

PROVERBISM AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Abstract

Conflict is a natural phenomenon that exists among humans in general, it can exist between husband and wife, parents and children, as well as among siblings. Conflict could be as a result of competition for power, greed, hatred, wickedness, selfishness, jealousy, gossip and for no reason, conflict can generate. It can even generate out of incompatibility. It is a social event and an integral part of human existence. Conflict is a kind of balm that sustains relationship and makes it last long; as such, conflict should be managed with caution and rationality. So, conflict is always expected but the management of conflict is where the problem lies. Social construct reflects shared ideas or perceptions about the way humans understand the world through historical process of interaction and negotiations. This study is of the view that conflict can be solved using proverbs because proverbs are constructed by the society as such this study examines fifteen (15) randomly selected Igbo proverbs used as social construct in resolving conflict. The data were collected in both planned and unplanned settings. The data were analysed using Anna Freud and Hartmann's model of Psychoanalytic theory because it will help to analyse the defences and views of people that are involved in the conflict then using the right choice of proverbs to appeal to their minds, reasoning and conscience. Results show that proverbs are drawn from the activities of the society and as such are very effective in conflict resolution because the members of the society have placed it like that and also the societal norms, practices, values, etc are enshrined in proverbs. Proper application of right choice of proverbs in conflict situations should be embraced.

Introduction

Effective communication calls for wise use of stylistic devices to spice up the linguistic utterances and of such spices is proverbs. Proverbs build in a speaker the ability to make his or her expressions flashy and culturally important to the topic of discussion. This is the reason Igbos employ them in conversations to accomplish acts which cannot be achieved by ordinary words. The power of proverbs in conflict resolution cannot be underrated thus Ajiboye (2012) confirmed that as an oratory and linguistic tool, when proverbs are applied to conflict situations, they can function as ice breakers in relieving tension, as therapeutic tools in facilitating trauma healing, in promoting introspection which brings about change, in promotion of interpersonal communication. Proverbs are drawn from and refer to all activities of society, natural objectives and phenomena. In many African languages, proverbs act as a catalyst of knowledge, wisdom, philosophy, ethics and morals which provoke further reflection and call for a deeper thinking and consideration of issues (Adeyemi & Salawudeen, 2014). Based on the nature of proverbs used for deeper thinking and consideration of issues that the case is made for examination of Igbo proverbs as social construct in resolving conflicts.

Social construct is something that exists not in objective reality, but as a result of human interaction. Social construct exists because humans agree that it exists. It is the meaning placed on an object or event by a society in respect to how they view with the help of proverbs. It is in this view that the role of Igbo proverbs in resolving conflicts is seen.

Statement of the problem

It is impossible for humans to live together without conflict, conflicts among humans are not the problem but the problem is the inability of the people, parties or groups involved to understand how to

resolve conflicts amicable as integral part of human existence. Language is the major tool in achieving peace, the ability to apply language appropriately helps immeasurably in achieving peaceful co-existence. Choosing the right words which are proverbs to appeal to people's reasoning, emotions and conscience, to shed more light where they have erred helps to achieve the optimal goal which is peaceful co-existence.

Research Questions

What are the nature of conflicts resolved through Igbo proverbs as a social construct in Igbo culture?

How effective are Igbo proverbs as social construct in resolving conflicts among the Igbos?

Are Igbo proverbs the appropriate language for resolving conflicts in Igbo culture?

Conceptual Review

Proverbs

Proverbs according to Tadi (2008) are generally considered to be words of wisdom because they contain the distilled thoughts, ideas and philosophies of a people. They are familiar, fixed and sequential expressions that state well-known truths, social norms or moral themes (Gibbs and Beital, 1995 cited in Akindele 2008). It is a short rhetorical saying expressing a general belief. Onuekwusi (2011) also sees proverbs as popular, common, numerous and pleasant expressions which adorn the rhetoric of a people.

Proverbs are used in many ways like it encourages, use to cultivate values and frame of mind that promote peace and heal emotional wounds; these values are found in patience, kindness, love and discernment (Ademowo & Balogun, 2014). Proverbs are used in situations like bride price settlement, entertainment, family meetings, advisory, conflict resolution etc.

The Igbo people occupy Anambra State, Enugu State, Ebony State, Imo State, Abia State and some parts of Delta and Rivers State. Igbo people employ proverbs in expressing their experiences in a condensed way. Nwachukwu Agbada (1990) avers that proverbs among the Igbo people remains a documentation of the daily activities of the people at a particular time and it records the history, experiences, trauma and tension of the society at every stage of its origin. Igbo people are known well for using proverbs because it was able according to Agbada to record their mental conditions caused by shock and also the solutions given to these situations.

Social Construct

The word Social constructionism was coined by the sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman in their book "The Social Construction of Reality", the book looks at how social concepts such as manners, work schedule and behaviours are invented by people and groups interacting with each other and how these factors became part of our daily beliefs and habits. Social construction is a sociological theory that believes all things that have social meanings are created by individuals and societies. Social Construction is everywhere in the society. It plays a role in how we behave, what we like and what we believe. Social Construct reflect shared ideas that exist only because people in a society accept that they do, it develops within a society, they do not have inherent meaning, the only meaning they have is the meaning given to them by people. Most acceptable practices, behavioural expectations, common perceptions, cultural norms, customary practices, customs, shared understanding, societal norms and traditions represent social constructs and are generally accepted with a society. Human beings can also alter social construct as they continue to interact. Igbo proverbs are social constructs. This means that society creates and dictates Igbo proverbs. Igbo proverbs as a social construct in conflict resolution is made manifest because the society approves it.

Conflict Resolution

The power of proverbs in conflict resolution cannot be overlooked. Conflict according to (Ajayi and Buhari, 2014 cited in Egenti and Okoye) is described as a condition in which an identifiable group of human beings whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, religious, social-political, economic, cultural or otherwise is in conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable human group because these groups are pursuing what appears to be incompatible goals.

Besides, conflict means a state of open, prolonged fighting, belligerency, confrontation, hostility, strife, struggle, war, warfare etc. Conflicts political conflict, Identity conflict, Economic conflict, Urban violence. Also, according to (Poku, 1998 cited in Egenti and Okoye), these could be interpersonal conflicts and inter communal conflicts and may range from person to person community to community and nation to nation. In Igbo traditional setting, conflicts could be resolved by the family, Umuanna, Umuada and age grades.

The purpose of Conflict resolution is reconciling the disputing parties. Conflict resolution is a process of managing conflict and negotiating solution. It is a communication process for changing the negative emotional states in a conflict to emotional states that allow working out a solution to the conflict negotiation in a communication process for enabling disputing parties to achieve an outcome with respect to their differences. It involves a processes aimed at lessening or removing sources of conflict. According to Neil Katz and Kevin McNulty (1994) two elements are involved in positive resolution of conflicts, they are conflict management and negotiation. Conflict management or settlement which deals with the attitudes and strong negative emotions usually associated with a conflict situation; it involves defusing the accompanying emotional energy and achieving a mutual understanding of differences. Conflict settlement on the other hand occurs when destructive behaviour has been reduced and hostile attitudes lessened. Once the conflict has been reduced, the next step is to use negotiation or problem solving to arrive at an outcome that satisfies both parties. Conflict management is directed towards achieving the more difficult outcome, resolution.

Proverb, Social construct and Conflict resolution

Proverbs are Social constructs, they were created by the society right from the past formally for teaching the youths during initiation ceremony and others functions this Finnegan (1970 :413) confirms that ‘the initiates may be instructed in the proverbs and aphorisms current in the society, just as they are also often taught dances, songs and other skills’. Also, proverbs are still effective in the present time as they were in the past. Thus Mieder (2005:167-8) affirms that

Proverbs are never out of season and will definitely continue to play a vital role in the education of the people since people will always be in need of expressing their old and new wisdom in easily remembered formulaic structures, employing them strategically as ready-made and usually metaphoric sign in various contexts.

Besides, proverbs state well known truths, social norms, or moral themes (Abraham 1968, Mieder 1985, Gibbs and Beitel 1995),this shows that proverbs were formed due to the fact that the society agreed that they will be, they have social norms, values beneficial to the society. Akinmade (2012) also noted that proverb have been and will continue to be of great benefits to the African society because, they express wisdom, preserve culture, bring peace and even bring hope thus:

It (proverb) is the most powerful and potent vehicle for culture dissemination from one generation to the other. Proverbs express the nature of African wisdom as they perform diverse functions, ranging from bringing peace where there is conflict and misunderstandings, giving hope where there is despair and light where there is darkness in human relationships and interactions (Akinmade, 2012).

From the above explanations of proverbs, it is so obvious that it is a social construct because it contains social values, beliefs, social practices, morals and also proverbs were constructed by the members of the society even for some functions according to Akinmade (2012) like bring peace where there is conflict and misunderstanding, bringing hope where there is despair .Proverb as a social construct is made manifest through its functions in resolving peace. The role proverbs play in bringing peace when there is conflict is not divorced from the cultural and social background against which they operate. Makamani (2013) supported that African proverbs are vital component of the indigenous knowledge systems of Africans that can used to resolve conflict both at the micro and macro levels of society. Also, in their own opinion, Philips and Ohworiole(2011) remarked that peacemaking in marital conflict often involve discourse usually connected with proverbs. Therefore, whenever the appropriate proverb is presented to the parties in dispute, the tensions that are inherent in such relationships are controlled

through the use of elliptical proverbial speech (Agbaje 2002). One of the strategies of improving people's knowledge so as to facilitate their uses in conflict resolution and peacemaking is the concept of Igbo proverbs being used as Social construct in resolving conflict.

Theoretical framework: Psychoanalytic Theory

Psychoanalysis was invented by Sigmund Freud in the late 19th century and continues to be developed by psychoanalysts all over the world. This branch of psychology focuses on the treatment of mental disorders and it does this by recognizing the relationships between the conscious mind and the unconscious mind. Psychoanalytic theory is a personality theory which is based on the notion that an individual gets motivated more by unseen forces that are controlled by the conscious and the rational thought. Freud gave a detailed account of human minds to comprise of the conscious, preconscious and the unconscious. According to him, the conscious describes a person's current state of minds, the unconscious is something deeper that drives our behaviours while the preconscious or subconscious is like a data base from where one recalls or retrieves from memory. The human actions and inactions are governed by those models of human mind.

Another sophisticated model of human mind called the id, ego and super ego was developed by Freud. The id according to him is the unconscious part of the mind, the id operates at the unconscious level promoted by a person's desire/drive to survive which makes a person to engage in life sustaining activities or the death instinct that drives destructive, aggressive and violent behaviour; he referred to these two instincts as eros and thanatos respectively. (Umerah-Okeke, 2020). The Ego in the other hand checks the id, it is the major seat of consciousness, the mind's agent that exercises the repressions, integrates and consolidates various impulses and tendencies before they are translated into action. Ackerman cited in Umerah-Okeke (2020) remarked that the superego is the portion of the mind in which morality and higher principles reside, encouraging us to act in socially and morally acceptable ways. Super ego is the mind's guide and conscience, a retainer for prohibitions to keep to and ideals to strive for. So, as an individual grows in the society he or she learns the society which helps him or her to differentiate between the rights and the wrongs.

Proverbs as a social construct in conflict resolution should be approached from the model of Psychoanalysis' Ego-psychology invented by Anna Freud (1895-1982), Heinz Hartmann (1884-1970) and others that focused their attention on the working of the conscious and unconscious ego, its particular role in unconscious defences and their inhibitory effect on psychic process. Hartmann also postulated a conflict-free area of ego that performs major tasks like awareness, motor control, logical thinking, speech, sensing perception and reality testing and all these are important functions. So, by systematically analysing the patient's defences, Psychoanalysis aims at strengthening the ego in order to increase impulse control, conflict resolution and the capacity to tolerate frustration and painful effect. Hartmann added to the Freudian metapsychological point, the adaptational aspect.

With the goal of psychoanalysis, on defences the human mind is examined because Freud believes that these models of the human mind are in constant conflict and when conflict is too much, the ego goes for a defence mechanism which can be in form of repressions, denial, projection, displacement, regression and sublimation; generating conflict often times is a subconscious thing. The use of psychoanalysis for this study is to fulfil some of its goals which are systematically analyzing the people's defences (people involved in conflict), their views then using the right choice of proverbs to appeal to their minds, reasoning, conscience. The people that are rational, the proverbs will appeal to their reasoning, the people that are emotional, the proverbs will appeal to their emotions and this helps to strengthen their ego by increasing their impulse control which helps in conflict resolution and also their capacity to tolerate frustration and painful effects that might have led to the conflict. The knowledge of this different models of human mind is reflected in the Igbo proverbs because proverbs as a social construct erupted from the society and has so many societal practices minds and values in it. Psychoanalysis theory with specific reference to Ego-psychology was used to explain how proverbs being a social construct could help in resolving conflict.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive and qualitative research design. The data for this study were collected from diverse sources over a period of six months (December 2020 -June 2021). The proverbs were got during Umunna and Umuada peace meetings in Ezi-Ogidi, Ogidi in Idemili North L.G.A and Umuanum Nibo in Awka South L.G.A. both in Anambra state, traditional marriage ceremonies and also through verbal interactions from few elders that are versed in Ogidi and Nibo cultures. The various peace meetings were recorded with the help of the heads of the Umunna and Umuada meetings, the researcher was a participant observer in the umuada peace meetings and some of the traditional marriage ceremonies, these help the researcher in analyzing some proverbs. Then the recorded peace meetings were transcribed and the proverbs that could not be explained by the researcher, the researcher sought the help of some elders from Ogidi and Nibo for proper explanation.

Twenty-five (25) proverbs were randomly picked after transcribing and fifteen (15) proverbs were interpreted and grouped under different occasions of usage and themes that reflected their use with a view to explain how they could be used to appeal to the mind, emotions and rational thoughts of humans to achieve the desired peace and resolve conflict.

Discussions and Findings

Igbo proverbs for conflict resolution- Meaning and the occasions used and how they helped in resolving conflicts. Some of the selected proverbs include:

E gbuo maka iwe, e nie maka isi .

If we kill because we are angry, we will bury because of stench.

Imi na onu adighi ese okwu.

The nose and mouth are too close to be enemy.

Ndu mmiri ndu azu, mmiri atala, azu anwula.

Let the water live and let the fish also live, the water should not dry and the fish should not die.

Iwe nwanne anaghi eru n'okpukpu.

A brother's provocation does not cut deep into the heart.

Eleta a ghara ka di na nwunye ji ebi.

Forgiveness is a tonic for friendship.

Obu ire oma ka ejula ji aga n'ogwu.

It is with sweet tongue that the snail walks over thorns.

Marakwa na di na nwunye gbaa izuzu, ntachiri ji aghoo anya nri.

You should know that if husband and wife confine together, a piece of yam becomes a big meal.

Ya mere anu m na-agaghi eri, a ga m enye ya onye ga-eri ya.

Therefore, the meat I cannot eat, I will give to the person that will eat it.

Aturu si na o dighi ihe kariri ile anya .

The sheep says that there is nothing like looking.

A naghi ano ebe tere aka esusu onu .

kissing cannot take place from afar.

Ebube agu na- eche agu.

The lion glory serves as a shield.

Ebe nwatakiri na- ebute onu mmanu ka o na – apu oriri.

Where a child gets his mouth oily, that's where he hangs out.

Obu oke ulo gosiri oke ezi ebe ngiga di.

It is the domestic rat that showed the wild rat where to find the hamper.

A nyukoo maamiri onu , o gbaa ofufu.

When people urinate on the same spot, it forms lather.

Aka nri kwoo aka ekpe, ake ekpe a kwoo aka nri.

If the right hand scrubs the left, the left hand will in turn scrub the right.

Below is how the above proverbs were used in conflict resolution

Context 1

Nature of communication: Verbal insult in a conflict situation between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law.

Audience: Umuada

The quarrel started from the mother-in-law who said that her daughter-in-law locked her out of the compound claiming that the compound belongs to her (daughter-in-law) and her husband. There was exchange of angry words from the two women and threats from the mother-in-law and scary acts she will carry out in the daughter-in-law, then the audience intervened, soothing the mother-in-law emphasizing that anger destroys things that she shouldn't allow anger push her into what she will regret later that 'if we kill because we are angry, we'll bury because of stench' (proverb 1) : 'E gbuo maka iwe , e nie maka isi'. The advice contained in this proverbs affected the mother-in-law in a way that made her calm down and told the audience that she had heard what they said and that they should help her warn the daughter-in-law.

Context 2

Nature of communication: Land dispute among siblings.

Audience: Umunna

A younger sibling (brother) accused his elder brother of possessing alone the family land that should be shared between him and the elder brother. The elder brother denied the allegations leveled against him then there was effusion of angry words and dirty names calling from the younger brother. The audience intervened telling the younger brother that it is unwise to harbour grudges against his elder brother because 'the nose and mouth are too close to be enemy' as in the proverb (in 2): Imi na onu a dighi ese okwu. The audience also admonished the elder brother to forgive the younger brother of the allegation he leveled against him for the interest of peace because 'a brother's provocation does not cut deep into the heart' as in proverb (in 4): 'Iwe nwanne anaghi eru n'okpukpu'. Based on Hartmann's model of Psychoanalysis, when the proverb was administered to the younger brother, it doused his defences and increases his impulse, brought calmness to his nerves, also the elder brother was able to tolerate the painful effect of the allegation from the younger brother and there was peace.

Context 3

Nature of communication : Traditional marriage ceremony

Audience: Members of Umunna of the bride and members of Umunna of the groom.

There was a price haggle on the paying of bride price and the items to be presented, at a stage, some members of Umunna of the bride refused giving her out in marriage to the groom's Umunna because the items were not complete, there was conflict. The head of the bride's Umunna intervened by appealing to both Umunnas to calm down with the proverb (in 3) 'Ndu mmiri, ndu azu, mmiri atala, azu anwula and proverb (in 8) 'Ya mere anu m na- agaghi eri, a ga m enya onye ga – eri ya.

Proverb in 3: Let the water live and let the fish also live, the water should not dry and the fish should not die and Proverb in 8: Therefore, the meat I cannot eat, I will give to the person that will eat it.

The head of bride's Umunna appealed to the two different Umunnas using the Igbo man's ideology of life, live and lets live to tell the two sides of Umunna that everyone of them is struggling the brides Umunna struggling for what they merited according to traditions ,the bride's umunna struggling for what they merited and the groom's Umunna not meeting up because of hard times . He went further to use proverb (in 8) to convince the groom's Umunna that he can't keep the bride because he won't marry her that the bride price haggle is not intentional that they shouldn't misunderstand them. So, when these two Igbo proverbs were used by the bride's Umunna representative, the groom's Umunna came up with the right items for bride price and the bride was released to them.

Context 4

Nature of communication: Accusation of infidelity between husband and wife.

Audience: Members of Extended family.

The husband accused the wife of flirting with the boys on apprenticeship beside his compound. The wife denied the allegation and recalled ugly incidents that has occurred in the cause of the of their marriage .How the husband has slept with his sales' girls, various angry expressions came from both

parties and along the line, one of the members of the extended family intervened with the proverb [in 5] ‘Eleta aghara ka di na nwunye ji ebi’: Forgiveness is a tunic for friendship . This Igbo proverb is used here to settle drawing the attention of both the husband and the wife that marriage is specifically all about tolerating and forbearing each other’s weaknesses.

Moreso, the verbal insult exchanges continued between both parties and the wife told the audience how her husband has failed in giving her money for upkeep of the family and this provoked the husband to the extent that he proceeded to heat the wife but was stopped by one of his uncles using the the proverbs [in 6 and 7] on the wife, ‘O bu ire oma ka ejula ji a ga n’ogwu :It is with sweet tongue that the snail walks over thorns . ‘Marakwa na di na nwunye gbaa izuzu ,ntachiri ji agho anya nri :You should know that if husband and wife confine together ,a piece of yam becomes a big meal and he equally used proverb [in 9] on the man , ‘Aturu si na odighi ihe kariri ile anya’:The sheep says that there is nothing like looking .The exchanges of verbal insult and attempted beating came under control and the members of the extended family made it clear to both partners that every marriage has its own challenges .The man’s uncles cautioned the wife with the proverb (in 6 and 7) telling how that getting something from someone needs diplomacy as such she should not be harsh while asking for a favour from her husband and that when she humbles herself and manages the little resources she gets from her husband that it will be enough for them .The man was also cautioned on his anger with proverb (in 9) that there is nothing better than looking that is controlling one’s hot temper instead acting in anger.They advised the couples to live peacefully that lack of love brings misunderstanding and they support their point with the proverb (in10) which positts that ‘ Anaghi ano ebe tere aka esusu onu’ :kissing cannot take place from afar. The wife was also advised to help her husband in financial upkeep of the family and the proverb (in 14) ‘Makana anyukoo maamiri onu ,o gbaa ofufu’ : When people urinate on the same spot ,it forms lather and also proverb (in 15) ‘Aka nri kwoo aka ekpe aka ekpe akwoo aka nri :If the right hand scrubs the left, the left hand will in turn scrub the right. The proverbs used in the context really appealed to the emotions of the wife and the husband, releasing the adaptative effect of the Igbo proverbs which helped the man to tolerate the painful effect of the verbal insults heaped on him by the wife ;the wife was also strengthened through the Igbo proverbs, she wasn’t condemned rather she was advised to love the husband more and help him in the financial upkeep at the same diplomatically telling her that what she did to her husband was not too nice. There was peace and the husband left with the wife.

Context 5

Nature of communication: Husband siblings, husband and wife

Audience: Extended family members including the husband

The quarrel was between the wife and the husband’s sibling [lady] .The husband’s sibling accused the wife of not feeding with her mother (the wife is mother-in-law) that lives with her (wife) well. The wife denied the allegation and the husband’s sibling was angry and attempted fighting the wife. Then the eldest of the extended family members started by cautioning the husband’s sibling that accused the wife telling her that it is not everything she sees that she will make case with because proverb (in 5) forgiveness is a tunic for friendship : ‘Eleta a ghara ka di na nwunye ji ebi.

The wife ‘s husband was also advised to take good care of the family ,because had it been his wife was under his control, the sister wouldn’t have intervend in their family issues after all the sister doesn’t live with them and that his behaviours allowed his sister to put eye in their nuclear family matters and he supported his advice with the proverb (in 13) ‘O bu oke ulo gosiri oke ezi ebe ngiga di’ :It is the domestic rat that showed the wild rat where to the find the hamper and also that the lion’s glory serves as a shield : ‘Ebube agu na –eche agu proverb (in 11)

The nature of conflicts resolved through Igbo proverbs are conflicts between husband and wife, conflicts among siblings, conflicts in traditional marriage events and so on.

The Igbo proverbs above were used in different contexts to resolve conflicts, the people that administered them in the different contexts were able to master the different parties defences which helped them choose the right proverbs that helped strengthen their unconscious ego and this increased

their impulse control. The Igbo proverbs soothed the painful effects and frustration from the conflict because the society has made it to be and proverbs are social constructs.

The Igbo proverbs are really the appropriate language for resolving conflicts because they are social construct, the discourses used in marital conflicts resolution and peacemaking are usually enshrined in proverbs.(Philip & Ohwovoride, 2011) Moreso, according to according to Ademowo and Balogun(2014) that language is a carrier of culture and if the culture is like that between two sides the same coin, the role of Igbo the role of Igbo proverbs as a social construct being the right language or choice of expression cannot be over-emphasised.

Conclusion

The best and reliable medium through which conflict could be resolved in the different states of Igbo land is using Igbo proverbs to appeal to the minds, emotions and rational thoughts of humans. To the emotional humans, the Igbo proverbs appeal to their emotions and to the rational humans, the Igbo proverbs appeal to their reasonings and bring about conflict resolution and peace at last.

Recommendation

More studies should be done on proverbs as social construct for conflict resolution for the purpose of complete acceptance. This study is also recommended for conciliators and mediators as this will help them in studying the defences and minds of the people involved and choose the appropriate language that will appeal to their minds and emotions.

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