

IGBO PROVERBS AS A TOOL FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

Proverbs are utterances with deep meanings which are of great value to cultures. Igbo people use proverbs in different contexts for various purposes such as crisis management and conflict resolution. They add to the style of discourse through their figurative, aesthetic, symbolic and cultural imports. It encourages deep reflection as the words of proverb are not direct but strategic. Proverbs are very notable in Igbo culture for its impacts on the community and people especially in crisis situations. This is why there is this common saying amongst the Igbo '*tàà okwū ezē tupu ì kwuo*' meaning that we should chew very well our words before voicing them out so as to avoid conflict. They are insightful traditional assertions that express perceived truth based on diplomacy/experience. Proverbs are based on symbolic or metaphorical language that calls for deep thinking. Conflict management and resolution are very essential in determining how far our harmonious living can go in maintaining peaceful coexistence amongst us. Based on this, this study will examine how some Igbo proverbs are used in conflict management and resolution using the Speech Act Theory of Searle (1969). The framework applies assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives to inspire, persuade, console, promise, and encourage the hearer by the speaker in certain situations and issues. However, it

brings about effects upon the beliefs, attitudes or behaviours of the addressee. Qualitative research design will be used to analyse data obtained from primary sources. It was discovered that Igbo proverbs exhibits these prelocutionary acts in resolving different forms of conflicts existing in our society amongst the people.

Keywords: Proverb, Conflict, Conflict Management, Conflict Resolution

Introduction

The word proverb is derived from Latin word *proverbium* which is a simple and insightful, traditional saying that expresses a perceived truth based on common sense or experience. Proverbs are based on symbolic or metaphorical language. Metaphors used as an aspect of a teaching method could be effective because they could enhance the conceptualization of abstract ideas. Metaphors reveal only part of the answers and learners could be actively involved in completing and understanding the meaning of metaphors. A proverb is an adage, saying, maxim that expresses conventional truth. Such expressions are generally short and are expressed in words that are simple, entertaining and easy to remember.

According to Nwoga (1976), proverb is the wisdom of many and the wit of one; the experience and wisdom of several ages gathered and summed up in one expression; and the edge tools of speech. This means that proverbs are not naturally in existence but are brought to light through diverse experiences of several ages which are summed up to bring about deep thought through their expressions. Igbo people take proverbs as in-depth utterances whose meaning are not understood literally especially those who are not Igbo or the Igbo who are not well

acquainted with the knowledge of the language. It is believed that proverbs are basically tools in the hand of elders as it has to do with deep wisdom. Hence, several young people have proverbs at their finger tips. This pushes accolades to the young people as being extraordinary in the matter of the language and culture. However, conflict and crisis situations in Igbo land require Igbo proverbs in order to appeal for calm and neutralize such situations. Proverbs are utterances with deep meanings which are of great value to Igbo culture. Igbo people use proverbs in different contexts for various purposes. Proverbs are very notable in Igbo culture for its impacts on the Igbo community. There is no gainsaying that various scholars have carried out studies on proverbs in different contexts. Mmadike and Nwankwere (2020) discussed Stylistic analysis of Igbo proverbs and riddles. Scholars have attempted to analyse proverbs using different approaches. Thus, this study seeks to examine the efficacy of proverbs in managing and resolving conflicts in our families, extended families and organisations as well as our society. It however applies the speech act theory of Searle (1969).

Proverbs: An Overview

Proverbs generally, are deep words whose understandings are not found on the peripheral. It is a part of every language like Igbo which has deep meaning beyond the basic meaning of the word components. In other words, meaning of a proverb is not seen from the literality of the plain words. Proverbs are oral compositions and their various stylistic constituents are derived from all layers of what we described as the hierarchy of socio-cultural value systems of the people. They point to the individual, domestic and collective life pattern of the society from which they are derived. In other words, proverbs adopt material from peoples' environment.

Obiechina (1975) perceives proverbs as a collection and/or representations of people's way of life. Obiechina's observation is quite obvious because in any proverb one is likely to see the culture of the people that own the proverb. Proverbs actually come from the depth of tradition, reflecting the intellect and wisdom of the people. Proverbs in Africa are wise sayings and, a special prerogative of the elders. The elders are always exalted as the custodians of the wisdom in Africa. Any African elder that lacks this power of the mind and words may lose his respect, no matter his status in the society.

Essen (1982) defines proverbs as a short clever saying full of wisdom, intended as rules of conduct and behaviour. It is a short rhetorical saying expressing a general believes (Crystal 1997). Finnegan (1970) opines that a proverb is a saying in a more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and salt, and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it. Proverbs form part of the various figures of speech in language, it is an embodiment of the wisdom and ethics of the traditional societies. Finnegan (1970) in her assessment of proverbs in Africa observes that: *In many African cultures, a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology come out particularly clearly in proverbs.*

Nwoga (1976) says that a proverb is the wisdom of many and the wit of one; the experience and wisdom of several ages gathered and summed up in one expression; and the edge tools of speech. Two things are clear about Nwoga's definition. First, proverbs make speech to be short, in other words, it is an economic way of using words. Secondly, proverbs bring out the wisdom and tradition of the people. Abraham (1964) in his own words defines proverbs as the aphoristic saying enjoying traditionally handed down currency...having protean powers of interpretation. The protean powers of interpretation may enjoy

a certain universality of application, but essentially proverbs reveal the culture in which they exist.

Uses of proverbs

It is an important fact that proverbs possess numerous importance in languages especially in Igbo language. As known as words of wisdom, we will discuss several uses of proverbs. Ezeafulukwe and Ezeani (2016) highlight few uses of proverbs as will be discussed in this paper.

Proverbs add to the style of discourse by their figurative, aesthetic and cultural imports. According to the erudite Igbo laureate Achebe, proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten. The palm oil being always a necessary ingredient in every traditional Igbo dish is highly valued and so Achebe compares the utilitarian value of proverbs to that of the palm oil because it is a necessary component of discourse in the traditional Igbo setting. Akporobaro & Emovon in Ezeafulukwe & Ezeani (2016) state that proverb belongs to the wider category of figurative and aesthetically concerned forms of expressions like the metaphor, simile, hyperbole and other anecdotal forms. It differentiates from these forms in terms of the explicit truthfulness of questions it states and by the terseness of picturesque quality of its style and form of statement. The truth presented in the proverb is different from those of other language groups whose geographical and socio-cultural realities differ.

Furthermore, proverbs encourage deep reflection as the words of the proverbs are not direct and as such would require a lot of references and associations for the real meaning to be evident. It also requires a certain level of intelligence for these inferences to be made.

In formulating, using and interpreting proverbs are virtues that are held in high esteem in the Igbo community. A proverb around this revered virtue states that *Onye a tũrũ ilu kọwara ilu, ego eji lụ nne ya lara n'iyi* (Whoever must wait for an explanation to understand a proverb addressed to him, should know that the money paid as his mother's bride wealth was all a waste of fund). Speeches punctuated with proverbs are deemed a show of oratory and skill and is highly admired and appreciated in the Igbo community.

Proverbs add style to discourse and texts as they distinguish the user from the multitude that use the language and make him to stand out as a knowledgeable and well oriented fellow. Proverbs are formulated around eternal truths or conventions and so, serve as a way of preserving these eternal truths which could have been lost if not preserved. They also help to avoid verbosity and avoid repetition as situations are analyzed or counsels given with few words capable of provoking deep thoughts.

Proverbs afford one the opportunity to exclude intruders in a discussion since the intruders will not be able to coordinate the associations and references and inferences necessary for the comprehension of the texts. Proverbs help to avoid repetition, economize words, and help to avoid communicative pitfalls. Proverbs provide a correct platform to discuss serious matters without inculcating oneself because they also provide a safe way of wriggling oneself out, should the matter under discussion become problematic or indictable.,

In the words of Ezeafulukwe and Ezeani (2016), proverbs are taken as titles and nick names these days, *Akụ rienne o rute ụmụna*, (Extreme wealth overflows to the extended family). *Anegbu achara achara ana-eto*, *Akụ ruo ụnọ o kwuo onye kpara ya*, *Ikuku bugharichaa odu igu o ma noro ebe ono*, *A gbara aka na-azọ ala ndi ji ji anaakonye*.

Speech Act Theory

Speech act by its name is likened to as the actions carried out by speech. Therefore, speech act theory is a theory applied in the actions created by speeches. Speech act theory then implies that by each utterance a speaker makes, not only that something is being said but also certain things are being done (Abdulghani & Abdullahi, 2021). Locutionary acts are simply the speech acts that have taken place. Whereas perlocutionary acts are the effects of the utterance on the listener, Illocutionary acts are the real actions, which are performed by the utterance and which could be promising, assertion, declarations, etc. Ndiribe (2016:236) asserts that the development of speech act theory (SAT) is credited to Austin (1962). There are a lot of controversies as to who really was the proponent of speech act theory. Saeed (2003) is of the opinion that SAT was published by Austin's students in 1975. Courthard (1985) believes that the work was published by Austin himself in 1962. Mey (2001) and Yoshitake (2004) also maintain that the work was published by Austin himself in 1962. However, all the various scholars agree that the work was published with the title: "How to do things with words" and this is where context comes in. The concept speech act rests solely on the assumption that the meaning of an utterance is its intended social function. That is, the act of learning to communicate in a language involves more than acquiring the pronunciation and grammar of the said language. In other words, the initiator of the framework believes that we perform an action whenever we use language. In speech act, the disciplines of both semantics and pragmatics are explored to bring out both literal meanings and the intended meanings. The concept of speech act theory will be discussed below:

Classification of Speech action Words

Austin makes the following classifications of speech action verbs: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives and expositives, which will now be expounded in detail:

a) Verdictives: These are typified by the giving of a verdict, as the name implies, by a jury, arbitrator, or umpire. But they need not be final; they may be, for example, an estimate, reckoning, or appraisal. It is essentially giving a finding as to something – fact, or value – which is for different reasons hard to be certain about. (Austin, 1962)

b) Exercitives: These are the exercising of powers, rights or influence. Examples are appointing, voting, ordering, urging, advising, warning, etc. (Austin, 1962)

c) Commissives: Are typified by promising or otherwise undertaking; they commit you to doing something, but include also declarations or announcements of intention, which are not promises (Austin, 1962)

d) Behabitives: These are related to social behaviour. Examples are apologizing, congratulating, commending, condoling, cursing, and challenging. (Austin 1962: 152)

e) Expositives: They make plain how our utterances fit into the course of an argument or conversation, how words are used. In general, they are expository. Examples are: ‘I reply’. ‘I argue’, ‘I concede’, ‘I illustrate’, ‘I assume’, ‘I postulate’ (Austin, 1962: 152). Swearing, promising, and guaranteeing that something is the case work as expositives, as, for example, when you give your word that you have done, and not that you will do, something. (Austin, 1962).

Searle (1976) as it appears in Levinson (1983) presented the following taxonomy of speech act, based on the types of action that can be performed in speaking:

- (i) Representatives: Commits the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition (paradigm cases: asserting, concluding, etc.)
- (ii) Directives: Are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something (paradigm cases: requesting, questioning)
- (iii) Commissives: Commits the speaker to some future course of action (paradigm cases: promising, threatening, offering)
- (iv) Expressives: They express a psychological state (paradigm cases: thanking, apologizing, welcoming, and congratulating)
- (v) Declarations: They effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions (paradigm cases: excommunicating, declaring war, christening, firing from employment).

Searle's taxonomy of speech acts includes five types of speech acts, like Austin's, but they only seem to coincide totally on this and on the fact that the 'commissive' type (in the name given to it as well as in the type of speech acts included within it) is equal for both Austin and Searle. These acts are very relevant in managing and resolving our individual, group and societal conflicts.

Conflict Management and Resolution

When people are in conflict, they can choose either conflict resolution or conflict management. While some people see the two options as the same, they are actually different processes that can shape the way conflict is dealt with and if it is resolved.

The two processes have different objectives and will often achieve different outcomes through different processes. However, many people still believe that conflict management and conflict resolution are synonymous and this leads to confusion when discussions around the two processes are had. However, managing a conflict leads to resolving it (Allen, 2012).

Understanding whether a conflict is constructive or destructive takes skill and practice, but some general characteristics may help determine the type of conflict. In line with ADR Times online publication of January 23, 2021, there are characteristics of conflict. These characteristics include:

Issues or People: Destructive conflict will focus on the people in the dispute. This is when people with a different opinions will be seen as an enemy rather than a person with an opinion. Constructive conflict, in contrast, will focus on resolving the issues and the people will be professional toward each other.

Past or Future: Constructive conflict will focus on what the parties can achieve together in the future and how to resolve that conflict to realize this vision. Destructive conflict will look at what has happened between the parties in the past and will seek to punish the parties for what they have done.

Cooperation or Polarization: Constructive conflict will encourage cooperation and how to bring the parties together to solve problems. Destructive conflict will create an “us vs them” mentality and drive people apart based on how they think.

Keeping these characteristics in mind, it will be easier to identify if a conflict is constructive or destructive and determine the best plan to deal with a conflict.

Conflict Resolution vs Conflict Management:

Resolution:

Conflict resolution seeks to heal the conflict at the heart of a dispute. It focuses on finding creative solutions and common ground between the parties. It seeks to view conflict as a neutral source, rather than a negative one and harnesses the possible positive outcomes of the conflict to create a solution. Conflict resolution is usually focused on the short-term disputes that are present in the current moment, but it seeks to find a way into the larger conflict through an understanding of these disputes. Once the conflict is understood, the parties will seek to find a way to resolve the conflict and stop it from coming up again. Conflict resolution may be helpful when there are disputes or conflicts surrounding tasks, job functions, minor employee conflicts, or miscommunications. It will likely not be beneficial in larger, long-term issues.

Management:

When parties have a long-standing conflict that cannot be easily resolved, they will need to learn how to continue being in the same space without reverting to the behaviors present at the height of the conflict. Conflict management is a system that handles differences and disputes positively and constructively to encourage the parties to work together, even during their conflict. Instead of seeking a solution to the conflict and looking for a way to solve the dispute, conflict management will seek to mitigate the negative effects of conflict in the environment the parties are in. The use of conflict management is beneficial when the differences between the sides are based on differences in fundamental morals and principles that the parties cannot see eye to eye on the issue. However, if there is a chance that a dispute may have the potential to settle, it may be better to try conflict resolution instead or alongside.

Conflicts are inevitable in a person's day-to-day life and when they happen, the idea is not to try to prevent them but rather to resolve and manage them in an effective manner. When people use the appropriate tools of resolution to address issues, they will be able to keep their differences from rising to major problems. "Establishing conflict management processes in a company is fundamental as it helps reduce conflict instances among employees," says Casper Hansen, an expert in resume writing from Resumethatworks. Conflict resolution is integral in the corporate world as it helps to distinguish a good business from a bad one. So, as a business owner, what steps should one follow to resolve a conflict? Well, below are some ways through which one can manage and resolve conflict in the workplace.

Allen (2012) outlines seven strategic tips on how to manage and resolve conflicts in our society and organizations. They are:

1. Clarify what is the source of conflict

The first step in resolving conflict is clarifying its source. Defining the cause of the conflict will enable one to understand how the issue came to grow in the first place. Additionally, one will be able to get both parties to consent to what the disagreement is. And to do so, one needs to discuss the needs which are not being met on both sides of the issues. Also, one needs to warranty mutual understanding. Ensure you obtain as much information as possible on each side's outlook. Continue asking questions until you are confident that all the conflicting parties understand the issue.

2. Find a safe and private place to talk

Many people often wonder and ask, "What is an approach to solving problems peacefully?" To have a constructive conversation, you need to find an environment that is safe for

you to talk to. Such a place also enables you to take the necessary risks for honest communication regarding the issues at hand.

So, before trying to resolve any issue, find a safe and private place to talk. Do not choose the office of either party or a location near them. And while at this place, ensure that each party gets enough time to air out their views regarding the matter.

3. Listen actively and let everyone have one's say

After getting both parties to meet in a secure and private place, let each of them have the opportunity to air out their views and perceptions regarding the issue at hand. Give each party equal time to express their thoughts and concerns without favoring the other. Embrace a positive and assertive approach while in the meeting. If necessary, set ground rules. Taking this approach will encourage both parties to articulate their thoughts in an open and honest manner as well as comprehend the causes of the conflict and identify solutions.

4. Investigate the situation

After listening to the concerns of both parties, take time, and investigate the case. Do not prejudge or come up with a final verdict on the basis of what you have. Dig deeper and find out more about the happenings, involved parties, the issues, and how people are feeling. Have an individual and confident conversation with those involved and listen in a keen manner to ensure you comprehend their viewpoints. You can do so by summarizing their statements and replicating them back to them. Also, try finding any underlying conflict sources which may not be evident or noticeable at first.

5. Determine ways to meet the common goal

When managing conflict processes, you need to have a common objective, which is resolving the issue and ensuring it does not resurface. Then, to solve any problem, you need to be aware of the different stages of conflict. This will enable you to look for the ideal ways to meet the common goal. After clarifying the source of conflict, talking to both parties, and investigating the situation, you need to sit down with both parties and discuss the common ways that you can execute to meet the common goal, which is managing and resolving the matter at hand. Listen, communicate and brainstorm together until you exhaust all options. According to the team lead of Edu Jungles writing company — Kevin Smith, find the source of conflict is the main step to solve any problem.

6. Agree on the best solution and determine the responsibilities each party has in the resolution

Managing and resolving conflict leaps model of communication. Employees will find it easy to interact with another as they understand that they have one goal, which is meeting the company's objectives. So, after investigating the situation and determining ways through which you can resolve the issue, both parties need to develop a conclusion on the best solution for the problem. And to agree on the best, you need to identify the solutions which each party can live with. Find common ground. Afterward, determine the responsibilities each party has in resolving the conflict. Also, it is crucial to use this chance to identify the root cause and ensure that this issue will not come up again.

7. Evaluate how things are going and decide preventative strategies for the future

Never presume that the issue is resolute. Effective communication ought to dominate in the business. So, ask yourself, “What is the second step of effective communication?” Knowing this will help you ensure that the employees are working together to meet the organizational goals. So, continue keeping an eye on the issue and assess if the solution is effective. If the issue resurfaces, take necessary action.

In the view of above assertions, it is necessary to examine and analyse some of the Igbo proverbs that play role in managing and resolving conflicts amongst different group of people in Igbo society.

1. *E gbuo n'iwe, e lie n'onuma*
'If you kill in anger, you bury in regret'
2. *Enyi na enyi na-atọ uto bu e leta a ghara*
'The joy of friendship is forgiveness'
3. *Nwanne na nwanne na-atọ uto bu e leta a ghara*
'The joy of brotherliness is forgiveness'
4. *Ọ bu ire oma ka ejula ji aga n'ogwu*
'Snail passes through the rough way using good tongue'
5. *Onye oku na-agba be ya anaghị achu oké*
'He whose house is on fire doesn't chase rat'
6. *E mee ngwa ngwa, e meghara odachi*
'Be fast and prevent problems'
7. *Iwe nwanne anaghị eru n'okpukpu*
'The anger of a brother doesn't get so deep'
8. *Uto ka a tovara tota ihe*
'Been friendly gains a lot'
9. *Ebe onye bi ka o na-awachi*
'Where you live is where you take care of'
10. *A nyukọọ mmamiri onu, o gbọọ ufufu*

'Working together as a team pays'

11. *Ihe oma ka a na-eñomi eñomi*

'We are meant to emulate good deeds'

12. *A mara kwuo, a mara saa*

'Good speech leads to good response'

From the above data (1 - 12), it is evident that Igbo proverbs exhibit pragmatic way of appealing to the inner mind and sense of an individual in ensuring that issues such as conflict are resolved and/or managed. A closer look at them especially data 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12 talks about peace and peaceful attitudes. Data 10 talks about team work, unity and togetherness of people. Those are ways through which one uses Igbo proverbs to manipulate a conflict situations towards managing and resolving them. However, they fall in line with the Speech Act Theory of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). According to them, action words such proverbs employ assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives to inspire, persuade, console, promise, and encourage the hearer by the speaker in certain situations and issues. Searle (1969) categorizes the illocutionary act into five classes:

1. Assertives: These are statements that describe a state of affairs in the world which could be true or false. They commit a speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition.

2. Directives: These are statements that compel or make another person's action fit the propositional element. It is usually used to give order thereby causing the hearer to take a particular action, request, command or advice.

3. Commissives: These statements commit the speaker to certain future action. It could be in the form of a promise.

4. Expressives: The purpose of expressive statements is to express sincerity of the speech act like excuses and sympathy.

5. Declaratives: These statements are used to say something and make it so, such as pronouncing someone guilty and declaring a war. These and more are what Igbo proverbs do.

Conclusion

Conflict resolution and conflict management can often work together on a certain conflict or dispute. When a dispute surfaces, the parties may start looking into conflict resolution to solve the dispute. They may look at mediation or negotiation to get to the root of the conflict and find a way to move forward. However, many of these formal procedures take time to implement and set up. When the conflict interferes with productivity or the relationship between the parties, this can be an issue. In this instance, conflict management can be beneficial in realizing conflict resolution process. While conflict resolution seeks to reduce or eliminate conflict, conflict management helps the parties to create an open-mindedness within their relationship. This can often lead to resolution as the parties learn to listen to each other and be more open to other experiences.

By using Igbo Proverbs and Conflict Resolution and Management effectively, an understanding of conflict resolution and conflict management is defined, a strategy to efficiently use conflict resolution and management can be created. There are some general tips for preparing for conflict management and resolution that can be helpful when developing a strategy. This strategy can be well maintained and achieved by the use of Igbo peaceful and unifying proverbs

such as those seen in data 1 to 12 of this study which endears peace and resolves conflicts effectively.

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