

Semantic and Pragmatic Interpretation of Igbo Proverbs in Contrasting Opposition

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Abstract

Proverbs in contrasting opposition are antithetical proverbs in which one proverb says something from one perspective and another proverb of equal value counters it. This paper examined 15 out of a total of 50 Igbo proverbs collected for the study, by providing their semantic and pragmatic interpretations. The aim is to highlight the fact that there are always two sides to the same coin when it comes to Igbo proverbs. The data were drawn from Igbo language consultants and complemented by interviews, library sources, participant's observations and native speaker intuition. The data were presented in lucid tabular format of two broad columns, A and B. The Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 2002), used within cognitive linguistics and pragmatics, was adopted in the analysis and discussions. It states that a speaker's every utterance conveys enough relevant information for it to be worth the addressee's efforts to process the meaning of an utterance. The results show that proverbs in contrasting relationships are not as popular as the regular ones. Igbo proverbs are culture-specific and since each culture has its unique features, they do not have direct English equivalents. This study provides readers with useful information about Igbo people's worldviews as embedded in their proverbs. It contributes to efforts being made to develop and preserve the Igbo language through research and documentation of its different aspects. The paper recommends that children be taught their language and culture through the use of proverbs.

Key words: *Proverbs, Contrasting, Relevance Theory, Semantics, Pragmatics*

1.0 Introduction

Proverb is an important aspect of Igbo life and very essential for effective communication in Igbo socio-cultural setting. Using proverbs is one of the best ways to portray and preserve the Igbo tradition, language and culture. A competent native speaker of the Igbo Language hardly interacts without making use of proverbs to boost the quality of the conversation and drive home the message. However, proverbs are not always what they seem at the surface level. Proverbs pose very serious problems of understanding due to the fact that different meanings can be associated with a single lexical item or phrase in a proverb. The ability to hide meaning makes proverbs assume some sort of secrecy and mystery, which the uninitiated find very difficult to understand and comprehend.

Knowledge of Igbo proverbs is important in understanding the Igbo people and their worldview. Most of what the Igbo think about life, moral, justice, relationships, and life after death are contained in their proverbs. However, despite its importance, the rich values of Igbo proverbs have not been thoroughly explored and documented. There are quite a number of materials on Igbo proverbs written by both European and Igbo indigenous scholars. Some of them appeared in both English and Igbo, while others were written only in the Igbo Language. But, none discussed anything on contrasting proverbs. This is the gap which the present research is poised to bridge by why proffering semantic and pragmatic interpretations to Igbo proverbs in contrasting pairs.

Again, considering the parlous state of Igbo language and the challenge of endangerment it faces, the need to carry out a research to document this aspect of Igbo life and culture cannot be overemphasised. This forms the *raison d'être* for this work on an aspect of Igbo studies that is less known and less considered, namely: proverbs in contrasting relationship.

1.1 Significance of the Study

Proverbs make a language rich, interesting and amazing. It is difficult to be firmly rooted in the Igbo life and culture or to possess the brilliance and beauty of Igbo language without being acquainted with Igbo proverbs. Therefore, having sound and proper understanding of Igbo proverbs equips the learner

with enough information towards understanding the people and their culture. Again, providing learners with the semantic and pragmatic imports of Igbo proverbs will help them make a personal application of the moral lessons embedded in them to their lives for mutual and healthy living. Finally, this work will educate the younger generation of Igbo children on the need to understand and view life from multidimensional perspectives, since there are two sides to a coin.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The Relevance Theory by Dan Sperber & Deirdre Wilson (1986, 1995 and 2002) is used for the interpretation of proverbs in this study. The theory is a framework for understanding utterance interpretation and it is used within cognitive linguistics and pragmatics. It discusses the method of communication as it concerns implicit inferences, with the aim to explaining that communicators usually convey more information with their utterances than what actually is contained in their literal sense. Hence, acts of verbal human communication are ostensive in that they draw their addressees' attention to the fact of what the communicator wants to convey. The audience searches for meaning in any given communication situation and having found meaning that fits their expectation of relevance, will stop processing.

In the fields of semantics and pragmatics, Relevance theory is the principle in which the communication process involves not only encoding, transfer, and decoding of messages, but also numerous other elements, including inference and context. The core import of the theory is the "communicative principle of relevance", which states that in the act of making an utterance, the speaker is conveying what they have said is worth listening to, that is, it provides "cognitive effects" worthy of the processing efforts required to find the meaning. In this study, energy ostensive act of communication, that is, the lexical "clues" that is explicitly conveyed when we speak or write will be something like: (i) The speaker purposefully gives a clue to the hearer as to what he wished to communicate – that is a clue to his information; (ii) The hearer infers the intension on the clue and the context mediated information. The hearer must interpret the clue, taking into account the context, and then summarises what the speaker intended.

In relation to the present study, this theory is applied to show that proverbs involve more than simple linguistic decoding to include a number of implications like identifying (a) what the speaker intended to say, (b) what the speaker intended to imply, (c) the speaker's intended attitude to what was said and implied, and (d) the intended context (Wilson, 1994). Thus, the intended interpretation of an utterance, like Igbo proverb, is a combination of explicit content, contextual assumptions and implication, and the speaker's intended attitude to these. An important aspect of this theory is the notion of manifestness. This refers to when something is grasped either consciously or unconsciously by a person.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Framework

On the surface level, proverbs have popular meanings, which the audience seem to understand. However, there are other associated meanings and interpretations that a proverb has depending on context or circumstance of use. This makes an examination of the interface between semantic and pragmatic imports very crucial and useful in the treatment and understanding of Igbo proverbs.

Semantics studies the meaning of expressions. It is concerned with the exact, literal meaning of the words in a language and their interrelations. That is what is linguistically encoded; the literal linguistic meaning of an utterance as well as the conventional meaning conveyed by words, phrases, and sentences of a language. There are, however, other shades of meaning relations investigated in semantics such as connotative, denotative, associative meanings, etc. For Yule (1996), semantics studies the relationships between linguistic forms and entities in the world that is, how words literally connect to things or to reality out there. It considers the meaning of a sentence without context that is the meaning that the grammar and vocabulary impart.

The meaning a linguistic item conveys in isolation is not always the same as the meaning it has in the mind of the hearer. Thus, there is always a difference between linguistic or speaker meaning and hearer

meaning. The meaning an item has in context is the area of study called pragmatics. According to Prasad (2008:151), pragmatics is the study of “the way in which language is used to express what somebody really means in particular situations, especially when the actual words may appear to mean something different”. Put succinctly, pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics that is concerned with the study of meaning in context. It studies the meaning of an expression in relation to the use made of it by participants in an interaction.

Yule (1996:4) explains that pragmatics deals with the relationship between linguistic forms and the user of those forms, and adds that the advantage of studying language via pragmatics is that one can talk about people’s intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes or goals, and the kind of actions that they are performing when they speak. For him, therefore, “pragmatics is the study of intended speaker meaning”. The import of this insight from Yule is that pragmatics helps in making sense of linguistic forms (i.e. lexical items like words, phrases, sentences), in relation to the users of those forms and the context surrounding them.

Scholars define proverb using different terms like: wise sayings, maxims, idioms, axioms, adages, etc., interchangeably without any distinctions. Without discussing in details the different nuances of these terms, we define proverb in this study as a short wise saying with underlying meaning that is used to convey important life message. A proverb is imbued with deep hidden meaning, containing indubitable truth and teaches great moral lessons about life. There are different proverbs for every aspect of life and human endeavour.

Honeck & Temple (1994) describe proverb as an important oral speech with vague meaning, with serious emphasis on many thoughts, learning and investigations in order for the readers to comprehend it well. They further identified proverbs with other parts of speech. Proverb is not used every time or indiscriminately rather “it is only when serious issues or events come up that elders roll out proverbs that suit the occasion” (Emenanjo, 1989:1). In this way, proverbs are the same as wellerism, idioms and puns.

Proverb is a succinct statement or expression of a general principle which expresses wisdom in simple ways that transcend time, language, and culture. For Ofofata (2016:39), proverb is a short sentence that is full of wisdom and deep meaning, which is employed each time during speech and which stipulates patterns of good living and acceptable behaviours. It is a crafty or wise saying that is full of truth and good morals, and which is used to teach people how to live and behave well.

2.2 Empirical Studies

Igbo proverbs are as old as the people and their language. They are indispensable aspects of Igbo life. Proverbs, in Igbo tradition and cultural setting, are associated mainly with grey hair and wisdom and, therefore, with the elders. They are, therefore, understood as deep wise sayings of the ancestors. Since women and children are not counted among the elders in Igbo society, it is believed that they equally do not speak in proverbs nor understand them. This informs the saying among the people that “*éjírí ilū bíé ikpē, nwáányì àgbàr̀ ákà*” (when a proverb is used in settling a matter, the woman goes empty). In other words, a woman who stays around where a proverb is employed to decide a case wouldn’t know when judgement is passed.

Proverbs are different from other wise sayings in Igbo language and literature like, maxim, tongue twisters, parables, figures of speech, etc. As observed by Okafor (2004:138), before now, there were not many written works in Igbo as it is today. However, there were sound oral literatures which included proverbs. Any group can employ proverbs to organise and bring out their literary style in a respectable way.

For Ashipu (2007:605), proverbs as one of the best ways to safeguard intercommunication relationships and tradition is the best pronounced way to have access to oral traditions and beliefs of a people.

Olugbamigbe (2003:398) adds that “if the proverb is regarded as the expression of the lores and the wisdom of the society, then the context and contents of the proverbs should not be overlooked”. Ofofomata (2016:12) notes that before 1984, Igbo proverbs were taken and understood as a figure of speech. However, this idea has changed as Igbo proverbs are now treated as part of Igbo grammar. According to Emenanjo (1989), the new finding was made and agreed upon in the linguistics laboratory, during a conference on teaching methods, held at Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Imo State, Owerri, from 13th – 22nd November, 1984.

Making a distinction between proverbs and figures of speech, Nwadike (1992:114) says that figures of speech are little stylistic colourations which are brought into communication to beautify it. They come in bits from time to time, making the message have some aura, and they help to change the meaning and understanding of the message.

Igbo proverbs help in facilitating communication. Kammelu, N. C., Onuegbu, C. M., Nnadi, C. C., Chukwu, O. A., & Umeh, I. E. (2002:138) describe proverb as a special way by which Igbo people speak. They further explain that the meaning attached to a proverb does not depend on the words that make it up rather on the person’s understanding of Igbo language. Therefore, proverbs help communication to have deeper meaning and understanding. The role of proverb in facilitating or enhancing communication is further emphasised by Emenanjo (1989:1) when he notes that any sound Igbo speaker finds it very difficult to speak his mind without employing proverbs. Proverb is one of the aspects of Igbo grammar. In fact, it seems that proverb is the most important aspect of Igbo grammar. According to Nwachukwu-Agada (2002:5), there are a lot of reasons why proverbs are important verbal expressions in Igbo tradition. One of such reasons why proverbs are prominent among the Igbo is because they are rich in deep meanings. Proverb is a verbal way to protect and project the culture for which a people are known for.

3.0 Methodology

The data for this study were fifty (50) Igbo proverbs, from which those that are apparently antithetical to each other were delineated, analysed and discussed. The data is presented in lucid tabular format of two broad columns, A and B. The first column, A contains the proposition proverb or what we call here the *thesis proverb*, while the B column is the contrasting proverb or the *antithesis*. Each proverb is first presented in Igbo language with the English translation. It is important to note that Igbo proverbs do not have exact direct English equivalents hence in some cases the English synonym is given. The discussion was carried out in English language, with a focus on the semantic and pragmatic imports of the proverb being analysed. The data were drawn from a field work by the researcher, complemented with interviews, personal discussions and participant observation.

4.0 Igbo Proverbs in Contrasting Opposition

Proverbs in contrasting opposing pairs are antithetical proverbs whereby one proverb says something from one point of view and another proverb of equal value counters it. This type of proverbs is very rare in human language unlike the conventional ones. The import of this type of proverbs in Igbo language and communication has been explored and discussed in this study using the semantic and pragmatic linguistic devices.

4.1 Presentation of Data

	Column A (thesis proverb)	Column B (antithesis proverb)
1.	Uché ónyē ádíghì yá ñjō. A person is entitled to his opinion.	Échiché ótū ónyé ànàghì ézúrú yá. Two good heads are better than one.

The proverb in (1), column A, is based on the principle of human right and freedom of speech, which affirms that a person has right to personal expression of opinion. This proverb holds that each person is entitled to his/her own idea and that a person’s point of view is always right to him/her. In this way, the proverb makes each person the sole determiner and the only judge of what is good/right or otherwise of his opinion. It asserts that a person is always right in the view he/she expresses and, by implication, the

action he/she takes. However, experience shows that arbitrary opinions or behaviours always conflict with what is generally believed and accepted as good or right conduct by the majority people. In fact, a person's freedom to stretch his/her hands stops where another person's right to remove his/her nose starts. Therefore, caution has to be exercised in the expression of one's rights. The idea of unguarded or absolute right is not tenable in true human society. This forms the basis for the contrasting opposing pair in column B, which in essence is saying that no man has a monopoly of thought. In other words, *ó nwéghì ónyé bụ́ nnámòhà*. Therefore, it is always good and better to weigh one's opinions on the scale of public acceptability and interest. A person who does not seek the opinion or advice of others sometimes dabbles into avoidable and regrettable mistakes. Thus, the saying that two good heads are better than one is a superior argument compared to a monolithic inclination to things.

	Column A (thesis proverb)	Column B (antithesis proverb)
2.	È meeé ñgwá ñgwà éméghára ódàchí. A stitch in time saves nine.	Ónyé búru chí yá ùzò ò gbágbúo ónwé yá n'ósó. One should not outrun his shadow.

The proverb in column A (2) is an advice on the need to act in time or be proactive in order to avoid delays or setbacks. A person does not need to wait until he is drenched before looking for shelter. An English equivalent would be "make hay while the sun shines". In Igbo cultural milieu, important tasks are always embarked upon at the earliest hours of the day. Thus, the Igbo people believe that "*úzó hápù ísì útútù óghóólá mwémwé ósọ*". Inasmuch as this holds true, another opposing proverb in column B (2) cautions against biting more than one can chew. It is an advice to those who may like to outsmart others to be cautious because a woman who outshines the husband in waking up too early will be caught up by the misfortune that awaits the husband. There is also a spiritual angle to this proverb or advice to the effect that a person should not go before or outpace his *chí*. *Chí* in Igbo traditional culture and belief refers to one's destiny or fate. In Christian belief and understanding, it refers to God. A true Christian always accords God the primary position in any engagement in his/her life. Thus, implicitly, the opposing proverb is advising that a person should allow God to lead the way otherwise the person will run counterproductive or out of steam in less than no time.

	Column A (thesis proverb)	Column B (antithesis proverb)
3.	Ónyé ñdidi ná-erí ázú Ùkpò. Patience pays.	Ónyé gbáá ñkítí, chí yá ágbáá. Heaven helps those who help themselves.

Although the Igbo believe in being hasty and proactive, they also appreciate patience as it is evident in the proverb in column A (3). *Azú Ùkpò* is a type of fish that is harvested from Ukpo River (a town in the present day Anambra State). These fishes are always bigger, better, more delicious and nutritious. However, it is usually very hard to fish or get such fish and difficult to buy them from the market because they are rare. Therefore, it requires that a person who wants to enjoy such fishes exercises great dose of patience both in the process of fishing and at the time of purchasing them. But, then, there is a limit to patience hence the contrasting opposing proverb in column B (3) cautions against being too calm and quiet. The proverb recognises the fact that fishes are hunted at particular time (i.e. the early hours) of the day and so to miss this period will spell doom for a man's pocket and kitchen. It, therefore, warns against any attitude which could lead to indolence. It is a well-known fact that Igbo people are intelligent and smart people and, therefore, hate any form of laziness, sluggishness or inertia. Moreover, this advice is hinged on the realisation that heaven helps those who help themselves, for unless a person says "here I am", nobody will know that he is.

	Column A (thesis proverb)	Column B (antithesis proverb)
4.	Úgwumágàlà sị nà yá ágághì éjì n'ihì óhíá ná-ágbá ókū hápū ijē ògàrànyà nnà yá kùziri yá. No competition in destiny.	Ómóro sị nà yá ánághì ékwé ékélē mà óhíá gbáwá ókū. Delay is dangerous.

The dramatis personae of these contrastive proverbs are lower creatures: one a reptile and the other an insect. In column A (4) the chief protagonist is the chameleon, which is a species of lizard that lives in the bush. The chameleon is known for its elegant colours, articulated steps and stylish slow movements. Its nature is such that it takes ample time in whatever she is doing, be it walking or eating, even, when

gazing at you. In fact, it seems that nothing perturbs the chameleon, not even when the bush where it is living is being razed down by fire. In such critical moments, the chameleon will still be seen walking away gently, stylishly, and slowly. This attitude of the chameleon is contrasted with another character of the grasshopper in column B (4) who believes that there is no time to waste, even for the exchange of friendly pleasantries when there is serious danger or threat to one's life. The wisdom of the grasshopper is complemented by another Igbo proverb that one whose house is on fire does not engage in frivolous pursuit of rats.

	Column A (thesis proverb)	Column B (antithesis proverb)
5.	È mée nwátā kà é mèrè íbē yá, óbī ádí yá m̄mā. What is good for the geese is also good for the gander.	Kpúó m̄ ísì kà á kpúrú íbé m̄, íhū ó bú ótū? No two people are exactly the same.

The Igbo believe in the principle of justice, equity and fairness. They believe that every human person has equal rights and so merits equal opportunity and treatment. Therefore, no person should be considered as inferior or be discriminated against or treated as a second class citizen. This is the semantic import of the proverb in column A (5). When a person is treated equally like others, he beams with smiles, while all forms of grievances, agitations and complaint are buried. But, there is a big problem here which some scholars have identified is the major problem with the concept of justice as "giving each man his due". Now, suppose a knife belongs to a mad person and you know that in giving him the knife, he will use it to kill someone. Are you still obliged to give him the knife that is his due? The proverb in column B (5), aware of this dilemma reminds the listener that what goes for one person may not, necessarily, go for another in equal and the same manner because no two persons have the same facial outlook or destiny. It is, therefore, expected that at times, individual differences and idiosyncrasies have to be critically and seriously considered in handling issues or relating with people.

	Column A (thesis proverb)	Column B (antithesis proverb)
6.	Íhè ónyé mètàrà, yá búrú. A person should be responsible for his actions.	(i) Íkè nyúó áhùrù, á kúó ísì ókpó. (ii) Nkítā ríé n̄sī, ézè éréé éwū. We have collective responsibility.

The traditional Igbo culture and practice uphold the idea of retributive justice. Consequently, the Igbo people accept that the person or soul that sins should be the one to suffer or be punished. This idea and belief is couched in such proverbs as the one in column A (6) above. In fact, a person should be ready and willing to bear the consequences of his/her words, omissions or deeds. However, experience shows that this is not always the case, as some people suffer for the faults and misdeeds of others. This is the scenario portrayed in the contrasting proverb in column B (6). We observe here that the agent that polluted the air is *íkè* 'the anus' in column B (6i), and therefore, the guilty party. Instead of the harmer falling on it, it lands on *ísì* 'the head', which gets the hard knock. The good news, however, about this seeming injustice is that in punishing the innocent head, the guilty anus also gets some share, for as long as the head is in pains, the whole body (and that includes the anus) are in a pitiable condition.

	Column A (thesis proverb)	Column B (antithesis proverb)
7.	Nkítā dárá ébé íbē yá dārà ábúghì yá ụjō. Solidarity is not cowardice.	Ókē sòrò ñgwéré máá n̄mírī, ó kóó ñgwéré ò gà-àkókwa ókē? Different strokes for different folks.

Naturally, people would always like to be in solidarity or emulate the good examples of others. They would like to be identified with the beautiful stories of their contemporaries, group members and friends. This is a practical life experience which is common among dogs when they are playing around. Except the dog is somehow sick or new to a place (in which case it is a stranger to those around), once a dog sees the others jumping and playing around, it immediately joins them, falling like dry leaves being blown around by a strong wind. This is the idea portrayed in the proverb in column A (7) above. So, this proverb is an advice against a person trying to be a loner or live an individualistic and isolated life. Such life style is alien to Igbo concept of community living – *úmúnnà*. While this idea is good for both humans and dogs, a person needs also to know that it is not always the case that what is good for

the geese is equally good for the gander. This is the idea the contrasting proverb in column B (7) wants to bring to the consciousness of the listener. Thus, while it is good to imitate others, it is also better wisdom to realise the uniqueness that makes each one of us exceptional and a different individual.

	Column A (thesis proverb)	Column B (antithesis proverb)
8.	Ótū m̀kp̀s̀ìs̀ìákā r̀t̀á r̀m̀m̀ánú, ó zúó òhà. What affects one person, invariably affects all.	(i) Ísì kóté ébū, ò gbáá yā. (ii) Íhé ónyé mètàrà, yá búrú. Paddle your own canoe.

The Igbo believe in and practice community living and extended family kinship system. In such setting, the members of a community or kindred are taken as belonging to one another. Thus, what affects one person is taken to impact the others in the same or similar manner. It is also the case when a person among his brethren commits an offence. The effect is extended also to the other members of the community. This is the understanding or meaning of the proverb in column A (8). While this holds true, it is also known amongst the Igbo that a person should act responsibly and be held responsible for his actions. One cannot hide under anonymity to perpetrate evil. Thus, the contrasting proverb in column B (8) notes that the head that touched the beehive should be ready to receive the sting.

	Column A (thesis proverb)	Column B (antithesis proverb)
9.	Èhí énwéghì òdù, chí yá nà-áchúrú yá íjìjì. God is the defender of the defenceless.	Ónyé áráchághì ònū yá, ùgùrù àráchára yá. Speak up or be swallowed up.

The Igbo believe in a personal *chí* who guides the course of events in the life of every individual. A person's *chí* has a way of defending him in difficult or helpless situations. This is the idea the proverb in column A (9) is portraying, with the image of a cow. A cow is a large female animal that is kept on farms for the purpose of producing milk. A cow is usually huge, but naturally looks very calm, weak and harmless. Due to its calmness, it seems, flies find it more convenient to perch all over her and this, usually, keeps her restless and uncomfortable. To avoid this disturbance, the cow flings its long tail continuously to ward off the flies. But, whereby it does not have this "facility" (long tail), it resigns to fate. At this point, it is assumed that the task of warding off flies will be taken up by providence that is its *chí*. This idea is transferred to the human situation, whereby if a person is being unjustly persecuted because he has no one to defend or speak for him, it is believed that the person's *chí* will fight his course. In modern times, some law firms (lawyers without boundaries) have taken it upon themselves to do this voluntary solicitous job of defending the poor defenceless. While a person may look up to fate or God to fight his course or take care of his problems, the proverb in column B (9) advises such fellow of the need to also be awake and alive to the changing tides and realities that happen in life. We cannot resign or consign everything to fate or providence. Human efforts must complement fate. Thus, the proverb calls attention to the dry season which is a period in the year when the weather is so harsh that it dries up a person's body moisture. For this reason, a person needs to keep his/her body protected (i.e. moisturised) to avoid being dried up. Where a person fails to do this then, the dry weather will do it for him and that will be dangerous.

	Column A (thesis proverb)	Column B (antithesis proverb)
10.	Ójé nà wáyòò ànaghì émérú áhū. Slow and steady win a race.	Úzò ghára útùtù, ó ghóó m̀wé́m̀wé ósò. Don't leave for tomorrow what you can do today.

Life often throws up a lot of challenges which demand that a person applies some caution in behaviour. Thus, it is not always advisable to react spontaneously to every situation. This forms the motive for the proverb in column A (10). Applying caution in what a person is doing or engages in saves him from certain problems or dangers in life. However, a person may be so eaten up with being careful that he forgets to take up responsibilities as he ought to. Therefore, the proverb in column B (10) reminds the reader that once a person postpones or fails to embark on an activity he is billed to carry out in the early hours of the day, he will be caught up in haste.

	Column A (thesis proverb)	Column B (antithesis proverb)
11.	Agwó t̀ur̀ú m̀bè t̀ur̀ú ókpókóró. The early bird catches the worm.	Mà ó nwéghì íhé m̀m̀ányá m̀èrè íjìjì, ó kwányé yá áfò úkwú. Don't leave for tomorrow what you can do today.

	Never fight with a person who has nothing to lose.	Never take undue advantage of others.
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Sometimes a person who considers himself as strong, knowledgeable, or intelligent, may decide to engage in fight with another fellow of lesser qualities thinking that he will outwit him. However, it often happens that the person may end up bruising himself in the process. The proverb in column A (11) is, therefore, sending a warning signal to such a fellow that the snake can't effect any injuries on the tortoise because the shells provide it with enough protective walls. In other words, it would amount to a waste of efforts to pick issues or quarrels with a person who has nothing to lose. Nevertheless, even the weakest elements have some powers or effects in them. Thus, the fly may be feasting on a keg of palm wine thinking that it has nothing to lose. But a time will come when it will find it difficult to fly out due to the size of its protruding stomach. In other words, it is unwise to underrate the power of even the weakest person, or take undue advantage of others.

	Column A (thesis proverb)	Column B (antithesis proverb)
12.	<p>Ìjǐjǐ ná-énwéghì ónyé ñdùmódú ná-ésò ózú alá n'ìlì. A fly that refuses to heed to advice follows the corpse into the grave.</p>	<p>Ò dǐghì íhé ágwóró ónyé árá ò hápù íkpù ányá. You cannot stop a mad man from looking at people suspiciously.</p>

An advice is an opinion (i.e. positive idea or opinion) given to someone to help him do what is right. The purpose or goal is save a person from getting involved in avoidable danger. Therefore, any wise, intelligent and responsible person always listens to and cherishes any piece of good advice he is given. A person who heeds to an advice will spare and save himself from trouble. But, this is not the same for many people. Some people find it hard to listen to an advice and the consequence is that they always plunge themselves into trouble. This is semantic and pragmatic import of the proverb in column A (12) above. It advises such people using the experience of the fly that follows the corpse into the grave because it will never listen to any piece of advice due to its restless and stubborn nature. However, the proverb in column B (12) is saying that no amount of help, advice or cure given to a mad man will stop him from talking to himself or flashing suspicious looks at people. Thus, some people who are naturally stubborn can hardly accept good suggestions or change their old character, just as the shrewd rat will never abandon its odour.

	Column A (thesis proverb)	Column B (antithesis proverb)
13.	<p>Ónyé énwéghì íhé ó bǔ, énwéghì íhé ná-ányìgbú yá. Clear conscience fears no accusation.</p>	<p>Ónyé chééré ímmádú kà yá énwé úchē. Be prepared at all times.</p>

Naturally, loads have weight and as such are sometimes burdensome and inconveniencing. Loads, here, are not just physical objects or material things, but include any form of worries, discomfort, need, suffering, health challenges, etc. These experiences of life create real burdens to the soul and health of the affected person. This is not the same for a person who is unencumbered or free of worries coming from these realities. For a person who is relaxed or less affected by difficulties, he has nothing to distract him, weaken his spirit or burden him. Thus, the proverb in column A (13) is saying that there is no headache for a person who harbours no malice in his heart. Another semantic-pragmatic interpretation of the proverb is that a person who has no ill-feelings or grudges against another person will not be afraid of any accusations. However, the possibility that a person in any of these states might become complacent and insensitive to things happening around him is very obvious. When this happens, he could be taken unawares in the event of a challenge or an attack by a more conscious and prepared person. Thus, the contrasting proverb in column B (13) reminds a supposedly complacent fellow that a person who plans ahead is credited with having more intelligence.

	Column A (thesis proverb)	Column B (antithesis proverb)
14.	<p>Mà ó nwéghì íhé ánwùrù ókū mètè àtànì, ò kwányé yá ányá ákpū. The tsetse fly that bites the cow is only scratching it. Don't fight with a person who has nothing to lose.</p>	<p>Ódùdú ná-àtá éhí ná-ákó yá ókó. The tsetse fly that bites the cow is only scratching it. Don't fight with a person who has nothing to lose.</p>

	Smoke may not kill the tarsier, but it can cause it protruding eyes.	
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It is a common belief among the Igbo that it was the amount of smoke that entered the tarsier's eyes due to his involvement in making fire for the sick mother-in-law that led to his having protruding eyes. At a deeper level of understanding, the proverb in column A (14) cautions those who engage in any form of prohibited activities (like smoking, drug alcohol addiction, etc) that such behaviours, though they may not appear harmful, are still dangerous and injurious to health. This proverb and warning is countered by the second proverb in column B (14) which says that the bite of the tsetse fly on the cow is infinitesimal. The cow (*éhi*) is a big mammal and very large in size. The tsetse fly (*òdùdù*), on the other hand, is a tiny small ant (compared to the cow). The tsetse fly usually clings to the cow with leechlike tenacity. Thus, the cow carries the tsetse fly about wherever it goes. While perching on the cow, the tsetse fly feeds on it by sucking its blood. However, this activity of the tsetse fly does not stop the cow from moving wherever it wants.

	Column A (thesis proverb)	Column B (antithesis proverb)
15.	<p>Ánaghị ásō mgbágbú hápú ògù. Challenges have to be confronted head-on.</p>	<p>Ó jí ósọ ágbákúrú ògù ámághị nà ògù bú ónwú. Appearance is not the same as reality.</p>

Most people are afraid of challenges. They would prefer to throw in the towel in the face of difficulties. For such people, they do not want to take risks for fear of getting hurt. This attitude, for the Igbo, is an act of great cowardice and weakness. Instead, the Igbo believe that it is a sign of courage, chivalry and bravado to confront challenges and problems with equal force. Thus, a true Igbo person does not shy away from challenges or consider whether he will die or not before confronting any serious and challenging situation. Nevertheless, a child who is ignorant of the effects of war always thinks that a war combat is like a wrestling entertainment or contest. But, this is only an appearance which is quite different from reality. The truth is as contained in the contrasting proverb in column B (15) that involving in wars is engaging oneself in a death's journey and activity.

1.6 Observations and Conclusion

This study observes that Igbo proverbs contain deep moral lessons which are very essential for life and living. A proverb usually has two levels of meaning: the surface or literal meaning and the metaphorical or figurative meaning. Basically, the proper meaning of a proverb cannot be adequately grasped except by reference to context. There is, also, disparity between the meaning of individual words in a proverb and that conveyed by the proverb as a whole.

Again, proverb is an important element of culture and since every culture has its unique characteristics, most Igbo proverbs do not have direct equivalents in, for instance, the English Language. Consequently, some proverbs used in this study were translated literally. Further still, a juxtaposition of the English translation of the thesis and antithesis of some of the Igbo proverbs do not spell out clearly the contrastive sense or quality that is neatly contained in their original or natural Igbo forms. Hence, attention should be paid more on the Igbo versions in order to appreciate the contrast between a thesis proverb and its antithesis counterpart.

Finally, a thesis proverb in one situation can become an antithesis proverb in another context. For instance, *ihé ónyé métàrà, yá búrú* is a thesis proverb in (6), but in (8ii) it is an antithesis proverb. However, this feature is very rare judging from the data explored in this study.

1.7 Conclusion

The study examined 15 Igbo proverbs in contrasting pairs by providing their semantic and pragmatic interpretations. It noted that proverb forms an indispensable aspect of Igbo language and culture. It is a rich means of communication among the Igbo people. Using proverbs effectively to communicate one's ideas and thoughts distinguishes a core traditional and well-informed Igbo native speaker from a neophyte or learner. Proverbs have implicit meanings that are not decipherable by merely considering

the meaning of the lexical items that convey them. Hence, the meaning a proverb conveys is deeper than what meets the eye. It is the view of this writer that Igbo language users should learn how to apply the rich values of Igbo proverbs to their daily life and interactions.

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