

EFFECTIVE USE OF IGBO PROVERBS AS A DISCOURSE STRATEGY TO MINIMIZE CONFLICT AMONG PTA MEMBERS IN OBOLLO-AFOR EDUCATION ZONE

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Abstract

The study's general objective is to use Igbo proverbs to attract peace in conflicting situations. The study was conducted using a descriptive research design. The population of the study was 3500 comprising both the teaching staff and the PTA members. The simple random sampling technique was used to draw a sample size of 125 members. Observation and questionnaire method were used as the instruments for data collection. Three research questions were used to elicit responses from the respondents. A simple percentage system was also used for the analysis of data. The reliability of instruments was validated by two experts from the Department of Mathematics, Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu. The analysis of data revealed that ten Igbo proverbs based on peace promotion among others were generated; that appropriate use of Igbo proverbs is capable of attaining or enhancing harmony even in the midst of conflicting situations; that adequate and appropriate use of Igbo proverbs increases wisdom and promote peaceful coexistence among group or community and; that proverbs used at appropriate conflict situation helps to educate both the teaching staff and PTA members the need to embrace peace at all times. From these findings, some recommendations were made which include that Igbo proverbs should be promoted in public discourse since it has the potent force to enhance social cohesion, communication, interaction, and also a means of social control in order to ensure friendliness, social stability, unity, security, prestige, dignity and development among different communities and individuals.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, Proverbs, Conflict, Peace and PTA Members.

Introduction

The intelligibility and philosophy of Igbo man rest strongly on his use of proverbs in addressing critical issues in different human domains. No wonder, it is a common saying that “ilu bụ mmanụ ndị Igbo ji eri okwu” (proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten)”. If proverbs serve as lubricant to oil a strange and stagnant relationship among individuals or group, then it is pertinent to invoke this power of proverbs in resolving different levels of conflicts in our day-to-day interpersonal conflicts. According to Merriam-Webster online dictionary, conflict is an extended struggle; fight, battle: a clashing or sharp disagreement (as between ideas, interests, or purposes): mental struggle resulting from needs, drives, wishes, or demands that are in opposition or are not compatible. Though, conflict is said to be part of man, but when it occurs, it does no one any good. That is why there must be conscious efforts in resolving conflict among individuals or group.

In an attempt to resolving any possible breach of peace arising from misunderstanding, disagreement and discontentment lead to the idea of peace building and maintenance. In this regard, linguistic scholars have made efforts towards postulations that would engender peace. Gomes (2005) notes that peace linguistics is an interdisciplinary effort to aid educational systems in creating conditions for preparing people to be peaceful language users. The author further postulates that to engender lasting peace, there must be a condition which the author calls “communicative dignity”. According to Gomes, communicative dignity is a vital tool for humanizing possibilities of language. When people communicate with dignity, there is the

tendency that the speaker would utter words that would include dialogue, empathy, compassion and understanding.

As a window of peace process both the school authorities and Parents Teachers Association (PTA) members in her wisdom have to device means of using proverbs to resolve issues or conflicts that would have threatened peace. Proverbs are rhetorical strategies or devices employed by various communities in expressing their experiences in a condensed manner. The philosophies and wisdom of Igboman are made manifests in his use of proverbs. Achebe (1958) explains Igbo proverbs as the palm oil with which words are eaten. The notion of ‘palm oil’ implies or indicates lubricants with which strange relationships are amirorated or put to fine use. Proverbs are indispensable in conflict resolution and crises management. Proverbs are powerful linguistic tools used in conflict resolution. Ajiboye (2012) observes that proverbs can function as ice breakers’ in relieving tension; it can also serve as therapeutic tools in facilitating, training, healing, in promoting introspection which brings about change, in promotion of interpersonal communication.

Discourse has a multi-dimensional approach in terms of meaning and scope. However, for the purpose of this paper, discourse may be defined as the use of language beyond single sentence. Discourse may be seen as a spoken or written communication between people, especially serious discussion of a particular subject. In this regard, the particular subject may constitute issues bothering on wrong use of parents teachers association’s (PTA) money, arisen from imposition of levies; negligence of duties on the part of principals and teachers. In such circumstance, either the government agencies such as the science, technical, vocational schools management board (STVSMB) or any other interested party like faith based organisation or non-governmental organisation (NGO) may broker peace by organising meeting where the two parties (the school authorities and members of PTA may converge to iron out the problems. In such gathering, the use of Igbo proverbs become inevitable given its potential to attract peace.

Objective of the study

The general objective of the study was to use Igbo proverbs to attract peace in a conflicting situation. Specifically, the paper sought to:

1. identify Igbo proverbs used in conflict resolution.
2. assess the impacts of proverbs in maintaining peace and to.
3. situate in context how Igbo proverbs are used in natural setting in resolving crises and conflicts among people of Igbo extractions.

Research questions

The following research questions were posed for the study.

1. What are the proverbs used in conflict situations?
2. What are the impacts of proverbs in resolving conflicts?
3. How do we situate proverbs into context in attracting peace?

Significance of the study

This paper is concerned with the analysis of Igbo proverbs in fostering peace among the readers. It is hoped that the results of the analysis of data would directly broaden readers’ knowledge on education, sociolinguistics, literature and cultural study. It is also hoped that the younger generation would learn how to appreciate the importance of oral literature and the cultural practices embedded there from. Above all, those interested in making public peace would benefit from the study in that it would enrich their knowledge on the oratory power of proverbs.

Finally, the researchers presume that the results of the analysis of this data would lead to further insights into the nature of linguistic systems. The mechanisms by which the orators and all those interested in fostering peace in communities would interact to produce new strategies of communication. The understanding of the social forces that guide directions of language use in specific contexts would enable the members of the community not only to coexist but is of vital importance in politics and socio-economic welfare. The work is expected to serve as reference material for further studies in the area of culture, sociolinguistics, education and literature. It would help in enriching the literature in other related studies.

Theoretical Framework

Discourse analysis (DA) as a theory was credited to Harris (1952) in his article titled: ‘Discourse Analysis’. According to Harris DA is a method for the analysis of connected speech or writing, for continuing descriptive linguistics beyond the limit of a simple sentence at a time. Since then, DA has developed into different strands that can be used for the analysis of different discourses. In this paper, the researcher would shed light on three different strands of discourse or the proponents of DA.

The first is post-structuralist discourse theory as credited to Michel Foucault (1972) and Michel Pecheux (1982). Post-structuralist strands of discourse theory postulates that discourse is a constitutive role of language and communication for what counts as real in a given society. In other words, post-structuralist theory insists that discourse tradition should embodied social aspects of language use rather than as a closed container. The proponent of this theory sees discourse as an open, dynamic and heterogeneous terrain of relationships. The second strand in this series is the critical realist discourse theory. This strand aims at explaining antiessentialist stance which emphasizes the contingent character of reality and nature constructed through practices involving both power and knowledge. This strand as noted by Hall (2003) has contributed immensely to the formation of cultural studies.

Finally, the third strand is normative-deliberative discourse theory. This strand aligns discourse as the negotiation of an agreement between participants (i.e. partners in dispute) who enter discourse in order to overcome a conflict while pursuing certain interests and objectives. This paper would adopt the latter because of its relevance to the topic under-discussion. Part of the reason for adopting this approach or strand is that normative-deliberative perspective focuses on free deliberation in the public domain over what can be considered good and acceptable for all members of the society to which the discourse is targeted. The rationale for adopting this strand stems from the facts that the two parties involved in the school administration such as the school authority represented by the principal and the teachers via the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) may clash over-certain decisions of the school. In this circumstances, dialogue or discourse may be organised to broker peace. Habermas (1985) opines that discourse according to this perception involves certain communicative laws and normative standards are inherent in discourse which make certain claims more true, rational, and more acceptable. Therefore, it is expected that discourse participants need to come to terms with clashing norms or interest in discourse. This idea of coming to terms would require a serious figurative device such as proverbs in order to harmonise issues that led to the conflict.

Methodology

The paper adopted descriptive research design. Observation method would be used in generating the samples of peace-based Igbo proverbs that would be used for the study. The paper would also use questionnaire method to elicit information on contextual use of Igbo proverbs and its impacts on conflict resolution. The questionnaire is titled: Impacts of Igbo Proverbs on Conflicts Resolution. The information from the questionnaire would be used to answering research question 2-3. A population of 3500 was used which covered six secondary

schools owned by government in the Obollo-Afor Education Zone. The figure was drawn from the six secondary schools that constitutes the board of science, technical and vocational schools' management board (STVSMB) Obollo-Afor zone. The simple random sampling technique was used to select sample size of 125 respondents.

The study adopted discourse analysis (DA) by Habermas for the analysis of data. The researchers also adopted likert's model 'of Strongly Agree ("SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D). These models which have the weights of 4, 3, 2, and 1 were respectively assigned to each of the structured responses. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents during the PTA meeting of each school through the help of the research assistants and the researchers.

Results

Impacts of Igbo Proverbs in Conflict Resolution

Table 1: Showing the results of research objective 2

| S/N | Items | SA | A | SD | D | Total |
|-----|--|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 1. | There are Igbo proverbs used in conflict resolution | 20 50% | 15 37.5% | 3 7.5% | 2 5% | 40 100% |
| 2. | Igbo proverbs are used in resolving conflict situation | 15 37.5% | 13 32.5% | 8 20% | 4 10% | 40 100% |
| 3. | Igbo proverbs are used in public discourse | 18 45% | 12 30% | 5 12.5% | 5 12.5% | 40 100% |
| 4. | People reflect deeper when proverbs are used in communication | 22 55% | 10 25% | 6 15% | 6 15% | 40 100% |
| 5. | People respond more when proverbs are deployed in crises moments | 16 40% | 17 30% | 7 17.5% | 7 17.5% | 40 100% |

Proverb i: *Okwu di nro na-emedede onuma* (A soft answer turns away wrath). This proverb is used to broker peace between two disputing partner. The proverb is used to solicit for peace against any form of provocative comments or expression. Similarly, the result on item 1 shows that 20 (50%), strongly agree, while 15 (37.5%) of them agree. On the contrary, 3 (7.5%) of the respondent's population strongly disagree while a hand few of them representing 2(5%) of them disagreed. The results when joined together shows that 35 (87.5%) of the respondents agreed that proverbs can be used to resolve conflicts while a few of the respondents' population disagreed. The implication of this result is that proverbs have proved to have soothing effects or as healing balm to resolve conflicts. The context to which this proverb is used helped to drive home the point. van Dijk (2001b) notes that the micro-level of analysis has to do with the way language is used in social context, discourse, verbal interaction and communication of events. The events represented conflicts that happened between the school authorities and the PTA members.

Proverb ii: *Ire ka ejula ji a ga n'ogwu* (It is with sweet tongue that the snail walks over thorns). This proverb is used when people want to plead for peace. Violent or aggressive comments are discouraged so as to pave way for peaceful negotiation. Also in appendix B of item number 2 indicates that 15 (37.5%) of the respondents strongly agree that Igbo proverbs are used in conflict situation while 13 (32.5%) of them simply agree. On the other hand, 8 (20%) strongly disagreed while 4 (10%) of the respondents disagree. The results when put together shows that 28 (70%) of the total populations agreed to this assertion while a few of them representing 12 (30%) of the disagree. The implication of this result is that proverbs can be deployed in resolving conflicts especially when the adult members of the society are involved in conflict

situation. Cook (1989) avers that DA is the analysis of language in use. In this case, the language in use is the proverbs used in the context of settling disputes.

Proverb iii: *Eleta aghara ka di na nwunye ji ebi* (Forgiveness is a tunic for friendship). This proverb preaches tolerance, forgiveness and reconciliation among disputing partners. In other words, there must be forgiveness before genuine relationship whether marriage or any other form of relationship. Again, on appendix B of item number 3, which sought to affirm if Igbo proverbs can be used in public discourse. The results clearly shows that 18 (45%) of the respondents' population strongly agree while 12 (30%) of them agreed. However, an insignificant number representing 5 (12.5%) of them strongly disagree while the remaining 5 (12.5%) of them disagree. Therefore, the results when joined together indicate that those in affirmative stood at 30 (75%) while the sum of 10 (25%) jettison the idea that Igbo proverbs cannot be used in public discourse. The views expressed by Wetherell, Taylor & Yates (2001) who assert that DA is a set of methods and theories for investigating language in use and language in social context. The views express by Wetherell et al captures the majority opinion of the respondents that Igbo proverbs can be used in public discourse.

Proverb iv: *Ofo ka ide ji awa ala.* (Ultimate triumph comes by justice). This proverb is used to indicate that *ofo* which is a symbol of justice is the only instrument for fairness, truth and justice is at the hub of peace and togetherness. When one holds *ofo* in a traditional Igbo setting, that person would be afraid to do injustice that would culminate in a crime and criminality. And when one avoid these vices the tendency to commit crime will be reduced and thereby maintain a just society surrendered with peace, justice and fairplay. In furtherance to our discussion, evidence have shown that people respond more and reflect deeper if proverbs are used in communicating them. The result to this analysis clearly shows that 22 (55%) strongly agree to this assertion, while 10 (25%) of them simply agreed. On the reverse side, those who opposed to this idea stood at 6 (15%) while only 2 (5%) simply disagreed. The results when joined together indicate that those in affirmation stood at 32 (80%) while those in disagreement stood at 8 (20%).

Proverb v: *Hapu ihe niile tara n'abali ka o buru anwu nta* (let us bury the hatchet). This proverb simply advocate for reconciliation and forgiveness. That is let the bye-gone-be-bye-gone. In other words, let us forget our difference and move ahead in peace. Sequel to appendix B of item number 5, sought to affirm if people respond more when proverbs are used in conflict resolution. The results of this assertion indicate that 16 (40%) of the respondents population strongly agreed while 12 (30%) of them agreed. The results when put together shows that 28 (70%) of the respondents agreed to this assertion that 'people respond more when proverbs are deployed in crisis moments.' However, those who rejected this claim stood at 12 (30%). The content of this proverb is culture specific. This implies that in Igbo culture, when one used, this proverb it means that he/she is no more interested in making trouble. Cameron (2001) avers that DA, is culture specific. She identifies, DA from anthropology, which is interested in the 'embedding' of language in a wider socio-cultural context. Here, the culture of Igbo man specify that ones this proverb is used everyone needs to end the crises or conflict.

Contextual use of Igbo proverbs in peace building

Table 2: Showing the results of research objective 3

| S/N | Items | SA | A | SD | D | Total |
|-----|--|-----------|-------------|----------|-----------|------------|
| 6. | Igbo proverbs are best appreciated when employed appropriately | 20 50% | 13 32.5% | 4 10% | 3 7.5% | 40 100% |
| 7. | In the event of maladministration, proverbs can be used to address the management problems | 17 42% | 15 37.5% | 4 10% | 4 10% | 40 100% |

| | | | | | | |
|-----|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 8. | Peace is best achieved when they are used in proverbial manner | 14 35% | 12 30% | 8 20% | 4 15% | 40 100% |
| 9. | When people seek for peace, do they uphold the content of proverbs | 24 60% | 14 35% | 1 2.5% | 1 2.5% | 40 100% |
| 10. | Leaders use proverbs more when they are discussing critical issues that affect them | 18 45% | 12 30% | 6 15% | 4 10% | 40 100% |

Proverb vi: *Iwe nwanne anaghi eru n'okpukpu* (A brother's provocation does not cut deep into the heart). This proverb is used to appeal for peace. The proverb condemns harboring malice and vengeance or revenge against a brother or any disputing partner. The proverb advocates for brotherliness and mutual resolution of discord or conflict. On the question which seeks to ascertain the impact of using appropriate proverb for resolving conflict. The result of item number 6 of table 2 shows that 20 (50%) of the respondents' population strongly agree while 13 (32.50) of them agreed. On the contrary, 4 (10%) of the respondents strongly disagree while 3 (7.50) of them simply disagreed. The results when summed together indicate that those on affirmative stood at 33 (82.5%) while those at deviances stood at 7 (17.5%) respectively. Agbedo (2015) notes that one of the primary tasks of DA as the study of how meanings are established, used, challenged and changed including the use of proverbs and talk are embedded in discourse. Here, the meaning derived from proverbs are deployed to attract peace in conflict threatened environment.

Proverb vii: *Egburu tinye n' okpukpu, e gburu tinye na anumme.* (Let strike balance in judgment). This proverb suggests that one need to strike balance in passing judgment. This is true, bearing in mind that unbalance judgment can trigger violence and conflict. In view of the above, the peace maker or all those involved in making peace in different communities should be mindful of the facts that poor judgment and ill-conceived judgment can lead to crises. The result on question number 7, of table 2 shows that 17 (42%) of the respondents strongly agree while 15 (37.5%) simply agreed. The result further revealed that 4(10%) of the respondents' population agreed to this assertion while insignificant number representing 8(20%) of them disagree. The implication of this result is that the majority of the respondents agreed that proverbs can be used to settle disputes arisen from maladministration. It means peace based proverbs can be deployed in discussing issues involved in maladministration. In line with our framework, Van Dijk (1988b) asserts that context is defined as the mentally represented structure of those properties of the social situation that are relevant for the production or comprehension of discourse. Such discourse may include applying proverbs in settlement of discords or conflicts.

Proverb viii: *E were iwe kpugbo nwa ewu, e jiri ije buru ozu ya.* (if one causes harm in anger, you end up regretting the consequences). This proverb sounds as a note of warning for easily provoked human-beings who take offence at slightest provocations. The meaning attached to this proverb is that one needs caution in dealing with issues to avoid possible regrets. On the notion, which seeks to find out if peace is best achieved by using proverbs in settling disputes. The results reveal that 14 (35%) strongly agree while 12 (30%) of the respondents agree. On the other hand, 8 (20%) of the respondents strongly disagree while 6 (15%) of them disagreed. The results when joined together shows that 26 (25%) of the respondents agreed to this assertion that peace is best achieved if proverbs are used in settling disputes. On the contrast, 14 (35%) of the respondents oppose this opinion expressed on table 2 of item number 8 above. Discourse goes beyond sentence level and looks at the overall meanings conveyed by language in context. This is considered appropriate since proverb is one of the figurative device that usually contains inherent meaning outside the literary understanding of the text. The context here refers to the social, cultural of the discourse.

Proverb ix: *Di na nwunye rijuo afọ lụba ọgụ ndi bụ ọnụ ka ha mma.* (The husband and wife that started fighting after a heavy meal are not better than their counterpart who has nothing to eat). This proverb means that peace is supreme. It also means that dry morsel in peace are better than a full mean with strife and war. In other words, it is better than being hungry in peace than to eat under discord and strife, again, to ascertain if people really uphold the content of proverb while involved in peace negotiation. The results clearly show that 24 (60%) of the respondents' population strongly agree to this assertion while 14 (35%) of them agreed. On the contrary, the insignificant number representing 1 (2.5%) of the respondents strongly disagree while the same figure 1(2.5%) of them rejected the idea. The results when put together show that 38 (95%) of the respondents totally agreed to the views expressed above while an insignificant number representing 2(5%) of the respondents rejected the idea. The implication of this result is that the majority of the respondents subscribe to the facts that they uphold to the content of proverbs in dispute resolution.

Proverb x: *E gbue n' iwe e nie ma isi* (If you destroy due to anger, you bury because of the smell). This proverb is a warning to those who cause harm in a hurry or anger because of slightest provocation. The cost of burying because of smell should have been saved for peaceful co-existence. Smelling here represents the ugly consequences of an ill-tempered behaviour. Finally, the results of item number 10 of table 2 shows that 18 (45%) of the respondent strongly agree that leaders and elders use proverbs more when they are handling critical issues in the community. About 12 (30%) of the respondents simply agree to this opinion. Expectedly, 6 (15%) of the respondent strongly disagree while 4 (10%) of them disagreed. The results when joined together show that 30(75%) of the respondents affirmed the opinion expressed above. Similarly, 10 (25%) of the respondents' population rejected the above opinion. The outcome of this result indicate that leaders/elders should be encouraged to use proverbs more, when they are discussing issues of critical interests to the community so as to drive home the point under discussion. In line with our framework, van Dijk (1992) attests that discourse is not limited to verbal action, but also involves meaning, interpretation and understanding. The above citation points to the facts that proverbs contain meaning that are not restricted to literary understanding alone but should be interpreted beyond sentence level to include the semantic and connotative meanings such as the use of figures of speech and proverbs.

Conclusion

Proverbs are considered as the most potent force in speech delivery in typical Igbo setting and of public discourse. In this paper, the researchers hamper on how best to deploy Igbo proverbs in public discourse to attract peace and drive away acrimony and bicarying. In view of the above, the researchers set out objectives that would enable them to establish the underlisted objectives of the study. These include: (i) identifying Igbo proverbs used in making peace (ii) establishing the impacts of Igbo proverbs in peace building and maintenance and (iii) to situate Igbo proverbs to achieve peace in peace threatened environment with special reference to government owned secondary schools, the school authorities and members of PTA's in Obollo-Afor Education Zone.

To achieve these objectives, some methods were deployed to guide the direction of the study. In this regard, descriptive research design and content analysis approach was used in the study. Also, observation method was also used to collect the samples of Igbo proverbs used Igbo public discourse. The data to ascertain the impacts and contextual use of Igbo proverbs would use questionnaire methods to elicit responses directly from the PTA members in their meetings including the school authorities in the chosen schools. For the analysis of data, discourse analysis (DA) was used. The population of the study was 3500 which comprises both the teaching staff and PTA members in the zone. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 125 respondents that was included in the study.

The analysis of data revealed the following: a total of 10 proverbs was identified used in Igbo public settings to make peace. The objective of the research was also attained as the respondents overwhelmingly agreed that Igbo proverbs are highly impactful in maintenance of peace in public schools. This is rewarding, when these proverbs were applied in appropriate contexts in peace threatened environment.

Recommendations

1. Igbo proverbs should be promoted in public discourse.
2. Igbo proverbs should be integrated as part of school curriculum.
3. Igbo proverbs should be integrated as part of linguistic devices used by those involved in conflict resolution processes.

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APPENDIX A

| S/N | Peace Based Igbo Proverbs | Gloss |
|------------|--|--|
| Proverb 1 | Okwu di nro na-emedede ọnụma | A safe answer turns away wrath |
| Proverb 2 | Ire ka ejula ji a ga n'ogwu | It is with sweet tongue that the snail walks over thorns |
| Proverb 3 | Eleta aghara ka di na nwunye ji ebi | Forgiveness is a tunic for friendship |
| Proverb 4 | Ọfọ ka ide ji awa ala | Ultimate triumph comes by justice |
| Proverb 5 | Hapu ihe niile tara n'abalị ka ọburu anwu nta | Let us bury the hatchet |
| Proverb 6 | Iwe nwanne anaghi eru n'okpukpu | A brother's provocation does not cut deep into the heart |
| Proverb 7 | Egburu tinye n'okpukpu, e gburu tinye na anumme | Let's strike balance in judgment |
| Proverb 8 | E were iwe kpugbo nwa ewu, e jiri ije buru ozu ya | If one causes harm in anger, you end up regretting the consequences |
| Proverb 9 | Di na nwunye rijuo afọ luba ọgu ndi bu ọnu ka ha mma | The husband and wife that started fighting after a heavy meal are not better than their counterpart who has nothing to eat |
| Proverb 10 | E gbue n'iwe e nie ma isi | If you destroy due to anger, you bury because of the smell |

Appendix B
Impacts of Igbo Proverbs on Conflicts Resolution

Please, kindly respond to the questions below by ticking (✓) against any of the options that express your feeling

| S/N | Items | SA | A | SD | D | Total |
|-----|--|----|---|----|---|-------|
| 1. | There are Igbo proverbs used in conflict resolution | | | | | |
| 2. | Igbo proverbs are used in resolving conflict situation | | | | | |
| 3. | Igbo proverbs are used in public discourse | | | | | |
| 4. | People reflect deeper when proverbs are used in communication | | | | | |
| 5. | People respond more when proverbs are deployed in crises moments | | | | | |
| 6. | Igbo proverbs are best appreciated when employed appropriately | | | | | |
| 7. | In the event of maladministration, proverbs can be used to address the management problems | | | | | |
| 8. | Peace is best achieved when they are used in proverbial manner | | | | | |
| 9. | When people seek for peace, do they uphold the content of proverbs | | | | | |
| 10. | Leaders use proverbs more when they are discussing critical issues that affect them | | | | | |