

SOCIOHISTORIC DISCOURSE OF LINGUISTIC METAPHORISATION IN SELECT IGBO PROVERBS

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Abstract

Proverb often oscillates between two extremes to modulate meanings by special creative use of language, through the aesthetic restructuring of lexical items to create and foreground meaning, value and interest; and to stimulate attention. It accounts and sways the sociocultural norms of experiences and conducts, by giving social prominence to the ancient beliefs and powers of divine inspiration, and also perpetuating the traditional order of oracular discourse. Though, many works have been done on proverbs, but this paper seeks to investigate the critical intelligence in the proverbs discourse in Igbo cosmogony which identifies and highlights the subtleties in the style. This evokes cultural and traditional linguistic habits through rhetorical rendition of native intelligence, to demonstrate rich cultural norms or values. Relevance theory was applied, as an inferential approach to pragmatics. It is one of the Grice's central claims in Co-operative Principles, which has the essential feature of most human communication, in verbal and non-verbal, is the expression and recognition of intentions. It stimulates possible interpretation at the cognitive level and at the culture-specific context. One hundred proverbs were reviewed and ten were selected through stratified sampling. The paper underscores the inherent African intelligence and philosophy found in the aphorisms, and their relevance to the performer, the addressee, the sociocultural context and socio-psychology of the discourse.

Keywords: Metaphor, Sociohistoricity, Proverb, Discourse, Relevance Theory

Introduction

The fluidity of language allows it to create and capture the intersubjective consciousness of thought, culture and social reality of existence. It is therefore the centrality of human perception which synthesizes "various unrelated social, cultural and intellectual practices" (Akwanya 22). Language of any particular society hold sway to the homogeneity of that society. This is laid bare especially in the lexical distinctions of the language which reflect in the culturally important features of objects, institutions worldviews and other activities in the speech community, in which the language is the medium.

The realization of language consciousness stimulates the whole gamut of the intellectual being in an individual, to liberate himself from the vestiges of the shackles of economic, political and sociocultural eccentricism which ushers in phenomenal change in his psyche. By this, the individual or the group is pitted against the ceaseless struggles:

...to their economy, politics and culture from that Euro-American-based stranglehold to usher a new era of true communal self-regulation and self-determination. It is an ever-continuing struggle to serve back their creative initiative in history through a real control of all the means of communal self-regulation and self-determination in time and space. The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe. Hence language

has always been at the heart of the two contending forces in the Africa of the twentieth century (wa Thiong O, 285).

So, the conciseness of language use highlights the ontological state of being which describes the features that are equally outside the phenomenon of which the language seeks to encompass. This helps language to adapt itself within some certain observable aspects of the phenomenon in order to hold it firmly and overlap with it (Akwanya 23).

Linguistic Consciousness

Language is considered in its relationship to human consciousness; this brings it into two quite different levels. In the one hand, it comes in as phenomenon which accounts for the primary realization of consciousness that engenders a major source of insight into philosophy and nature. Secondly, it comes as meta-phenomenon, which is the powerhouse of human intellectual endeavour (this involves the construction of theories, especially theories that dwell in the evolution of consciousness. Language as a phenomenon constantly renews itself by being influenced by changing in resonance with changes in its environment. This attribute is inherent, that is, it is interred in language. It is the fact about language because it is the integral condition of its existence as socio-semiotic system. So, any denial of language in the social structures or strata is the denial of interaction or dialogue. Lemke highlights that many human systems which include all socio-semiotic systems, belong to dynamic open system. This means that language has the features that are metastable, that is, they solely persist on development through constant change. The change only takes place through interactions within the linguistic environment of the language (102). Halliday draws our attention that during the interaction exchanges in the linguistic environment, the system end product is disorder so the system exports disorder and in the process of exporting disorder; the system therefore increases “the entropy of its environment, the system renews itself, gains information, imports or rather creates order and in this way continues to function. The system exists only because it is open. But it is now no longer itself; for such a system, the state of being is one of constant becoming” (121-122).

Language as a metaphenomenon theorizes in the form of human intellectual endeavour which is also a part of the history of consciousness. Its evolutionary path aligns with “some sort of dynamic such as that of successive refinements of categorization, from generalization through abstractness to metaphor and characterized by particular ‘moments’ in the history of human cultures (some more rapid, some more long-drawn-out) as cosmologies-theories of the human condition-are steadily built up” (Holliday 391-392). He equally points out that those cosmologies vary naturally in the condition of living, especially in the major changes, for example, settled people are likely to have different theories of the world from those of the unsettled people and hunting-gathering cultures; within these settlement, technology changes as long as theories change:

Mythic, religions and scientific cosmologies represent the theory-building aspect of consciousness associated with homo sapiens. (That this is not in fact an essentially different kind of activity from the commonsense use of language in everyday discourse becomes clear once we recognize that the grammar of every natural language is itself a theory of experience albeit one that is typically lodged “below the level of” conscious awareness ... (392).

Essentially, language is a condition of higher order of human consciousness, especially from the standpoint of socio-semiotics.

Paremiology and Definitions of Proverbs

The study of proverbs has been dated since the time of Aristotle the word paremiology is derived from the Greek ‘paroimia’, meaning ‘proverb’, which is the study of proverbs. Then, paremiography means the collection of proverbs or the art of coining of proverbs. This has been on for millennia through Sumerian tablets to the middle ages up to the present day. It is a quintessential “documenta human” around the globe and all times (Kuusi 57). The presence of a proverb in a discourse is a deliberate aesthetic colouring by the artist to reinforce a proposition. Proverb has been variously defined by many scholars. It is considered generally as a vehicle use to transmit words’ wisdom because of its distilled thoughts, ideas and philosophies of a given people. In this regard, it encodes the sociocultural identities, the ontology and their relation to the physical and metaphysical space. The communicability of proverbs helps to pass on values, aspirations, norms, likes and dislikes of the society; by stipulating the normative

principles for the societal integration. It helps to console, philosophise or even reflect on the people's temporal, material and spiritual wellbeing. Mieder observes that "proverbs play a part in education, religion, law and social life of the native. In earnest or in play, from youth to age, the proverb plays a regular yet lively role" in what we do or say in our daily activities. (47). Thus, proverbs are integral part of our (African) oral literature which mostly reflects people's life in our society.

Proverbs are metaphorical expressions or propositions presented with implicatural intent in the provision of meanings, especially hidden meanings. They are usually projected to convey deep feelings or ideas through their unconventional rhetorical force. This unconventionality is the spine of the language which gives the expression weight and more meaning. Krikmann states that "proverbs are metaphorical descriptions of certain situations" (123). Similarly, Meider defines proverb as a short sentence that is common among a group which they have shared knowledge of, which "contains wisdom, truth morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and that is handed down from generation to generation" (119). Usman further states that proverbs are folk wisdom which form greater part of their experience and way of life (3). Knappert points out that they are "short expressions of wit containing the wisdom of past generations in condensed form, often in rhythmic language easy to remember and pleasing to hear" (2). Taking into account the wittiness of proverbs, Ibekwe explains that "proverbs and aphorisms may be described as terse general statements often using figurative language, touching on some aspect of life" (1). Essentially, proverbs are oral situational sayings which contain and convey messages laden with wisdom handed down for common inheritance.

Identity and Social Roles of Proverb

Language inherently determines and sustains identity of individuals or groups in every discourse role of the language, researches in humanities and other disciplines have shown. Humanity is so complex and the inhabitants, who are the language interactants, are social actors with several identities that are articulated based on the social events which are determined by the construction of the social contexts. So, the fluidity in the social function of a proverb determines whether the identity it represents is more appropriate than the others in a given social phenomenon "in an interaction and rise to the top of the hierarchy of identities" (Omoniyi, 22). These hierarchy of identities are the integral elements of social construct which demonstrate the dynamism rather than the inelastic property of identification. The conventions governing saliency operate, and they are equally recognized by all interactants within the discourse network or community. Omoniyi states therefore:

In other words, in the interactional context, movement from one to another stratum on the hierarchy is not arbitrary since such movement is understood to be purposed for a particular objective. Its rationale may be unquestionable, but as with all practices and procedures in the empirical sciences, confidence in its deployment will only arise from and grow with use (260-261).

Proverb is an embodiment of social practice which energizes the social roles of the metafunction of language. It is a rhetorical force of illocution in the actual performance of language, for lexical convenience, that is, being able to be persuasive and speak power to the truth, aesthetic intentionality. Proverb incites meta-awareness among the participants in appreciating the discourse values of any utterance in sociopragmatic situation. In other words, it activates the consciousness of the participants by sensitizing their temporarily latent episteme of the discourse that is under the microscope. Proverb is socio-theoretic element of oral literature that gives vent to the cultural deep dive into the history and belief system. It sustains the sociocognitive literacy of the community by holding firmly the cultural tread that identifies a group or community. In other words, the expertly use of proverb by the participants is a clear definition of social consciousness and cognitive awareness of the operativeness in the group or community. So, the participant(s) is culturally immersed in the philosophical symbolisation which he makes "visible, audible, and tangible beliefs, ideas, values, sentiments, and psychological dispositions that cannot be directly perceived" (Turner, 50) through the ordinary language use.

Sociohistoricity of Discourse

The life of a discourse is dependent on the lexical capacity of the language to sustain the long line of its ideological and phenomenal experiences which are reinforced by social actions within the sociolinguistic practice. This is the point of convergence of history and social sciences that creates a broad interdisciplinarity which overarches the metafunction of the given language, in its specific cosmos which include, cultural metaphor, cultural history, historical anthropology, social history, and so on. These interdisciplinaries are grouped under one umbrella called “sociohistorical inquiry”. It is an epistemological methodology that pivots on historicity, within the framework of metatheoretical stance of postpositivism which focuses on the description of external world; thus, reality is constructed by people and experiences of their temporal structurations of social actions and processes (Hall, 82). So, every discourse of proverb is a sociohistorical phenomenon which evolves from the social practices and values infused in the conventions of the social group and time period; so it is culturally saturated with the relevance of eternalism and presentism in its discourse, for its social existence. This invigorates proverb in creating knowledge that is valid in its own right, independent of the value commitments of its users, because it is the universal convention of the construction of its users.

In sociohistoricity, proverb bears the ideology that demonstrates a powerful capacity, which constructs reality from sociocultural dynamism and evolution of fact-value distinction to cultivating a culture of reason – “social life, events, and processes unfolding over time” ... which are “ontologically central to the character of the social” (Hall, 151). Within and outside sociohistoricity, proverb often mirrors the essential concerns about the character and prospects of contemporary society, which offers variegated telescopic narrative of everyday life, social movements, family life, identity, labour and popular culture. It is also a reflection of and a reflection about predated hermeneutic understanding of enduring human experience (Kippenberg, 134).

There are four elemental modes of discourse in which sociohistoricity depends on, they include, discourse on values, narrative discourse, the discourse of explanation and social theoretical discourse, these are intrinsically engrafted in the *beingness* of proverb. They are therefore interdisciplinary in their inquiry into the problematics of these discourses, objective “methodology typically is oriented either toward theorization in relation to cases (historical sociology) or toward comprehensive analysis of a single phenomenon (sociological history)” (Hall, 164).

Communicability of Proverb

Communication is an art, so it must be done artfully. Artistic communication liberates the mind or the audience and holds the society to sway. All sorts are impelled to affect. This is dependent on the rhetorical efficiency and effectiveness which the art possesses. And it can be stimulated through “a number of interrelated factors, such as the degree of originality or stylistic virtuosity of the artist, the socio-cultural ambiance of his (the art) operation and its historical imperatives, his view of the role of art in society and the nature of his own social vision” (Osundare 5). Art communication also came as a result of man’s passion to communicate. This is celebrated in the drawings of the cavemen, in their quest to articulate their passions which indeed highlighted their state of ontology. Indeed, it is a truism that poetry and drama came into being as a result of man’s creative adventure to interact vertically with supernatural forces. So, he chose some sort esoteric language that would enable him “wish his needs into reality and horizontally with his fellow men, the co-actors in the magic drama of wish-fulfillment” (Osundare 5).

The artist or the language user is often at crossroad with communicability; that is, how to communicate. This usually creates a hiatus between his perception and expression, and his ideation and verbalization. So, an artist may not be able to transmit his conceptive intensive input optimally, because he falls short of communicating his total expressive output maximally; that is, under-communication. Equally, artist is handicapped by uncommunicability, this implies that not all that he wants to communicate that he can communicate. He avoids taboos and other culturo-linguistic anathema which compel the artist to resort to insinuations, figurative languages, innuendoes and other types of word-avoidance:

Words or matters signifying or relating to sex, defecation, death, dreaded plagues, etc, are infrequent in normal language, replaced as they are, by celebratory periphrases and genteel synonyms. It must be stressed, however, that this type of communicability is more cultural than linguistic: there are direct verbal signifiers; it is only that people avoid them (Osundare 8).

Indeed, communication is the major feature of human existence, it is inseparable to the state being. Children cry or ramble in the bid to press home their demands. But mature minds express themselves through views, experiences, aspirations and thoughts by the process of impressing them upon the minds of the hearers or audience, these realities of life. It is believed in our cosmology that ordinary language, which is the everyday language, does not transmit the needed meaning which is intrinsic. So, higher level of language or expression which is fulfilled by proverbs, because proverbs have the capacity to convey or provide deeper reflection on the philosophy of which is bereft of everyday language (Uso 16).

Relevance Theory

It is a cognitive approach to analysis of discourse. It was developed by H Paul Grice (1969, 1989,) when he proposed a communication model which would be guided by four maxims, namely, Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner. He called them Co-operative Principle and maxims of conversation where he states that people are disposed to assume that communicative variables or behaviour influenced by these principles and norms (Schmitt, 73). He states that one should make his “conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Grice 26). Therefore, any effectual interpretation must satisfy the Co-operative Principle which effected through these four maxims. Sperber and Wilson assert that a single principle of relevance is enough to explain the of utterance comprehension (15). However, the neo-Grecian scholars tend to show interest in relationship of utterance to information, but Sperber and Wilson argue that the cognitive motion of relevance is more crucial in utterance comprehension than the probabilistic induction (157).

So, ‘be relevant’ is believe to override all the other maxims, because it is presumed to be central in the collaborative efforts of the conscious participants in directing a conversation to achieving a common goal. It is central because explains how information is processed in the discourse. The advocacy of this theory is to explain cognitively in realistic terms what expectations of relevance amount to and how they can affect an empirically plausible account of comprehension. It advocates two variables for linguistic communication, namely extension and inference. Ostension enables the speaker to express his intention through a linguistic code, while inference enables the receiver to interpret the utterance based on his judgement that what the speaker says is relevant (Eziefeka, 204).

Method

The paper employs survey research method approach for this study. One hundred Igbo proverbs were generated through interviews, consultation of books (O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada’s *The Igbo Proverbs: A study of its Context Performance and Functions*, F.B.O. Akporobaro’s *Introduction to African Oral Literature* and Emefie Ikenga Metuh’s *African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problems of Interpretation*) and some groups in Twitter handle (#ilu Igbo, #Igbo Proverb, #Igbo and #Igboamaka). These proverbs were randomly selected among these sources, to generated authentic data, for objective analysis. These data were collected from multiple sources because of contemporary phenomenal approach within the real-life context under investigation. Ten proverbs were selected through stratified sampling, for the textual analysis. Survey research method/design was chosen because it is appropriate for research that involves attitudes, cultures, views and beliefs. Moreover, it is good at examining problem in realistic setting rather than in a laboratory.

Analysis and Discussion

The result of the analysis was generated through the application of the inferential and cognitive processes on the data collected. They correlate to achieve comprehension through background cultural knowledge at conceptual and realistic levels, which reflect the cosmogonic manifestness of the Igbo people. This helps one to see his subconsciousness as having variety of specialized systems which are situationally-oriented. There are two broad systems; each has its own representation and computation.

The input systems which process auditory, linguistic, visual and other perceptual information, while the central systems which accommodate the information generated from the different contexts, and from memory and perform inferential exercise. It relates events and experiences one has by knitting them logically and graphically as constituents.

Onwa tibe ije aguma onye ngwuro (If the moon is shining, the lame thirsts for a stroll)

Here, there is the concept of moon in Igbo cosmic world, and during the period of moonlight, everybody comes out to enjoy the moonlit night. This implicates that during that time, there is relative peace or security, that even the lame can come out freely to immerse himself in the joyful atmosphere of that time. Moreover, that the lame *is* always therefore excited during this period, to come out from the shelf of loneliness.

Ana abacha ji ana-ele ite anya. (As yams are being peeled, the size of the pot is being assessed).

This assesses logical flexibility that every experience deduced must be with the universal truths prevalent with the immediate conceptual representations derived from different input systems. So, the universal truths should be strictly adhered to within the discourse community. It is also a philosophic admonition to accept the changing dynamic of society by modifying the old assumptions through reconceptualization.

A na-egbu achala o na-eto (If bamboo is being felled, it will continue to grow further).

It expounds the philosophical essence of logical realities, that life is timeless. So, nothing can forestall the natural transition from life to death. This reinforces resurrection, that life is a continues changing course which has no end. It is a mental state that represents or assesses the metaphysical immanence in human existence. This is indestructibility of existence and fatalistic nature of being.

Aja ndu bu maka onye no na-onye na-anoghi. (Sacrifice for life is for those present and those absent).

In traditional Igbo religion, sacrifice is often the killing of animals for spiritual cleanings or appeasement or atonement, before a shrine or a selected spot related with the cult of the deity. This is a physical manifestation of conceptual representation of the religion's values from the immanent world.

The performer implicitly assumes that the process of inferential comprehension has taken place. But the addressee may have not deduced or decoded the addresser's communicative intention. The best the addressees can do is to construct an assumption based on the evidence before him which was provided by the addresser's/performer's ostensive behaviour.

In Igbo cosmology, sacrifice is an integral part of its culture and identity. It is chiefly done to appease the immanent beings that are believed to control the elemental forces of nature and existence. In addition, it is offered to solicit life and prosperity, for the "offerer". This proverb reinforces the importance of sacrifice to the continual existence of life in Igbo socio-cultural philosophy. And therefore, it serves to remind the user or the hearer of the proverb, that sacrifice is the material connection between the living and the living dead -the spirit. This implicates that, there is existence of life hereafter, and how we live affects our next life. So, whatever sacrifice we make here, it is for us and for those that had left us behind. Therefore, we are not alone; we give the spirit to eat (that is, the sacrifice), in recompense the spirit pays us back with life.

O na-abu azota ana tupu azota ute. (It is after you have secured the ground that you struggle for the mats).

The cognitive principle of relevance is described and manifested strongly here, to make our mental processed at least partially predictable to others. So, the performer relates his experiences to the addressee, that he must set his priorities right. Life is in phases to be at the top, it must be sequential and objective. The performer is generally fair at predicting the external stimuli which will affect the addressee's nervous system (subconscious) in drawing indefinitely many conclusions from the contextual facts. The addressee is expected to pay attention to the essentially potentially most relevant

stimulus that is his priority, and processes it to maximizing its relevance. This will be most relevant in a context where background assumptions are easily accessible and the information it has will have relatively rich cognitive effects.

Mmuo na-eri asaa, enye asato oju (The spirits that demands seven, if you give it eight, it will refuse).

This utterance will be optimally relevant to the hearer, if it is relevant enough to stimulate the hearer's processing effort within the context of the cultural background knowledge. It is most relevant also, if the utterance is compatible with the speaker's abilities and performances. Here, if the hearer interprets the utterance, he has to go beyond the linguistically encoded sentence meaning, which may generate ambiguities and referential indeterminacies to resolve, and other underdeterminate aspects of explicit context. Speaker tells the hearer that the spirit lives with man and that it is principled and strict. It does not take more than enough or what does not belong to it. So, before the hearer begins to decode the utterance must be of optimal relevance to the hearer, because the hearer has to generate implicatures which are situated in linguistic deviations (ironies and the metaphors) and illocutionary indeterminacies to resolve. All these help the hearer to interpret, effectively and efficiently, the utterance within the confines of the sociocultural appropriate set of context assumptions. With optimal relevance and communicative principle of relevance, the hearer interprets the utterance by constructing interpretative hypothesis; that the spirit lives among us, it eats what we eat, we have good relationship, etc.

Ngu Chukwu gbunyelu onye, ka oji ekote ihe. (The hook God gives a person is what he uses to pluck things.)

God is the creator that pulls the string in the epicenter of the centrifugal and centripetal forces of the universe. The proverb resonates the fact that every individual person is *sui generis*, therefore every endowment is peculiar to the person's or the community's needs. In fact, every individual is contributory to the overall or common good, which is the part of the scheme of God's providential care of man. It equally affirms that God cannot give you what you cannot bear or manipulate. So, everyone is as important as each other.

A na-chu aja ki ikpe na-ama ndi mmuo. (Let sacrifice be offered, then let the spirit bear the blame.)

This proverb implicates that one has to initiate a course of action; and left the other to the controlling force of nature. Therefore, everyone has a part to play in determining his fate to have a completeness of expected action or effect. The subtext here, is that one has to do his bidding, before expecting result. And whatever one does to achieve his set goal is seen as sacrifice to the spirit who controls and dispenses reward, at its own time. So, it is a counsel to the hearer not to blame the spirit, rather he should do his own part; and ideally the spirit will not fail.

Anu nuru mmiri nye ibe ya efe. (If an animal has taken water, it should allow the other to take.)

The universe is controlled by social logic and therefore, everything is done graphically to accommodate everyone in the sphere. So, there is always an equal opportunity given to every individual person to explore and exploit the existential possibilities. In addition, social existence is premised on patience and therefore every situation is time-bound, just keep the faith, you will eventually envelop the tide.

Nsogbu na-esugbo onye na-esogbu ya. (Trouble troubles one that troubles it.)

This is wordplay that reinforces the elemental forces that compel our self-induced troubles to come back to us. Our actions or inactions will come to haunt us. Moreover, you are the one that attracted the spell of trouble. This affirms that trouble does not seek the attention of anyone rather, people stir it into action. It is always withdrawn, that is, it is introverted. But, one looks for it, it will give you full measure.

Conclusion

Proverbs are the heart and soul of lexical aesthetics and rhetoric in Igbo life and culture. They are the traditional influencers that constitute the integral part of oral literature which eternally the symbol of

natural wisdom and the receptacle of sociocultural philosophy. The performers use them to embellish their oral eloquence or speech acts through rhetorical dexterity to their hearers. Though, proverbs are not corpuscular and do not gain power by their density as in written literature, as oral literature, they are wavelike and gain power by their intricacy (Halliday, 132). The study of proverbs as literary discourse is interesting and rewarding, especially in the recent development of cognitive, poetics and in text linguistics. So, it becomes necessary to use relevance-theoretic apparatus to extract through inferential processes any set of institutionalised or culturally-specific conditioned rules of communication and interpretation, across varying speakers and contact.

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