



## **Language as a Didactic Tool and Vehicle of Cultural Preservation: A Pragma-sociolinguistic Study of Selected Igbo Proverbs**

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### **Abstract**

Language plays major functions in society. The way of life of a people is handed down from generation to generation through language. The Igbo people are known for their rich oral tradition and cultural heritage especially in the use of proverbs. Some studies on Igbo proverbs have focused on the semantic classifications, structures of the proverbs, the relevance of Igbo proverbs in interpersonal relationships and conflict resolutions as well as explored the stance of proverbs in the creation of dichotomy in gender relations in Igbo land. The present study aims at establishing the relationship between Igbo proverbs, their functions in society and their pragmatic force as didactic tools. The proverbs were selected from texts written by Igbo native speakers. Twenty proverbs that teach respect and honour in Igbo land were selected, translated to English and analysed. In Igbo land, proverbs are situated in contexts; hence, the work adopts context, an aspect of Lawal's 2012 pragmatic theory. The work is analysed in line with the six levels of context identified in the theory in consonance with the Igbo worldview. These levels include cosmological, sociological, social, psychological, situational and linguistic.

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## 1. Introduction

The language of the people provides a veritable tool through which their literature is preserved and carried on from one generation to another. It is through the means of language that the norms, values, riddles, idioms, music, oratory, folktales, folklore, incantations, proverbs, poems, and the people's way of life are fully expressed. WaThiong' O (1994) expresses the point clearer when he writes that language is not a mere string of words but a means through which the riddles and proverbs of the people are brought into play. From the foregoing, it shows that the cultural content of the people is expressed through language. Babatunde and Shobomehin (2007) affirm that the cultural content of language is the means by which members of society express their thoughts and ideas to one another and thus, shows the diversity for each society. Every culture has a unique way of using language which differentiates it from other cultures. This uniqueness in language lends credence to the difference in human perception about issues and behaviour which is a confirmation that human behaviour is conditioned, moderated, and influenced by the language they speak.

Of particular interest in language use and which depicts creativity is the use of proverbs. The Igbo man refers to proverbs as '*the palm oil with which words are eaten*'. Proverbs are used creatively to achieve different purposes. They can be used to teach, soften words and situations, deepen the meaning of what is said, add aesthetics to discourse, interpret what is said, drive home one's points, admonish, draw inspiration and make an impact. In Igbo land, proverbs are not just used for the fun of it. This explains why it is more prevalent among certain age bracket and gender. This suggests, among other things, that the users know the meanings, how and when to apply them appropriately in a discourse. For the purpose of this paper, the emphasis is on how proverbs can be used to teach respect and honour especially to the young ones of the Igbo ethnic group.

Proverbs add beauty to language use. Hence different scholars have discussed proverbs from different points of view. For instance, some scholars have focused on the degradation of women through proverbs. Such works include

Chikwelu (2019) who worked on the proverbial oppression of women in African culture. The study discovered that the stereotypical depiction of women in Igbo African proverbs has continued to limit and deny the notable contributions of women in Africa. In like manner, Meshesha (2016) studied the prejudiced negative images of femininity in Wolaita proverbs. The study exposed the prejudiced negative images of women through Wolaita proverbs and discouraged their usage in different social settings. Similarly, Oha (1998) surveyed the semantics of female devaluation of Igbo proverbs. The study concludes that attention should be paid to the role of male-oriented rhetoric in Igbo proverbs that signify prejudice and hostility towards women in social discourse. Conversely, Egenti and Okoye (2015) examined some Igbo proverbs to determine the extent to which proverbs are used as tools in reconciliation and crisis management. The study discovered the various functions and impacts of proverbs in enhancing conflict resolution and the promotion of peaceful coexistence in human interpersonal relationships. Similarly, in exploring the role of Igbo proverbs in interpersonal relationships, Ogwudile (2016) surveyed the encouragement proverbs and their discourse relevance in the Oge dialect of Igbo. His study discovered that proverbs imbue the speaker with the ability to make his/her expressions flashier and culturally relevant in the topic of discourse which cannot be realized by ordinary words. Some scholars have equally focused on the contextual use of language in literary texts. Such scholars include Adeeko (1998) who studied the contextual paradigm of meaning in Achebe's novel and examined the use of proverbs in the textuality of the work. In the same vein, Aremu (2015) examined proverbs as cultural semiotics in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*. Findings from the research reveal that proverbs in the literary work contain both verbal and non-verbal cues. The study further revealed that proverbs in the work have indexical signs of warning, eulogizing, and condemning.

From the works reviewed, it is clear that Igbo proverbs have not been studied as a didactic tool from the pragmatic point of view. The only work that is close to the present study is Fadumuye (2017). The researcher studied the pragmatic analysis of politeness strategies in

selected Yoruba proverbs. The study analysed Yoruba proverbs into hard work/laziness, wisdom/foolishness, truth/untruth and decency/indecency. Her findings reveal that Yoruba proverbs employ different politeness strategies to promote peace. The present study is different from the previous studies examined in the sense that it studied selected Igbo proverbs that teach respect and honour from six contextual levels: cosmological, sociological, social, psychological, situational, and linguistic in accordance with the Igbo milieu. From the works reviewed, it is evident that Igbo proverbs have not been studied from these angles and it is in line with this gap in knowledge that the present study finds essence.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. The Place of Respect and Honour among the Igbo

The Igbo people are known for their communal life, belief in God and other gods, hard work, the dignity of labour, respect, and expectations based on age difference which are the basis for respect and honour (Emenanjo, 2000; Nwoga, 1984). In fact, respect and honour constitute an important aspect of the linguistic and socio-cultural identity of the Igbo people. This explains why a child who lacks respect is taken as not to have come from 'a home'. Besides, the admonition of deviant behaviour is seen as a collective responsibility as it is assumed in Igbo culture that the child belongs to everybody. In Igbo culture, certain words and behaviour are expected from the young ones in order to show respect and honour to the elders. Certain behaviour is frowned at and is regarded as lack of respect and honour. Some of the behaviour include refusal to greet an elderly person, talking while an elderly person is talking, addressing an elder by his name, sitting while an elderly person is standing, pointing at an elderly person, refusal to lend a helping hand to an elderly person, using obscene or taboo words, outright insult of an elderly person or blunt refusal to obey constituted authorities among others. Apart from the relationship between elderly people and younger ones, adults in Igbo land have ways of showing respect and honour to one another. In fact, a high premium is placed on respect and honour especially among one's kindred. It is taken as sacrosanct, and failure to respect or give respect

or honour to deserving individuals might earn one a fine, chastisement or ostracization. This knowledge is shared pragmatically by members of the speech community. Apart from the above, other linguistic elocutions such as the use of formulaic and honourifics, fossilized expressions, and proverbs are used to show respect and honour in Igbo socio-cultural setting. The present study analyses proverbs that strengthen the Igbo belief in respect and honour.

### 2.2. Examining the Concept of Proverb

Different scholars have defined proverbs from varied perspectives. It has been defined "as a discourse deviant, relatively concrete, present (non-past) terse statement that uses characteristic linguistic markers to arouse cognitive ideals that serve to categorize topics in order to make a pragmatic point about them" (Honeck, 1997, p. 18). What this simply means is that proverbs do not follow the usual rules. It talks about things in referents or ideals. In the same way, Mohammad and Majed (2019, p. 42) express that "proverbs add flavour to the idea or truth we want to express based on common sense and a community's shared experience". Similarly, a proverb is taken to mean "a statement which conceals the clear in the unclear, or which through concrete images indicates intellectual concepts, or which makes clear the truth in furtive fashion". In addition, it is "a trite phrase constantly used in popular speech ... or a saying that has become thoroughly habitual in our daily customs and life" (Apostolius, in Whiting (1994) quoted by Lau, Tokofsky, & Winick, 1997, p. 3). From their postulations, it shows that proverb is part of the custom of the people and they make habitual use of it in their daily lives. Corroborating the position, Omoera and Inegbeboh citing Manikas-Forester and Syswerd (1990, p. 17) present their position in these words, "... these wise sayings (proverbs) describe patterns that operate in everyday life, offering us advice on how to conduct ourselves in various situations".

The scholars' positions confirm some of the elements of proverbs which include brevity, terseness, truth, sensibility, fixity and aesthetics. In proverbs, abstract ideas, values, and emotions are represented by certain linguistic markers. More so, the actualization of

the meaning of proverbs in situations depends on the adroitness of the user, context of the utterance, cultural inference, and the interpretative ability of the hearers as well as other linguistic considerations. Fashina (1998, p. 314) summarizes the argument on the definition of proverbs when he writes that a proverb is “a condensed text which embeds a whole gamut of historical, cultural and moral narrative with the intent for didactic values as a school of philosophical thought”. It is in line with the didactic function of proverbs that the present work finds essence.

### 2.3. Pragmatics and Speech Act: An Overview

Pragmatics is a sub-field of linguistics which various scholars have attempted to define from various dimensions. For Yule, pragmatics is “the study of intended speaker meaning which borders on ‘invisible meaning’, or how we recognize what is meant when it is not actually said or written” (1996, p. 127). This further suggests that both the speaker and the hearer should share a lot of assumptions and expectations before they will be able to arrive at the intended or invisible meaning. Watson and Hill (1993, p. 146) consider pragmatics from the angle of the language user. Hence, they see pragmatics as “the study of language from the point of the user, especially the choices, the constraints he meets with, in employing the use of the language and the effects the use has on the communication situation”. This shows that pragmatics goes beyond the mere use of language but involves other considerations and effects of such considerations on the utterance. Conversely, Mey (2001, pp. 5–6) avers that the proper domain of pragmatics is captured in what Chomsky called performance which is the actual use of language in concrete situations. Hence, he summarized pragmatics in these words: “pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society”. The common denominator in the positions of these scholars is that pragmatics goes beyond the surface meaning of utterances to the deep meaning that such utterances denote. In addition, it looks at the way humans use language in communication and social contexts following the stipulations of society and the effect of such language use.

Since meaning is also involved in pragmatics, there is need to differentiate between semantics and pragmatics. Umera-Okeke (2011, p. 101) quoting Lyons (1995) maintains that “grammatical and lexical meaning belongs to semantics while utterance and context meaning belong to pragmatics.” So, in semantics, meaning is seen from the totality of the meaning of the individual words and not from the functional or the meaning of words in relation to the language user/context which belongs to pragmatics.

One of the guiding principles in pragmatics is that the utterances obey certain principles and are used to perform certain acts. This is what Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) called the speech act. Austin identifies three kinds of speech acts that are performed when language is used which are: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. Locutionary act is considered as an act of speaking. Osisanwo (2008) holds that locutionary act has three components – phonetic (phonological), phatic (syntactic), and rhetic (meaning). On the contrary, illocutionary act refers to acts done in speaking. It refers to the intention behind the speaker’s utterance which could be to inform, advise, promise, warn, sentence, guarantee, and many others.

In classifying illocution, Omoniyi Friday-Otun (2016) citing Allan (1986) submits that every utterance possesses both direct and indirect speech acts simultaneously. According to him, the sentence type identified in the utterance represents the direct speech act, while the functions performed by the utterance such as greetings, promising, informing, and so on are the indirect speech acts. He goes further to explain that the statement: I’m hungry which is a direct act of “stating” can also perform an indirect act of requesting the food vendor to serve the speaker. Crystal (1987) quoting Searle further classifies the illocutionary acts into five basic types: representatives (assertatives), directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.

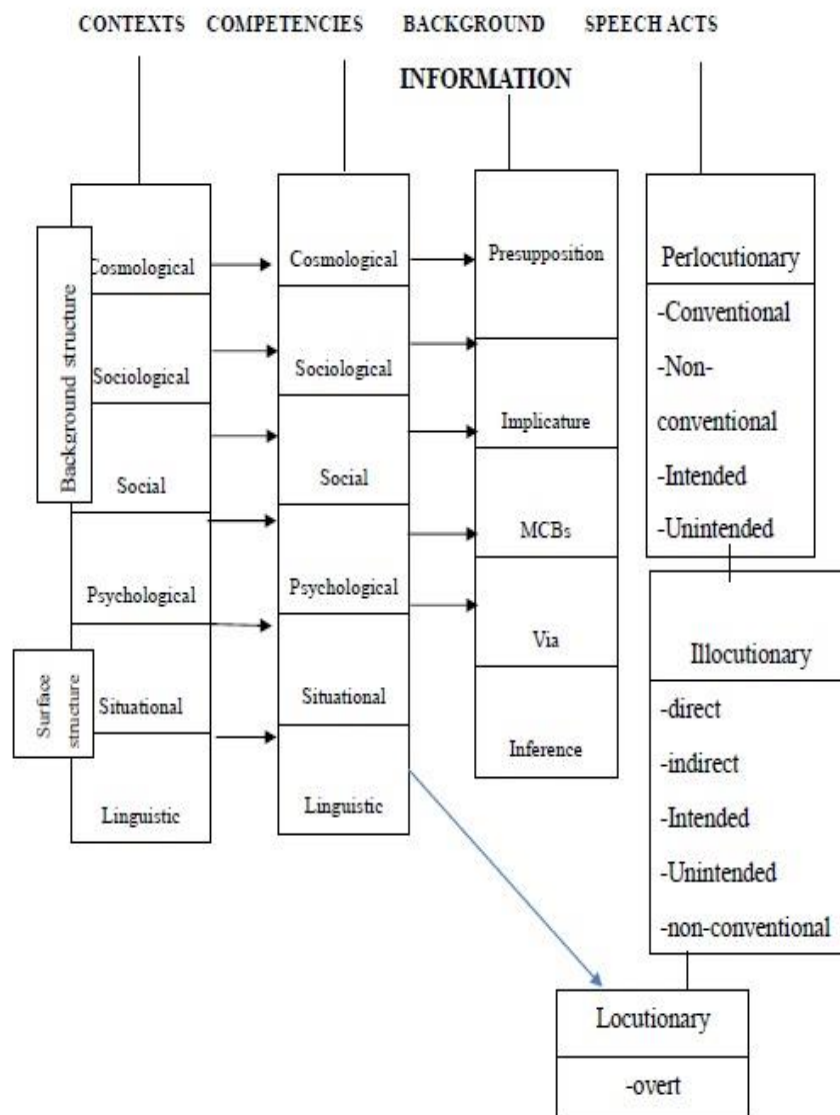
In representatives (assertatives), the speaker expresses a belief that the propositional content is true. Verbs like affirm, believe, claim, conclude, deny, report, assert are used in such cases. In directives, the speaker tries to get the hearer to do something by using verbs like ask,

challenge, command, insist, request, and others. For commissives, the speaker is committed in varying degrees to a certain course of action, for example, guarantee, pledge, promise, swear, vow, and others. Expressives express an attitude about a state of affairs. It employs such verbs as apologize, deplore, congratulate and others. For declarations, the speaker alters the external status or condition of an object or situation by solely pronouncing an utterance such as I resign, I baptize and I declare to mention a few. These divisions of illocution act will be employed in the analyses of data for this study.

On the other hand, perlocutionary acts are the consequences or the by-products of speaking. They have to do with the effect of what is said

on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the hearer and speaker.

The current study adopts the pragma-sociolinguistic approach in its analysis. Omoniyi Friday-Otun (2016, pp. 58–9) quoting Adebija (2012) proposes the approach for the analysis of context of utterance. According to him, “the global context of an utterance is constituted by both pragmatic and sociolinguistic contexts”. The pragma-sociolinguistic competence, therefore, calls for the historical, personal, environmental, socio-cultural, and linguistic features of all factors that relate to the contexts in which a particular conversation occurred. It is in line with these assertions that the present study explores the pragma-sociolinguistic study of Igbo proverbs.



**Figure 1**  
*Lawal's (2012) Aspects of Pragmatic Theory*

## 2.4. Lawal's (2012) Aspects of Pragmatic Theory

The theory identifies two main structures: the surface structure and background structure. These structures, in turn, are made up of six levels. The first level is linguistic and is located in the surface structure. The linguistic level is the level at which utterances are produced. Phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, and semantic features are embedded in the linguistic level. In hierarchical order, after the linguistic level are the situational, psychological, social, and cosmological. The six levels are further divided into contexts and competences symmetrically. In other words, each layer under contexts (the first column) corresponds to that of competencies (the second column). Furthermore, Omoniyi Friday- Otun (2016, p. 61) explains that the level after the linguistic layer, the situational context, and competence, refers to the topic of discourse and the factors of the physical events including, concrete objects, persons, and location. In this model, the psychological context and competence, the third layer, is described as the background of the mood, attitudes, and personal beliefs of the language user. The fourth level, "social", indicates the interpersonal relations among interlocutors. The next level, "sociological", relates to the socio-cultural and historical settings that characterize the use of an utterance, while the sixth and the highest level, "cosmological", depicts the user's world-view, implying references to the world or aspects of it, and to certain universally established facts.

The third level of the theory, discusses presupposition, implicature, politeness formula, MCBs and CP, which determine the inference that a listener can draw from the speaker's intention. In addition, the model postulates that the contexts, competencies, and the background information constrain the functions that utterances (or texts when written) perform. Similarly, the fourth column explains the import of speech acts which further constitute three levels of functions performed locution, illocution, and perlocution. The different divisions of illocution earlier discussed will be deployed in the analysis of data.

## 3. Methodology

The paper purposively selected twenty Igbo proverbs that show respect and honour from *Mmanuejieriokwu* (Igbo proverbs): *their meanings and usage* by Onwudufor (2013). The proverbs were translated into English and analysed following the various divisions of the illocutionary acts: direct, indirect, assertive, directive, commissive, evaluative, and declaration. Being a pragmatic study, the paper adopts Lawal's (2012) model of aspects of the pragmatic theory as its tool of analysis with specific emphasis on context. The choice of the contextual aspect of the theory stems from the fact that context is germane in every pragmatic analysis. Abiodun (2018) expresses the indispensability of context in pragmatic analysis. Similarly, Mey (2001, p. 41) posits that context is more than just reference, but helps to give utterances their 'true pragmatic meaning'. Against this backdrop, the analysis was done at the six levels of contexts: linguistic, situational, psychological, social, sociological, and cosmological as identified in the theory.

## 4. Findings

### Text 1

*Okokporo kwanyere onwe ya ugwu, a juo ya kedu maka umuaka ya.*

**Translation:** When a bachelor carries himself with honour, he will be asked after the welfare of his children.

### Illocutionary Acts

Direct: Assertive (stating)

Indirect: Expressive (appraising)

### Contexts

#### a. Linguistic:

The Igbo people believe so much in honour. Therefore, a person who carries himself with honour should be given the honour he deserves.

#### b. Situational:

One may be in a bad situation but the way he comports himself will not let the public see the true picture of the situation.

*c. Psychological:*

Every individual should strive to do what will bring respect and honour to him/her and which should be done at the rightful time.

*d. Social:*

Society will respect a person more if the person respects himself.

*e. Sociological:*

In Igbo culture, people are expected to be enrolled into certain institutions like marriage at a certain age and it is good to do those things when one's mates are doing them.

*f. Cosmological:*

Nature has a way of honouring people who comport themselves well.

**Text 2**

*A hụ dike e bie ábiá.*

**Translation:** When a hero appears, the *ábiá* music is normally halted.

**Illocutionary Acts**

Direct: Assertive (stating)

Indirect: Statement (admonishing)

**Contexts***a. Linguistic:*

In Igbo land, the *ábiá* music is done by the respected sect and even in the midst of the dance, it can be stopped to acknowledge the presence of a well-respected personage. Honour and respect are given to people who deserve them irrespective of the happenings around them.

*b. Situational:*

It shows that people with honour and dignity are held in very high esteem and people around them will go to any length to show their reverence to them.

*c. Psychological:*

Anybody who wants to be respected should do things that will earn him respect.

*d. Social:*

In Igbo society, as in most societies, honour is only given to the person who deserves it.

*e. Sociological:*

The respect given to people in society is as a result of their achievements.

*f. Cosmological:*

The presence of a well-respected person can change situations.

**Text 3**

*Onye chie ọzọ, ọ sọba mpị wa nye ji.*

**Translation:** When a man takes an *ọzọ* title, he begins to reject unwholesome gifts.

**Illocutionary Acts**

Direct: Assertive (stating)

Indirect: Expressive (counselling)

**Contexts:***a. Linguistic:*

*ọzọ* is a prestigious institution for well-respected individuals. So, when a man is admitted to the institution, he carries himself with that dignity and honour.

*b. Situational:*

In life, to whom much is given, much is equally expected of. People expect a lot from those who occupy leadership positions in society.

*c. Psychological:*

Having attained a certain height, one is supposed to behave in a manner that is in conformity with the elevated status.

*d. Sociological:*

Every elevated position in society commands certain preferences, social treatments, accolades, respect and others.

*e. Cosmological:*

Leaders, priests, prophets, and other officeholders deserve the respect of the people.

#### Text 4

*Qgaranya na-asọ mkparị zeelu egwu ụmụaka.*

**Translation:** A rich man who does not want to be insulted must avoid playing with children.

#### Illocutionary Acts

Direct: Assertive (stating)

Indirect: Statement (admonishing)

#### Contexts

##### a. Linguistic:

In the Igbo cultural milieu, children are known for playing. Therefore, it will be humiliating if a well-respected person condescends to the level of playing with children.

##### b. Psychological:

Doing what is least expected from a person begets dishonour and disrespect for the person.

##### c. Sociological:

In society, people who behave accordingly and respect themselves earn the reverence of the people.

##### d. Cosmological:

World over, people are respected according to the value they place on themselves.

#### Text 5

*Okenye chọọ ire ugwu ya, were isi okuko.*

**Translation:** An elder who opts for chicken's head will certainly receive instant insult from children.

#### Illocutionary Acts

a. Direct: Assertive (warning)

b. Indirect: Verdictive (predicting)

#### Contexts

##### a. Linguistic:

In Igbo culture, some parts of chicken like the head and legs are exclusively reserved for children.

##### b. Situational:

A leader that behaves uncouthly risks the danger of being insulted by his followers.

##### c. Psychological:

Just as respect is earned, insult is also invited through unpleasant behaviour.

##### d. Sociological:

Whosoever knows that a particular behaviour will attract insult, and yet, does that should not complain when the insult comes.

##### e. Cosmological:

One who desires respect from people must maintain his dignity in all circumstances.

#### Text 6

*Asọkarịa eze anya e kpuru nkata n' iru were gwa ya okwu.*

**Translation:** When a king has been tolerated for a long time, the followers mask their faces to challenge him.

#### Illocutionary Acts

Direct: Expressive (reporting)

Indirect: Assertive (recounting)

##### a. Linguistic

*Eze (King)* is used in a metaphorical sense. It is taken as a person who is well respected by virtue of his leadership role in a community. Such persons are not spoken to in an unguarded manner; hence, the masking of the face when they are to be spoken to, in an indiscreet manner.

##### b. Situational:

In our contemporary society, one has to be constructive and diplomatic in talking to people in positions of authority.

##### c. Psychological:



The masking of face removes direct attribution as it is seen as a discourteous act speaking to people in leadership positions in a disrespectful manner. Criticizing such individuals is done indirectly which symbolizes the masking of face.

*d. Social:*

One should not continue to support a person to the point of concealing the truth. In contemporary society, the idea of condemning evil helps in checking the excesses of people in leadership positions.

*e. Sociological:*

When a leader's behaviour becomes intractable, religious and political leaders should speak up as they also occupy positions of authority.

*f. Cosmological:*

Bad behaviour should be condemned irrespective of who is involved.

**Text 7**

*Asọ ga adiri nwa okwa n' ih na nna ya so nwere ohia.*

**Translation:** A young partridge should also be respected because his father is a co-owner of the forest.

**Illocutionary Acts**

Direct: Assertive (affirming)  
Indirect: Expressive (validating)

**Contexts:**

*a. Linguistic:*

The use of *okwa* (bush fowl) conjectures the image of a special kind of bird. It connotes the image of man and his environment where people who are associated with the respected in society also enjoy some privileges and honour.

*b. Psychological:*

The knowledge that respect/honour is also extended to children from respected

backgrounds given their parents' antecedents raises the ego of such children.

*c. Social:*

One shares in the dignity and rights of his father.

*d. Cosmological:*

There are rewards for integrity and good work.

**Text 8**

*Nwata hukaria enyi nne ya o gbuo ya mma ekwu.*

**Translation:** Frequent visits will make a child strike his mother's male friend with a kitchen knife.

**Illocutionary Acts**

Direct: Assertive (warning)  
Indirect: Expressive (counselling)

**Contexts**

*a. Linguistic:*

*Mmaekwu* (kitchen knife) is a knife usually used by women in the kitchen. The object has been used in a derogatory sense here to show humiliation.

*b. Situational:*

Someone who is seen in a place more than he /she is expected to be seen stands the risk of losing his respect.

*c. Psychological:*

Insult, disrespect, and humiliation are not unconnected with one's behaviour and attitude. One will be ready to accept insults if he puts up behaviour that attracts insults.

*d. Sociological:*

Too much familiarity breeds contempt, embarrassment, and disrespect. In life, one should be able to delineate between being close to people and constituting a nuisance to them.

*e. Cosmological:*

In life, people are expected to relate with one another. However, there should be decency and moderation to avoid insults.

### Text 9

*Okenye na- eri nri ebe ụmụaka nọ, ọ bụrụ na ọ hughị nsi, ọ ga ta rịrị aja.*

**Translation:** An old man who eats in the company of children must surely see excrement in the food or eat sand.

### Illocutionary Acts

Direct: Assertive (warning)

Indirect: Verdictive (predicting)

### Contexts

#### a. Linguistic:

The two images: excrement and sand connote unpleasantness especially when used with the action of eating.

#### b. Situational:

It is always good to be in the right company.

#### c. Psychological:

Anyone who associates with the wrong people stands the risk of getting into trouble or being embarrassed.

#### d. Sociological:

In society, people in certain strata should be together.

### Text 10

*Ugwu eze bụ ndị ọ na achị.*

**Translation:** The glory of the king lies in his subjects.

### Illocutionary Acts

Direct: Assertive (stating)

Indirect: Directive (claiming)

### Contexts

#### a. Linguistic:

There can never be a king without the people he is leading. Besides, the king only succeeds with the support of his followers.

#### b. Situational:

No leader will succeed without the support of the followers.

#### c. Psychological:

Every leader needs the support of the people he is leading for him to achieve a reasonable degree of success.

#### d. Social:

Human support is a great asset.

#### e. Cosmological:

Unity is strength. The strength of a leader is assessed/judged based on the support/respect he gets from the people.

### Text 11

*Ọ dighị mma ike ọke ji n'azu ọba.*

**Translation:** It is not attractive to hang first-class yams at the back of the barn.

### Illocutionary Acts

Direct: Assertive (warning)

Indirect: Directive (stating)

### Contexts

#### a. Linguistic:

In Igbo culture, yam is symbolic. It is a crop that commands respect among other crops. It depicts strength, wealth, and manliness. Then, reference to *ọkeji* (yams that are distinguished among other yams) probably because of their sizes and species is an allusion that in doing things, one should start from what one has the greatest expertise in or where one's strength lies.

#### b. Situational:

It is always noble to showcase things that are honourable while ignoble attitudes should be hidden.

*c. Psychological:*

In carrying out any activity, it is always good to start from what one has an aptitude/knack for. This will stimulate intrinsic motivation and encouragement.

*d. Sociological:*

In doing things, the best of what you have should come first or be showcased.

*e. Cosmological:*

The proverb negates the idea of saving the best for the last. In life, one's strength should be showcased.

**Text 12**

*A dighi anọ n' ihu ọnya egbu ijiji.*

**Translation:** The housefly is never killed on the surface of the sore.

**Illocutionary Acts**

Direct: Assertive (informing)

Indirect: Verdictive (judging)

**Contexts***a. Linguistic:*

*Onya* (sore) is symbolic in this context. It is an imagery that symbolizes filthiness.

*b. Situational:*

No matter how bad a situation is, one should endeavour to find a better way out of it as to maintain self respect and dignity.

*c. Psychological:*

Dishonour and disrespect could seriously affect the psyche of a person especially when it is done in public.

*d. Social:*

Inasmuch as one can exert authority over one's subordinates or talk to them without mitigation or saving their faces, there is still need to exercise caution and moral conscience for the maintenance of societal peace.

*e. Cosmological:*

The Igbo cultural group believes in relating with one another. However, there are principles guiding such relationships at every level so as to maintain the social distance and respect that each individual deserves.

**Text 13**

*Ọna- abụ ekpo kota akwụ, a horo ugo.*

**Translation:** In a heap of palm fruits, it is still possible to isolate the golden ones.

**Illocutionary Acts**

Direct: Assertive (classifying)

Indirect: Verdict (judging)

**Contexts***a. Linguistic:*

*Ugo* is a special breed of palm fruit with outstanding qualities that distinguish it from other palm fruits.

*b. Situational:*

Circumstance can always throw up a leader.

*c. Psychological:*

A person's sterling quality will always distinguish him/her from the crowd.

*d. Sociological:*

The good that a person does will always make him to be recognized among the people.

*e. Cosmological:*

There are always a few chosen ones among the lot.

**Text 14**

*Mbe siri si kwe ya ọnu ahia ekwere ibe ya kama a puo n'azu si were ya na nkiti.*

**Translation:** The tortoise says that he wants to be priced the same way as others even if he could be taken for free behind the scene.

**Illocutionary Acts**

Direct: Assertive (declaring)

Indirect: Expressive (appraise)

**Contexts:***a. Linguistic:*

In Igbo culture, whenever tortoise is mentioned, wisdom and craftiness come to mind.

*b. Psychological:*

Everybody has self-esteem which he/she wants other people to recognize and acknowledge.

*c. Sociological:*

It is more fitting to be honoured outside one's domain as that makes the honour more prominent.

*d. Cosmological:*

It is man's inherent nature to be appreciated, respected, recognized and more importantly, be appreciated for good deeds.

**Text 15**

*Ka a na ele okenye na azocha agiri afo okuko  
ka a mara ma o ga achinye kwa ya umuaka ka  
obu ya ga eri.*

**Translation:** An old man preparing the intestine of chicken should be monitored to find out if he prepares them for the children or for himself.

**Illocutionary Acts**

Direct: Assertive (stating)

Indirect: Directive (predicting)

**Contexts***a. Linguistic:*

In the Igbo socio-cultural milieu, it is improper for elders to indulge in certain acts that may be observed among young people such as improper dressing or vulgarism in language use.

*b. Situational:*

There is an expectation/entitlement in every height one attains.

*c. Psychological:*

Acting in contrary to one's status will raise questions, reservations, doubts and suspicions in the minds of people.

*d. Social:*

It is not good for one to live below societal expectation given the fact that every age group is expected to behave in a certain way.

*e. Sociological:*

In Igbo land, uncouth and foul-mouthed behaviour should not be found among the elderly.

*f. Cosmological:*

It is improper to deny a person or a group of people what is rightfully theirs.

**Text 16**

*obu okenye rachara oku siri umuaka tiwaa oku.*

**Translation:** It is an old man who licked the plate that asked the children to break the plate.

**Illocutionary Acts**

Direct: Assertive (informing)

Indirect: Verdictive (judging)

**Contexts***a. Linguistic:*

An elder in Igboland does not do certain things which are noticed amongst children like licking plates after food.

*b. Psychological:*

Just as certain behaviour is admired and respected in society, certain behaviour is also abhorred and hated by the members of society. Such aberrant behaviour attracts insults.

*c. Sociological:*

Whosoever that insults himself will always be looked down in society.

*d. Cosmological:*

There is nowhere in the world where people who disrespect themselves are respected.

**Text 17**

*Anya miri okenye na-acha nzu nzu.*

**Translation:** The tears of an old man has the colour of chalk.

**Illocutionary Acts**

Direct: Assertive (stating)

Indirect: Expressive (disappointment)

**Contexts***a. Linguistic:*

Normally, tears are associated with pains. In the Igbo socio-cultural milieu, old men do not cry as it is believed that it will take an extreme case and a very severe and pathetic situation to see them shed tears. Hence, the change in the colour of the tears.

*b. Situational:*

An old man would be distressed but would not cry physically.

*c. Psychological:*

Nobody is exempted from unpleasant situations in life.

*d. Social:*

It is bad to agonize/ disrespect an old man.

**Text 18**

*Ji na abana adighi azo ihu oba.*

**Translation:** Recognized yam species and water yams do not struggle for position in the frontage of the barn.

**Illocutionary Acts**

Direct: Assertive (declaring)

Indirect: Expressive (advising)

**Contexts***a. Linguistic:*

*Abana* (water yam) is not regarded the same way other yam species are regarded. Some yam species are accorded more respect in Igbo land than water yam. In other words, there is

no basis for comparison between such recognized species and water yam.

*b. Situational:*

To avoid insult and disgrace, one should know where to sit when invited to a public function.

*c. Psychological:*

It is good for one to know his rightful/proper position.

*d. Social:*

Certain positions are reserved for certain groups of people in society.

*e. Cosmological:*

In life, people are endowed with different attributes and traits that could give them an edge over others. Therefore there is no need for unhealthy rivalry.

**Text 19**

*Ihe oji jiri buru oke osisi bu na udele na ugo na ebe na ya, nku adighi akwa ha.*

**Translation:** What makes an iroko tree an exceptional tree is that both the vulture and eagle perch freely on it without sustaining broken wings.

**Illocutionary Acts**

Direct: Assertive (stating)

Indirect: Verdictive (affirming)

**Contexts***a. Linguistic:*

In Igbo culture, *oji* (iroko tree) is a well-known tree that stands out wherever it grows.

*b. Situational:*

Anyone who exhibits leadership qualities whenever the need arises is like an iroko tree.

*c. Psychological:*

Respect is earned and not demanded for or forced.

*d. Sociological:*

Some human beings are unique because of the impact they make on others. Such people are likened to the iroko tree given their capability to provide succour to others.

*e. Cosmological:*

In life, what we do for others makes us who we are. Being benevolent does not make anyone less.

### Text 20

*Okenye na aracha nwu oku ma o richa nri aghaghi iji aka ya saa oku otu ubochi.*

**Translation:** The elder that licks the bowl after eating should be ready to wash it himself one day.

### Illocutionary Acts

Direct: Assertive (warning)

Indirect: Verdictive (predicting)

### Contexts

*a. Linguistic:*

In Igbo cultural setting, elders do not do some work at home like washing of plates. Those chores are strictly reserved for children and women.

*b. Psychological:*

Division of labour is a sine qua non to personal and organizational growth.

*c. Social:*

In society, whoever that does not want to be looked down upon should learn to respect himself or herself.

*d. Sociological:*

Certain responsibilities are shared among the various components of society. Anyone who chooses to enjoy the benefits that accrue to the responsibilities should also be ready to work alone.

*e. Cosmological:*

In life, everyone is important as we all have our defined roles.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

From the previous works reviewed, it is apparent that some scholars considered proverbs as a veritable tool for the liberation of women. The scholars used proverbs to divulge the patriarchal system and subjugation of women in Africa and consequently, used proverbs as a potent weapon for the liberation of women. Given the inevitability of conflicts in interpersonal relationships, previous researches have paid attention to proverbs and their invaluable roles in conflict resolutions, reconciliations and crisis management. More so, the richness and moral lessons inherent in proverbs in some literary works by Africans have equally been studied. The aspect of moral lessons is closer to the present study but differs greatly in terms of choice of proverbs and methods of analysis. The investigation of Igbo proverbs from the socio-pragmatic perspective and as didactic tools, particularly, with respect and honour in Igbo land were not considered by the previous studies already mentioned, and which makes the present study significant. The current study established that proverbs are specifically and best understood in the context of use since they are used to achieve certain illocutionary effect. It also points out the relationship between Igbo proverbs, their functions in society, and their pragmatic force. From the proverbs analysed, it is observed that the Igbo people place much premium on honour and respect. The analysis shows that respect and honour is earned; and, people are respected because of how they comport themselves and what they do in society. On the contrary, respect and honour is equally lost where behaviour that could warrant disrespect or dishonour is noticed among certain individuals. Through the use of language and the analysis of the proverbs, the young ones are further educated on the value of respect and honour in Igbo land. There is no doubt that using proverbs as didactic tools and the latent truth embedded in them, they will help to preserve and promote the Igbo cultural values especially in terms of respect and honour among the young ones of the Igbo ethnic group.

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