

ADDRESSING THE MISWRITING OF 'MAQBỤ' IN IGBO

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Abstract

It needs no advertisement to know that written Igbo is now having the indiscriminate combination of words or word elements, which are treated as one word. Many words, which are supposed to stay separate, are written together in many Igbo textbooks, essays and journals. This paper is set to theoretically and grammatically look into this anomaly. The topic of study here is "Addressing the Miswriting of 'Ma ọ bụ' in Igbo". The objectives of the study are: to trace the causes of the miswriting, establish the implications of the anomaly and offer solutions to remedy the situation. The method of the study is descriptive. And the study resorts to the Theory of Descriptive Grammar and the Use Theory of Meaning to guide it. The study discovers that one of the causes is the habitual carryover of the grammatical patterns of English into the Igbo language. Other causes are the inattention to the peculiar nature of the Igbo language and the negligence of grammar and its applicable theories. The researcher establishes the problems of this miswriting to be the disregard of the independence of the Igbo grammar. Again, it does not permit Igbo language pupils and students to understand an average Igbo man's mode of understanding of the meaning of words. Through this miswriting, the writing of the Igbo language is derisively perceived to lack uniformity. From all these findings, it is obvious that the appreciation of the need for continuous research to overturn some old assumptions will help improve written Igbo. Also, according to the Igbo language its peculiarity and independence from English is foreseen to help secure the intrinsic identity of the Igbo language.

1.0 Introduction

Igbo language is our intrinsic worth and our legacy. It is one of our possessions and one of the things that make lives and well-being of the Igbo estimable. It is an instrument that serves the purpose of the Igbo race. It is the pride of the Igbo nation, something we value and cherish. It is also a core principle and standard we cherish to maintain. Igbo language is a value that directs the Igbo vision, mission and strategic plan. It is it that guides our goals, objectives and activities. All these point to the significance of the Igbo language to every Igbo person. It is an embodiment of our culture, norms and values which we would all wish to bequeath to the generations yet unborn. The Igbo language is one of the non-negotiable core principles or standards that the community's members would like to maintain by passing it on to upcoming generations.

But how can we pass on to generations yet unborn the Igbo language that is distorted and corrupted? How can we, linguists, keep quiet as we watch our written Igbo still wear the garb of colonialism? How can we feel comfortable with the vestiges of colonialism that are still evident in our Igbo language? Why are we linguists? And what are we using our knowledge of linguistics for? Charity, they say, begins at home.

A lot of Igbo books out there are observed to be messing up the true nature of written Igbo and even the spoken one. Today, there is no unanimity in the way Igbo words are written. Some of the observed miswriting is seen to reside in the grammar, some of whose rules seem not to have been taken into

consideration. The other side of the miswriting could be traced to the misconception of the role of culture in the way of writing Igbo. It is against this backdrop that this paper is set to address the miswriting of ‘ma ọ bu’ in Igbo.

There are many reasons for embarking on this study. One of them is to find out the causes of this miswriting. The second purpose is to find out the problems that befall the Igbo language as a result of this miswriting. The third prompting is to offer solutions or cure to this problem. After all these have been done, Igbo language is expected to be able to retain the cultural strength of the Igbo language, respond to the global drive to maintain linguistic and cultural diversity, preserve Igbo culture and tradition and guard against the loss of cultural identity. Above all, the study is anticipated to announce and warn against the corruption of the Igbo language by the English language.

In order to successfully accomplish all these objectives, the Use Theory of Meaning and Descriptive Theory of Grammar will be called into use. The theories are expected to address both the cultural and grammatical sides of the errors, as the descriptive method of research gets adopted.

As per the organisation of the work, it is made up of different sections. The first section is the introduction, which highlights the essence of the research work. The next is the literature review, where issues, views, opinions and sound academic outputs written down by knowledgeable linguists and language experts are re-visited with some analytical intent. After that, the areas of the miswriting are put forward and analysed with corrective intent. This is followed by some recommendations on the steps to normalize the anomaly. The last section is that of conclusion, where the whole discussion is ended on a good note.

2.0 Literature Review

Our responsibility in this section is to review the works of relevant literature and from there pick the facts that will nourish the drive of the study.

2.1 Language

Ohiri-Aniche (2013:4) defines language as “the organised system of speech used by human beings as a means of communication among themselves”. According to her, language could be a reference to the concrete act of speaking, writing or signing in a given situation. She calls this the notion of parole, or performance.

Her definition shows that language is not an anyhow thing; it is not haphazard, just because it is organised. Secondly, language is not an isolated thing, but a system. Being a system shows that some of the elements of language are working together in a synergistic fashion. Her definition traces the use of language to human beings who use it to share messages among themselves. Further still, Ohiri-Aniche’s (2013) elucidation presents language as an activity that is on-going, and being on-going only applies when somebody is speaking it as an action, writing it as an action or signing with it as an action in a specific real-life occasion.

Another look at language is from Prasad (2012). To him, language is the principal activity through which the communication of ideas is obtained. He points out that we can communicate via dance, music, physical gesture and symbol, but is convinced that language is the main source of sharing ideas amongst human beings.

Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens (1965), as presented by Prasad (2012), are of the view that speaking, listening, writing and reading are the four fundamental kinds of activities involved in language. In the same Prasad (2012), Sapir’s (1921) definition of language says that language is basically a human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desire through the use of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. Through Prasad (2012), also, Sweet (1993) defines language as the expression of thought by means of speech sounds. The next definition is from Pei and Franch (1954). To them, language is a system of communication through the use of organs of speech and hearing,

among human beings of a certain group or community, using vocal symbols that have arbitrary conventional meaning.

Analysing these definitions reveals some common facts about language. From all the contributors, communication emerges as a common basic function of language. It is only Sweet (1993) that presents language as an expression of thought through the use of sounds. He fails to bring in communication into his definition. In Sapir's (1921) definition, it is easy to see the other things that language communicates in addition to ideas. These include emotions and ideas. Like in Ohiri-Aniche's (2013), Sapir (1921) recognises language as a system. Both of them see the involvement of symbol in language, except that Sapir (1921) goes ahead to say how these symbols are produced ---voluntarily.

As defined by Ikekonwu, Ezikeojiaku, Ubani and Ugoji (1999), language is a system of conversation, a means of understanding of thoughts of people and it could be in the form of spoken or written words among human beings alone. According to Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010), language is a means which human beings have fashioned out to enable them communicate ideas, feelings, desires, and so on, by using complex vocal or written symbols. The accompanying explanation stresses the fact that language is learnt by every fluent speaker through a system of symbols.

A semblance of the above definition is the one from Agbedo (2000), which says that "language is the culturally established rules which govern all forms of linguistic communication within any given community of speakers that share common linguistic knowledge".

Out of the three authors above, only Ikekonwu, Ezikeojiaku, Ubani and Ugoji (1999), coupled with Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010) talk about language being in two forms, spoken and written. Of the three, Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010) and Ikekonwu, Ezikeojiaku, Ubani and Ugoji (1999) share the view that language is devised or fashioned out by owners of the language. But while the former tells us nothing about how the language is fashioned out or devised, the latter lets us know that the rules of language are devised according to how the culture says it will be. Here, it is made clear that it is the culture of the community that sets out the rules to govern the use of the language.

Okwudishu (2010:44) defines language as "a communication system used by people of a particular community, region or country and consists of a set of symbols used in speech and writing". Here, something stands out clearly. It is the fact that the communication system is for the community, which implies that the meaning those symbols have were assigned to them by the community. Also, the culture of the people sets out the rules that determine how the language is used.

2.2 Linguistics

Linguistics, according to Ezikeojiaku (1989) is the study that looks into language scientifically to survey, describe and analyse it, even as it assembles all the vital things in human language.

Encarta (2004), through Umaru (2005), gives the following as the focus points of linguistic study: the sounds, words and grammar of specific languages. It also focuses on the relationship between languages. The other thing it focuses on is the universal characteristics of all languages. The analysis and description of languages can be done through a diachronic or historical approach. It can also be done via synchronic or modern approach.

On the whole, Wilkins (1972), in Umaru (2005), furnishes us with the key points of the goals or targets of the study of the field of human language, but also targets the development of theories which will be employed in elucidating the behaviour of language. Even at that, linguistics pursues the task of supplying the most empirical or scientific ways of giving a description of language. That is to say, its method is the type that goes on with openly or publicly verifiable data procured through observation or experiment. The other goal of linguistics, according to Wilkins (1972) is to make available the most accurate and comprehensive language description.

2.2.1 Linguistics and Modernity

In the view of Agbedo (2000), what has sparked off the era of modern linguistics is the descriptive inclination which the study has shown. This inclination is that of emphasis on the spoken version rather than the written aspect of language. According to Agbedo (2000), what this emphasis goes to show is that speech is primary to writing as far as language is concerned. He goes on to say that it is Ferdinand de Saussure who enunciated this priority of the spoken language over the written. And he points out that all systems of writing, as always manifested, are dependent on units of spoken language.

Agbedo (2000) explains the linguistic study of language as that which is as objective as possible and is dependent solely on observed facts and not imagined or prescribed conclusions. The descriptive study of linguistics does not pass judgments. It is also being pointed out that modern linguistics perceives every language as a system of relations. This means that no element in the system can claim to be independent of the other. Each one relies on the simultaneous presence of the other.

2.2.2 Descriptive Linguistics

As Prasad (2012) puts it, “descriptive linguistics deals with the description and analysis of the ways in which a language operates and is used by a given set of speakers”. In its work of description, linguistics describes how a language works and how it should work in relation to other languages. Again, its description is systematic, as it touches all levels, such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics.

2.2.3 The Standpoints of Linguistics

There are notions, beliefs or standpoints which linguistics has as a field of study. Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010) throw some light on these beliefs and propositions. The propositions are as follows: every language is qualified to be studied; every language lacks nothing; and every language is affected by the factors of competence and performance.

In their explanation that no language is unworthy of study, Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010) stress how every language is important to the linguist. No language should be condemned as being inferior. As long as a language is being used for successful or effective interaction in a community, such a language is of interest and worthy of study to the linguists. This implies that a linguist does not make subjective judgments in his study. He does not pass value judgments. Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010) talk about linguistic competence and performance. As per competence, it has to do with the knowledge of grammar which a speaker acquires unconsciously and which enables him to use and understand a language, including a construction he has not seen or heard before in his language. Chomsky (1965) makes it clear that competence is about what a person knows. It is the ability that allows a native speaker to distinguish between ‘grammatical’ and ‘ungrammatical’ expressions, including being able to decipher or recognise ambiguity. This ability also makes it possible for a native speaker to judge a sentence he has never heard prior to the time in question. It has to do with defining the system of rules that governs an individual’s tacit understanding of acceptability.

2.3 Significance of Language Theories

According to Horby (2010), a theory is a formal set of ideas that is intended to explain why something happens or exists. It is about the principles on which a specific subject is based. Also, it is the standpoint that guides a particular explanation or view.

Theories are very important. They guide and give meaning to what we see. When a researcher investigates and collects information through observation, the investigator needs a clear idea of what information is important to collect. Thus, valid theories are validated by research and are a sound basis for practical action (<https://eric.ed.gov>).

Theories enable mankind to organise knowledge and construct objectivity by framing observations and experiments. Theories derive their essence from the ability to explain, predict, and understand phenomena and, in many cases, challenge and extend existing knowledge within the limits of critical bounding assumptions. Theories help us to understand and make predictions. Through it, we understand the relationship among various phenomena. And from there, we can predict the behaviour or

characteristics of one phenomenon from the knowledge of another phenomenon (<http://www.studocu.com>).

For the Igbo language, one big lesson to learn from here is that the book, “Qkaasusu Igbo: Igbo Metalanguage”, written in 1985, about 38 years today, can have its knowledge provisions challenged by existing, more current theories. With the help of bounding assumptions, its knowledge can be extended or can be compared with another phenomenon. A continuous study of linguistic theories will help us to challenge some aspects of extant theories.

2.4 Syntax

Syntax, according to Finegan (2008) is an aspect of grammar which determines the shape of strings which users of language employ in making statements, asking questions, giving directives and so on. It is about the structure of sentences and their structural and functional relationships to one another. Agbedo’s (2000) idea of syntax is that it is the part of linguistic study whose concern it is to study the inside/internal form/shape of sentences. What syntax does is to dish out a set of finite rules which language users abide by in producing an infinite number of acceptable sentence structures. On the side of Prasad (2012:73), syntax is “putting things together in an orderly manner. It is the grammar of sentences, a study of the ways in which words can be strung together to form acceptable sentences”. Echebima (2015:97) gives his definition of syntax as “the rules governing how words are arranged in a phrase or sentence, or the study of the relationship of words for meaningful expression”. He calls syntax the grammar. This means that it is about the rules stipulating how we should combine or not combine words or their elements.

2.5 Grammar as Linguistic Competence

Eyisi (2006) is of the view that grammar is equal to the innate knowledge which a speaker of that language has about his language. This is the knowledge that enables such a native speaker to fashion out sentences which comprise those sentences he has never heard prior to the time under consideration. It is this type of knowledge that is known as linguistic competence. It is the native speaker’s thorough knowledge of his language. This competence can also be referred to as the grammar. Yes, it is the rule determining what should be said, written or not be written in the language.

2.6 Where Syntax and Grammar Part Ways

Syntax and grammar have departure points. While syntax concerns itself with the study of sentences and their structure, and the constructions within sentences, grammar has to do with the general term for the set of rules in a given language, which include the rule about syntax and morphology. The duty of syntax is to stipulate what goes where in a sentence, while grammar embodies the rules of morphology, syntax, phonology, semantics and even pragmatics that determine the nature and correctness of the construction (linguistics.stackexchange.com).

2.7 The Meeting Point of Culture and Grammar

Echebima (2015) is of the view that every language has its own brand of syntax or syntactic rule. This means that there are variations in the way sentences of a language are arranged. It is these divergent ways of syntactic arrangement of words in a sentence that empower sentences to have different meanings, which the audience is expected to comprehend. If the way of arranging English words in sentences is different from that of the Igbo language, it then means there is variation in culture.

2.8 Grammar and Writing

As <https://www.writingforward.com> presents, grammar, spelling, and punctuation constitute the most basic ingredients or elements of good writing. This is because correct texts make for easier reading, and the publishing is easier, too. Such a well written text is easier to be sold to readers. Even at that, when one understands his/her grammar well; it makes the writing process easier.

The implication of this is for us to understand that a person who does not firmly understand the grammar of his language should not be expected to write such a language well. Grammar plays no small role in writing, because a proper knowledge of it is vital for credibility, readability, communication, and clarity.

In fact, whatever anybody is writing, correct grammar is paramount, because it makes texts easier, clearer, and more enjoyable to read. Anyone who does not know grammar is not a good writer. Bad grammar gives a message of sloppiness on the part of the writer and even takes away the speaker's credibility.

2.9 Empirical Review

The preoccupation in this section is to take a second look at some previous researches that have some bearing on the topic of our concentration.

2.9.1 Mbah and Mbah (2014):

Under the sub-heading, "Nkwụgba/Nkwụkọ", the two linguists stress the need to write 'ma ọ bụ' separately, especially when considered in the context of the following expressions and more:

- (i) Ma ọ bụ gi ma ọ bughị gi, achoghị m ịma. [Whether it is you or not, I don't want to know].
- (ii) Ma ọ buladi ya biara, agaghị m ekwe. [Even if it was he that came, I would not agree].
- (iii) Ma ọ bughị nwa, onye ga-enye m? [Mbah & Mbah (2014:22). If not because of my child, who would have given me?]

They also emphasize that it is the verb that mainly accepts affixes in the Igbo language and not any other word; and that the 'q' that is in the middle is a pronoun.

2.9.2 Emenanjo (2015):

Emenanjo (2015:76), treating the sub-topic, "The Identification of the morpheme" touches on the factual point of culture being involved in written and spoken language. To buttress this point, he makes the following statement for exemplification:

Note that whereas the definition of a morpheme is universal, its realization is language-specific. For what is a morpheme (or word) in one language may be or turn out a morpheme, word or even phrase or sentence in another language. Every morpheme has its own form/structure, meaning and distribution in a named language. Many linguistically naïve Igbo hold that ezi okwu (true word=truth) is one word in Igbo because it is so in English. So, they insist that the two elements which are otherwise, nouns in associative construction, should be written together! But 'eziokwu' really contains some four morphemes, and two nouns.

Here, Emenanjo (2015) is emphasizing the possible, language-specific nature of the realization of some Igbo morphemes, words, phrases or even sentences; and that a language's morpheme (like in Igbo) can have its own form or structure, meaning or distribution. All that he is saying is that we (in Igbo) should not always copy or ignorantly imitate English word forms.

2.10 Theoretical Framework

This is where we look into the two theories that guide this investigation.

2.10.1 The Theory of Descriptive Grammar

The taking of a big stage in grammar by descriptive linguistics is attributed to the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913, a Swiss linguist, the father of modern linguistics. According to www.thoughtco.com,

The term, descriptive grammar refers to the objective, non-judgmental description of the grammatical constructions in a language. It is a description of how a language is being actually used, in writing and speech. Linguists who specialize in descriptive grammar examine the principles and patterns that underlie the use of words, phrases, clauses and sentences. It is about a set of rules that relies on how people think languages should be used.

Confirming the truth of the above statement, Finch (2000) states that what descriptive grammar does is to make a description of the way the language works in practical terms. Contributing to the discussion, Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007) stress that linguists make efforts to describe the rules (that is, the

grammar) of the language which are contained in the brains of the speakers. There may be some differences, but still some shared knowledge abounds. As long as the description the linguist makes represents a true model (the shared knowledge) of the speaker's linguistic ability, then it is a successful description of the grammar.

2.10.2 Use Theory of Meaning

The Use Theory of Meaning was founded by Wittgenstein (1953). It is also known as the contextual or operational theory of meaning. The theory takes the stand that statements are meaningful if, and only if, they can be defined or pictured in the real world. The theory insists that meaning should not be treated as merely entities. It maintains that the meaning of a word or an expression is determined by the context of its use. What gives out the meaning is the effect which the linguistic unit creates within a given context (Ogbulogo, 2005).

What this means is that the meaning of any linguistic expression, whether it is a word, phrase, or a sentence, is found out normally from the situation or context in which it is used. It is about the effect such a word creates in a particular context in which the expression is used.

3.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

Here, the task is to present the research data derived from the literature review and analyse them in line with the objectives of the study. The objectives of the study will be lined up for step by step analysis.

3.1 Analysis of the causes of the Miswriting.

Egbe (2005) states how Europe colonized the rest of the world, as the English did to the Igbo and imposed the eight parts of speech on them. The use of them is in a way that is not natural with the Igbo language; meaning that it has an embodiment of the prescriptive approach of the traditional grammar, instead of a descriptive approach. This 'carry-over' mentality is being reflected in the writing of 'ma o bu' in Igbo.

(a) Understanding the Contextual Meaning of 'Ma o bu' for L1 Igbo Speaker

Let us interpret what an average L1 speaker of the Igbo language has in mind when he/she says 'ma o bu' and not what 'ma o bu' should imply in the situation of spoken or written English, or when compared to English meaning. To put the record straight, when an average Igbo man says 'ma o bu', he/she has the meaning 'it may be' embedded in the statement. The meaning in that situation is: 'if it is not this, it will be this', that is, 'either this or that'.

The point that will assist us to understand that this is precisely what an average Igbo speaker has in mind in this context is that we, Igbo people, are fond of calling out words or expressions descriptively instead of singly or individually as do the English. As such, to an average Igbo speaker 'this or that' will be translated as 'o bughị nke a, o buru nke ahụ'. This is another way of saying 'it may be' this or 'it may be that'. There is always the presence of the pronoun, 'o' and not its absence as in English. The 'o' is constantly there for an Igbo speaker's correct translation of 'or'. There is always an implied 'it'; and this 'it' is the pronoun, 'o'. In other words, when an Igbo intuitive speaker says, 'nwoke ma o bu nwaanyi', what he/she implies, when turned into English, is 'if 'he' is not a man, 'she' may be a woman'. There is a cultural tendency in every Igbo speaker to be descriptive about most concepts.

For instance, if an Igbo person wants to call a seller, a teacher and a footballer, he/she will call them 'onye na-ere ahịa' (ore ahịa), 'onye na-akuzi akwukwo' (okuzi akwukwo, onye nkuzi) and 'onye na-agba boolx' (ogba boolu), respectively. This is to show that in calling 'or', an Igbo speaker also becomes naturally, characteristically and unavoidably descriptive. The propensity to describe concepts makes an Igbo man to imply 'it may be' whenever he/she uses the word 'or'. That 'it may be' is its contextual meaning.

This Contextual meaning is in line with Wittgenstein's (1953) idea in his Use Theory of Meaning as Ndimele (1992:24) reveals: "...the meaning of any linguistic expression (be it a word, a phrase, or a

sentence) is determined by the context in which it is used. The meaning of an expression, therefore, is the effect or effects that it creates in a particular context in which the expression is used”.

(b) Grammar is Synonymous with Culture

Hantrais (1989) says that culture is made up of the beliefs and practices governing the life of a society for which a particular language is the vehicle of expression. The embedded meaning of this is that there are beliefs and practices characterizing the life of a society, like the Igbo. The Igbo could possibly have some peculiar beliefs and practices concerning the meanings of some groups of words or expressions. The meanings and/or beliefs they attach to these words could be expressed in the way they write such words together or separately. And this way they write them to indicate certain or particular meanings is in the grammar of the language.

This idea is supported by Emmitt and Pollock (1997) in their view that language is rooted in culture and culture is reflected and passed on by language from one generation to the next. It is in line with this understanding that Byram (1989) maintains that the teachers of a language are also teachers of culture. The negligence of this culture is an ignorance of Igbo grammar as it relates to the writing of ‘ma ọ bụ’.

(c) Negligence of the Igbo Writing Culture/Grammar is a Colonial Mentality

To L1 Igbo speaker, ‘ulọ ọgwụ’(hospital) is descriptively written, because it means ‘a house where medicine is stored or kept. It is not one word, *‘ulọọgwụ’. The same applies to ‘onye nkuzi’(teacher), descriptively written as ‘onye nke na-akuzi nkuzi’ (a person who teaches). It is not one word, *‘onyenkuzi’. So it is with ‘ma ọ bụ’ (‘whichever it is’ or ‘whichever it may be’). It is not, also, one word. It CANNOT be ‘maọbụ’, which implies ‘or’ for an English speaker.

Therefore, any person writing ‘ma ọ bụ’ as one word, * ‘maọbụ’ is manifesting a negligence of the Igbo writing culture/grammar. The person is just demonstrating a carryover of the way of writing English (i.e. English culture/grammar) into the Igbo language.

(d) Grammar is culture, as supported by Echebima (2015:115) and Emenanjo Evidence (2015:76). In the words of Echebima (2015:115),

syntax [grammar] is the cultural way of placing words where they should be, in a language, by its owners. It is the normal way of saying something correctly; and that any attempt to dislodge the order or fail to put words in their right position would make the expression sound awkward, clumsy, funny, vague, incomprehensible, incorrect and unacceptable. Syntax is about the people and their culture and how things are said, the positioning of strings of words.

Supporting this view, Emenanjo (2015:76) presents his view on the issue of culture in written and spoken Igbo. He opines as follows:

...whereas the definition of a morpheme is universal, its realization is lingua-specific. For what is a morpheme (or word) in one language may be or turn out a morpheme, word or even phrase or sentence in another language. Many linguistically naïve Igbo hold that ‘ezi okwu’ (true word=truth) is one word in Igbo, because it is so in English. So, they insist that the two elements which are, otherwise, nouns in associative construction should be written together. But ‘eziokwu’ really contains some four morphemes, and two nouns.

Emenanjo (2015) maintains that those who will equate ‘ezi okwu’ with one word as it is in English are not supposed to be ascribed as having experience, knowledge or good judgment of the language; it means that such linguists manifest lack of sophistication and information. It means that such a linguist, being uninformed, believes everything he reads without questioning it. It means also that such a linguist is unsophisticated. The implication of this Emenanjo’s (2015) statement is that many linguists and even Igbo authors are now transferring what they see in the English language into the Igbo language.

By implication, also, this cultural perspective of grammar is also saying that Igbo language should never be written in the ways the English write theirs, so as to reflect their peculiar beliefs, understanding and practices.

(e) Understanding the Lexical Status of the Elements in 'Ma o bu'

By lexical status, here, we mean what each word, as an entity, stands as. It is about what each of the words takes as its meaning when considered in isolation from other ones.

(i) The Element, 'Ma'.

For instance, one of the elements of 'Ma o bu', which is the word, 'ma', is a coordinating conjunction in status. That is the role it plays in such a construction as 'Ma nwoke **ma** nwaanyi ka o choro' (Both man and woman are needed by him). Another one is 'O bara **ma** n'ime ulo, **ma** n'azu ulo' (He entered both outside and inside the house). It is the same status of a conjunction that 'ma' assumes in the expression, 'ma o bu'. Here, it means 'whether it is' or 'if it is'. This explanation makes it easy to understand how 'ma o bu' cannot just be translated as a mere 'or', one word, as it is in English. The reason is because, in Igbo, it is a stretch of meaning and not a unit of meaning or a single-word meaning.

(ii) The Element, 'Q'.

Again, by lexical status, 'q', as an element of 'ma o bu', is a pronoun. In this case, whether the translation of 'ma o bu' appears as 'it may be', 'whether it is' or 'if it is', what it implies is that the element, 'q', stands as the third person singular pronoun, which is graphically presented as 'it'. As a pronoun, it succeeds the conjunction, 'ma', which makes a direct reference to it. It is immediately followed by 'bu' to establish or show what is.

(iii) The Element, 'Bu'.

The other element whose lexical status needs to be addressed is 'bu'. The lexical status of 'bu' is that it stands as a verb, the class of words that indicates action, state or event. In 'ma o bu', 'bu' stands as the word, 'is', that is, the verb 'to be' or the singular of 'be'. Understanding its meaning as a verb will obviously indicate that it is the one that makes overt the action of the subject or pronoun, 'it'. It marks the action of the pronoun in the expression, 'ma o bu'.

Having understood the elemental or fractional meanings of the constituents of 'ma o bu', we can now apply the grammatical rules that govern the way they should actually be written in Igbo.

(f) Grammar (Linguistic Competence) Involves Speaking and Writing Well

The word 'grammar' refers to a system of rules and principles for speaking and writing a language. It is about the rules which native speakers abide by in the production and graphic or letter-form representation of well-formed constructions. Two things that stand out in this explanation of grammar is the fact that grammar is inclusive of speaking and writing of a language. So, the rules of grammar not only guide how we speak, but also how we write what we speak. It presupposes that somebody may know how to speak the grammar of a language, but does not know how to reduce what he has spoken to a proper writing.

One other point that emerges from the above definition of grammar is that it is the native (L1) speakers or intuitive speakers who present the standard of grammar that is emulated. It is the linguistic competence of the native speakers that constitute the standard that should be copied. The grammar involved in this instance is the Igbo grammar. So, the standard has to be taken from what the native Igbo speakers speak and write. What they speak is important, because it is peculiar to their language. That is why it is cultural and a representation of their way of life, way of speaking, way of giving meaning to concepts or giving some expressions what we call cultural meaning. It is based on this, that the cultural meaning of 'ma o bu' is equated with 'it may be', 'if it is' or 'whether it is'.

When it comes to the grammar of writing 'ma o bu', the way some people write it shows that they know how to speak it or use it in speech, but do not know how to write what they know how to speak. And the knowledge of the grammar of a language cannot be said to be complete if it does not include both how to speak and write. Knowing how to speak and not how to write leaves something to be desired.

(g) Why it is Wrong to Write 'Ma o bu' as One Word.

Still on how to write, it is surprising that some people write 'ma', the conjunction, 'q', the pronoun and 'bu', the verb, together as one word. That way of writing is not right for some obvious reasons. Firstly, it is a general knowledge of Igbo morphology that the addition of morphemes or affixes is only done on the verbs and not on any other word in the language. Secondly, in the writing of 'ma o bu' as *'maoɓu', there is an indiscriminate jumbling of all the elements, with a complete disregard of the peculiar morphological modalities of the Igbo language. That way of writing is a combination of elements of language in a confused way. Thirdly, that way of writing falls outside the rules of the grammar of the Igbo language. It is wrong to combine a conjunction with a pronoun and a verb at the same time, disregarding the cultural, lexical and grammatical peculiarities of the Igbo language.

(h) The Rule of Grammatical Purity of Pronouns

The Rule of Grammatical Purity of Pronouns stresses the fact that pronouns are regarded as being pure during word combinations in a language. What this 'pure' means is: "not mixed with anything else; with nothing added".

Supportively, there is no language in the world in which words are combined with proper nouns or pronouns. But this error is committed in the writing of 'ma o bu' as *'Maɓu'. Here, 'ma', 'q' and 'bu' are combined to stand as a word, and this is wrong. They need to be concatenated and not juxtaposed. It is ungrammatical to combine the pronoun, 'q' with any word. Every pronoun in any language stands alone. It is an error of the writing of the grammar of Igbo to write 'ma o bu' together as one word. They are three separate words that should be written separately.

Referring to this rule, Mbah and Mbah (2014: 22) put it interrogatively thus: "Olee asusụ na-edeko nnochị aha na ngwaa ma o bu mmeju ọnụ? Igbo anakwanughị eme nke a." Translated into Igbo, the quotation says 'which language combines a pronoun and verb or complement together? Igbo language does not do this.'

So, the Igbo language and other languages, including English, do not combine a pronoun with either a verb or any complement. Mbah and Mbah (2014:22) maintain that "A maara na okwu na-anabatakari mgbakwunye n'Igbo bu ngwaa" (It is known that the only word that more easily accepts affixes than others in the Igbo language is the verb). By saying this, they reiterate the point we made earlier in this study, that it is the verb that mainly has the characteristic of accepting the addition of affixes in the Igbo language.

(i) Existing Igbo Example Backing the Separation of 'ma, q and bu'.

Grammatically speaking, 'ma' and 'ka' are coordinating conjunctions. A coordinating conjunction is a word that joins two elements of equal grammatical rank and syntactic importance. Coordinating conjunctions can join two verbs, two nouns, two adjectives two phrases, or two independent clauses. Examples of them in English are 'for, and, nor, or, yet and so'. In Igbo, Uba-Mgbemena (2009:43) refers to them as "Njikọ Ndonanha or Njikọ Nhatanha". Other Igbo examples of coordinating conjunctions are 'na, mana, kama, and nke'.

In Igbo, the expression 'ka o bu' (if it is), the constituents, 'ka', 'o' and 'bu' are acceptably written separately. The surprising thing is that it is the same advocates of the combination of 'ma', 'o' and 'bu' as *'maoɓu' that accept that 'ka o bu' should be separated as it is. This is a show of inconsistency. Are they not speaking from the two sides of their mouths? Is this not a clear case of contradiction? Maybe they have done this inadvertently. If so, let them now retrace their steps to come to terms with what is right, the grammaticality of our position of separating the word elements. Let us look at the following illustrations:

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| (a) Ma o bu anyi ma o bu unu | (b) *Maɓu anyi *Maɓu unu (Whether it is us or you). |
| (c) Ka o bu anyi Ka o bu unu | (d) *Kaɓu anyi *kaɓu unu (Whether it us or you). |

In the above sentences, the advocates of combination will support sentence (b) as against sentence (a). Yet the same people will support sentence (c) and disapprove sentence (d). When grammatically

considered, taking this kind of position is an obvious instance of contradiction, more especially as the two coordinating conjunctions are synonymous functionally.

The relationships of ‘ka’, ‘o’ and ‘bu’ and that of ‘ma’, ‘q’ and ‘bu’ are syntagmatic. A syntagmatic relationship refers to sequential characteristics of language. That is to say, it specifies the particular order that should be adhered to in arranging the individual items of a language. Syntagmatic relationship is about what follows what in a line. It is just like phonotactics, which is the study of the permitted or non-permitted arrangements or sequences of phonemes in a language. With their similarities of meaning and syntactic structure, it is improper for any person to advocate that the two expressions be not written the same way in Igbo.

(j) *Other Igbo Pronoun Patterns Support the Separation of ‘Ma, Q and Bu’*

The way pronouns are written separately from other words gives the evidence of what is wrong with the writing together of ‘ma’, ‘q’ and ‘bu’. Mbah and Mbah (2014) are of the view that ‘ma’, ‘q’ and ‘bu’ should not be written together in Igbo as a translation equivalent of the word, ‘or’, in English. Mbah and Mbah (2014:22) support this claim with some examples of Igbo pronouns that possess the impossibility of being written together with other words. This means that if the following concatenation or serial writing of all the Igbo pronouns with other words is the proper way, then it is impossible to write ‘ma, q and ‘bu’ joined together. The following are the Igbo pronouns in concatenation and not in juxtaposition with other words:

- (i) ma ì bu (whether you (singular) are).
- (ii) ma unu bu (whether you (plural) are).
- (iii) ma m bu (whether I am).
- (iv) ma a bu (whether someone/somebody) is.
- (v) ma ha bu (whether they are).
- (vi) ma anyì bu. (whether we are).

Note: The above English elucidation appendages are the researcher’s initiative.

(k) *Igbo Expressions Rightly and Culturally Separated Like ‘Ma o bu’*

Our grammatically and theoretically backed proposition that ‘ma o bu’ should be written separately is further clarified in the following Igbo expressions which even the deviants, those who do not agree with separation, fully agree that the word elements should not be written together as one word. They agree that it is proper to write the following expressions separately. Is this not also a contradiction?

Normally Separated Igbo Expressions:

- (i) Ma ì bu (not maìbu)
- (ii) Ma unu bu (not maunubu)
- (iii) Ma m bu (not mambu)
- (iv) Ma ha bu (not mahabu)
- (v) Ma anyì bu (not manyìbu)

The above examples are impossibilities in the Igbo language. Mbah and Mbah (2014) makes reference to the above word structures or concatenations where the pronoun is seen, in each instance, to have ‘q’, the pronoun, right at the middle of ‘ma o bu’. They use it to show that there is no language in which the pronoun and the verb are written together as one word. Talking about these examples, Mbah and Mbah (2014:22) have to pose a rhetorical question in Igbo, thus: “Olee asụsụ na-edekọ nnọchi aha na ngwaa ma o bu mmeju ọnu? Translated into English, the question says, “Which language ever writes the pronoun and the complement together as one word?” They stress that this uncommon practice does not ever obtain in the Igbo language. That is to say, that the Igbo language, like other languages in the world, does not join a pronoun, a verb and a complement as one word. To do that is an aberration.

3.2 Analysis of the Implications of Miswriting Igbo

Here, the attention of this study turns to the conclusions that can be drawn from the obvious fact that, theoretically and grammatically, the expression, ‘ma o bu’, is not properly written in Igbo. The paper

now focuses on the effects of this miswriting on the Igbo language and, invariably, the Igbo. The implications are many.

One of them is that the miswriting discourages the upcoming pupils and students from understanding the average Igbo man's mode of conception of the meaning of words. For instance, 'nwoke ọma' means 'a good man' to the English, but to the Igbo man it is understood as 'nwoke nke mara mma', but is written as 'nwoke ọma'. If the writing of 'ma ọ bu' as one word continues, it will not generate the right atmosphere or avenue for the upcoming Igbo youths to be able to appreciate and reflect how the Igbo perceives some words contrary to other languages.

Another implication is that the anomaly denies Igbo grammar its independence from the grammar of English. It somehow presents the Igbo language as one that is subservient to another language, especially English. But in actual fact, the Igbo language is complete and serves all the purposes of a language without depending on any other language.

Again, those in this error of miswriting are shut off from the knowledge of the peculiarity of an average Igbo man's perception and pronunciation of words. It prevents them from according the Igbo language the deserved uniqueness.

Not only that, those in this miswriting somewhat manifest themselves as not being conversant with the implications of the theory of Principles and Parameters in language use. Were they to be well-informed in this area, they would understand that the syntax of a natural language is described in accordance with general principles (i.e. abstract rules of grammar) and specific parameters (i.e. markers, switches) that for particular languages are either turned on or off.

As if that is not enough, the miswriting tends to reveal that the Igbo study is now deficient of a supervisory body that should ensure updating and standardization, as did before by the Society For Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC).

Furthermore, the miswriting has the implication of derisively giving written Igbo a mark of inconsistency and changeableness. It means the mode of writing Igbo has now become an all-comers affair; there is no standard, anybody is free to write Igbo anyhow without questioning.

Lastly, the improper writing of Igbo words gives Igbo linguists out as not being sufficiently research oriented, especially in the area of written Igbo. If they had been adequately research conscious, probing and committed to penetrating investigations, the cases of miswriting in the Igbo language would have received more research attention than now.

3.3 Analysis of the Remedies to the Miswriting of 'ma ọ bu'

What should be done to correct the situation of the improper writing of 'ma ọ bu'? How do we go ahead to nip this trend in the bud? What should be done to ameliorate this tendency? These are the questions facing this section of the study.

The first step to address the anomaly of miswriting in Igbo is for the authors, pupils, students and other stakeholders to strive to understand the contextual meaning of 'ma ọ bu'. Doing so will put them in the stead to see the grammatical truth in the matter.

Secondly, users and writers of the language should endeavour to comprehend the synonymy of grammar with culture. The way of writing Igbo has to be understood as the culture of the Igbo; and the culture of the Igbo, in this circumstance, means the same thing as the grammar of the Igbo in this context.

Another remedy is for the Igbo to do away with the colonial mentality of neglecting the peculiarity of the Igbo writing culture. The Igbo should stop copying the English language in the way they write the Igbo language, because the Igbo language is independent of any other language.

As a remedy, it is also recommended that the Igbo should emulate such Igbo linguists as Echebima (2015) and Emenanjo (2015) who have stressed that the Igbo should reflect their culture (which is their grammar) in the way they write Igbo words.

Also, to avoid this continued miswriting, there is the need to grammatically master the lexical status of the elements that make up the expression, 'ma ọ bu'. Knowing the grammatical function of each of them in their contexts of usage will show that they should not be written as one word.

In addition to that, incorporating the Rule of Grammatical Purity of Pronouns into their knowledge of Igbo grammar will help many authors, students and scholars to understand that 'ma ọ bu' is not one word in the appropriate writing of the Igbo.

Added to all these is that Igbo stakeholders are encouraged to take examples or clues of their writing of 'ma ọ bu' from the way such Igbo expressions as 'Ka ọ bu', 'Ma m bu', 'Ma ha bu', 'Ma anyị bu' and 'Ma unu bu' are written in Igbo. The writing of 'Ma ọ bu' will follow the same way.

Another problem area is about some adamant lecturers in various Igbo departments in Nigeria. Such lecturers, for no more reason than maintaining the status quo refuse to change their stands. These are the traditionalists who refuse to allow some modern theoretical changes to be applied to the Igbo language. They forget that the only thing that is constant is change, and that languages change and the users have to respond to the inevitable ones. This set of scholars should not be seen as the progressives, because they support the Igbo language to remain stagnant. They do not want the Igbo language to join the league of other languages in the world that quickly respond to emergent theoretical innovations. Those in this group are advised to, please, join in updating our written Igbo.

Another step to be taken is for Igbo departments in Nigeria to decide and officially arrange a forum for the proponents of improved and updated written Igbo to share their ideas, theories and proposals with other academics. Let an opportunity be offered them by the department to teach or make others understand the knowledge they want to share. If this is not done, the students of the department will continue to be left in more confusion as to the proper way to write Igbo.

Finally, it is advisable for Igbo pupils, students, scholars and all stakeholders to understand that any Igbo man's linguistic competence is inclusive of speaking and writing Igbo well. For anyone to claim to be a competent Igbo speaker, both qualities are mutually inclusive.

4.0 Summary of Findings and Conclusion

The task of this investigation has taken us to looking into how 'ma ọ bu', as an Igbo expression, has been inappropriately written, and no research topic, so far, has concentrated on the subject. Our topic on this matter has been: "Addressing the Miswriting of 'Ma ọ bu' in Igbo".

In order to perfect our work on this subject matter, we went through an introduction, literature review, presentation and analysis of data and now we are in the last section to summarise our findings and bring the entire study to a conclusion.

In the course of our investigation, it has been discovered that the following are the causes of writing 'ma ọ bu' in disagreement with the grammatical and cultural tenets of the Igbo language: not understanding the contextual meaning of 'ma ọ bu', not understanding that grammar is synonymous with culture, succumbing to the colonial mentality of writing Igbo in the mode of English, being ignorant of the lexical status of the word elements in 'ma ọ bu', not having the knowledge of the Rule of Grammatical Purity of Pronouns, seemingly having a zero knowledge of the application and relevance of the Use Theory of Meaning. Another causative factor is the failure of the scholars and other stakeholders in the Igbo language to borrow a leaf from expressions like 'Ka ọ bu', 'Ma ha bu', 'Ma unu bu', 'Ma m bu' and 'Ma anyị bu', so as to learn to write 'Ma ọ bu' separately and not as one word.

Miswriting has been putting the Igbo language in bad light, making it to be denied of its independence, characterized with inconsistency and treated with levity as an un-updated language. Further still, the error keeps putting Igbo scholars and linguists in the stance of those who are research-scared and not well-schooled in their language.

From the findings, the only way all the setbacks of miswriting can be restored is by righting all the wrongs of the causative factors. Once done, the Igbo language will reclaim her pride of place in the league of other languages in the world.

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