

PROVERB AND REPRESENTATION IN IGBO ETHNIC-SEMANTIC DISCOURSE

SITUATION

By

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Abstract

In our social world, proverbs remind us of our values in the constantly evolving society, through its metadiscoursal activities in human development, and in social structure of human living. They are used in different situations or contexts to accommodate people, to share experiences within the psycho-social domain, and this domain affects diverse identity, ideology and social standings. Therefore, their use must be functional to accommodate every peculiarity of human thoughts in communicational situations. This paper, therefore, looks at the philosophical sphere of metacommunication through the rendition of proverbs, in the context of their metafunctional expressiveness. By focusing on some of the concepts such as intellectualism, wisdom and understanding which are immanent in analysis, these enabled the researchers dug deep into their epistemic responsibilities as the epistemic agents or urns of ideology, culture and interactionism. Relevance theory is employed to explain or analyse how information is processed in discourse. This theory emphasizes on the expression and recognition of intentions in human communications. Five hundred Igbo proverbs were purposively collected from the corpus and observation; twenty proverbs were randomly selected for the analysis. The paper adopted descriptive and qualitative approach to analysis. The study revealed that proverbs engrave the ancient wisdom, the wisdom that is distilled and pristine, which houses the philosophies, ideas and thoughts of a group. Thus, proverbs are the conscience of a people who live in the same physical and metaphysical society; moreover, the valence is reinforced insofar as the discoursal context is between the interactants of the same socio-cultural and linguistic extraction.

Keywords: explicatures, language, metafunction, proverbs, relevance theory

Introduction

Literariness of discourse is the drive of the contextual sensitivity of the lexical manipulation of psycho-social domain of the phenomenon, which represents the subtext of metacommunication employed in sharing ideas, opinions and views. So, language is a prism or spectrum that leverages sociocultural and political contexts of discourse in its metafunctional expressiveness. Proverb as an aspect of language is deployed in communication between participants in specific discourse situations, is a euphemistic strategy of communicating ideas in interactional discourses. They are metaphorical and euphemistic expressions of diplomacy which expresses the philosophy, ideology, wisdom or culture of a people. They are wisdom-filled, ageless and philosophical linguistic expressions that are deployed in specific socio-cultural discourses and mostly used by elders to emphasize their points or buttress on the premises of their utterances. They are most reliable forms of oral tradition which provides the authentic beliefs of peoples living in preliterate societies, and also a storehouse of ancient wisdom and accumulated experiences of the past generations (Ikenga-Metuh, 1991, p. 23). In addition, they serve as tools of pedagogy, instruction, counselling and custodian of culture of a people.

In human cognition, the comprehension of utterances of the speaker by the hearer in specific context depends mostly on background knowledge or mutual cognitive environment shared by the participants in context which makes the utterances of the speaker to be relevant given little effort of cognitive processor and large contextual effect which maximizes relevance of a phenomenon. Thus, there will be frictionless communication as participants takes turns in their discourse. In turn, to test this perspective twenty randomly selected Igbo proverbs were used, using the relevance theory of Sperber and Wilson (1995), to analyze how meaning is established in context of proverbial expressions use and how the participants makes out the meaning, that is the proverb is relevant to them.

Rhetoric of Proverb

Proverbs are “short, pithy statements of widely accepted truths about everyday life” (Abrams and Harpham, 2012, p. 10). They are ageless and philosophical expressions in varying length (short or long

structures) that are heavily clad in or laden with wisdom, truth and life experiences and are relevant in certain situations of use in discourse. Ehondor (2017, p. 3) states that, “proverbs comprise a good

portion of common sense, experience, wisdom and above all truth”. Proverbs contains compressed information about life and as communication tools, they comprise a people’s thought pattern, philosophy and way of life. Tadi (2008, p.1) asserts that “proverbs are generally considered to be words of wisdom because they contain the distilled thoughts, ideas and philosophies of a people”. These philosophical wise sayings are works of antiquity or ancient elders and they are passed on from generation to generation through words of mouth. According to Adeyemi & Salawudeen (2014, p.188), Usman (2008, p.3) and Mieder (1985, p.119) cited in Bashir & Amali (2008, p.1), proverbs are short philosophical thoughts and sentences generally known among a particular people and which are passed down from generation to generation.

Proverbs are speech ornaments which gives weight to linguistic expressions and has underlying meanings. They are said to improve competence in communication and to be a sign of an elder or the wise, thus proverbs enables a speaker to achieve oratory language skills. Tadi (2008, p. 2-3) opines that proverbs aid in developing the communicative competence of people as it enables people to perfect their language skills”. Communicative competence is “the totality of linguistic repertoire that is required of a competent language user to communicate effectively with his or language, understanding when and how to use certain utterances” (Moshood, 2016, p. 66) Chinua Achebe, a great literary icon, stated in his monumental literary masterpiece, *Things Fall Apart*, that “proverbs are the (palm) oil with which words are eaten” (1985, p. 5).

Proverbs play great roles in the life of a people as it serves as an instrument of teaching, advising, resolving issues and crises, reprimanding, criticizing and correcting a people’s wrong behavior. Proverbs play an active role in the social life of the people as they advise, warn, analyze observations criticize, admonish and console (Tadi, 2008, p.1). Mckenna (1996, p.215) cited in Sheba and Oyewo: 2008, p. 2) Tadi (2008, p.2) further adds that “...and they (proverbs) are used to teach some lessons to the young ones and to awaken the consciousness of other members of the society to the fact that the truths of the society should not be forgotten but be zealously guided” (2).

For Maalej (2008, p.2) “as an indirect mode of speaking and understanding proverbs offers their users (and listeners) a measure of freedom to say indirectly what they would have thought about twice before saying without offending their targets”. The use of proverbs in communication could be said to be

obvious indirect ways of expressing feelings or ideas which could be termed as being polite as the hearer deduces the meaning using hints dependent on context.

Discourse Specificity: discourse as a term refers to spoken or written form of communication. Discourse according to Fairclough (1995) as cited in Ezeifeka (2018, p.4) is “more than just language use; it is language use, whether speech or writing, seen as a type of social practice”. Discourse specificity looks at discourse and the language that is used in a particular contextualized situation. The specificity an interlocutor has in the discussion of a particular topic in a cultural domain of interlocation. Proverb, for instance, when used in a discourse is used to express as well as highlight the philosophical realities of a particular culture that is the context of discussion. And is used in a context where the hearer or addressee could easily interpret the proverb uttered in relation to the premise of their conversation. Speakers ought to be conscious of their language in the domain of the thing being said in order not to deviate but stick to the subject matter of discourse which entails the specificity of discourse.

Metadiscourse of Language

Metadiscourse can simply be referred to as beyond discourse, that is use of discourse to talk about discourse. A coinage by a linguist, Zellig Harris in order to account for ways to understand language in use, representing a writer’s or speaker’s attempts to guide a receiver’s perception of a text (Hyland 2005, p.3) According to Vande Kopple (1985) as cited in Yousefi and Risekh (2010, p. 159) it is “discourse about discourse”. For Yousefi and Risekh (2010, p.159) metadiscourse refers to “the ways writers or speakers project themselves in their texts to interact with the receivers”. Crismore et al (1993) as cited in Uba (2020, p.57) view it as “features of textual organizations”. Uba (2020, p.57) corroborates this by asserting that writers use metadiscourse to achieve the consideration of the readers’ social influence and any possible impact on the readers because, “... the construction of

meaning of a text lies between the shared knowledge and practices of both the writer and the reader". To Mu, Zhang, Ehlich & Hong (2015, p.135), metadiscourse refers to "the devices or resources which writers use to organize the discourse, engage the audience and signal the writer's attitude". Metadiscourse includes linguistic items which refer to the speaker or writer, the listener or reader and the text, which could be written or spoken. It refers to the "commentary on a text" (Hyland, 2017)

made by text producer "speaker or writer in the course of having a discourse say in form of speaking or writing. Hyland (2017) claims that metadiscourse is what helps relate a text to its context by using language to take reader's needs, understandings, existing knowledge and prior experiences with texts into account and a stretch of discourse may realize both functions.

Metadiscourse of language are those discursual devices that are deployed by speakers or writers in their text production to convey meaning in such a way that the reader or listener is considered because he/she will be influenced by what is produced in the text. Metadiscourse markers are essentially important in discourse as they are "means of facilitating communication, supporting a position, increasing readability and building relationship with an audience" (Hyland 2005, p.5). He further adds that metadiscourse plays a role of signaling the writer's communicative intent in presenting propositional matters (Hyland 2005, p.20). Examples of metadiscourse markers are: "I hypothesize", "fortunately" (attitude markers), "she will certainly agree that" (commentaries), "according to Smith" (narrators), "first" (text connectives), "perhaps" (hedges), use of examples to illustrate a point and soon. Hyland differentiates between items that function "metadiscoursally" and "propositionally" using such words as: "therefore", "in contrast", and "as a result of". These linguistic items could function as metadiscourse in a text by "connecting steps in an argument" and function as a proposition when they are used "to connect events in the world outside the text"; real world (Hyland, 2017).

Metadiscourse markers, as deduced from the foregoing, are evident in discourses even when a speaker or writer wishes to add proverb in the discourse. A speaker could choose to deploy proverbial expressions in a particular discourse whose meaning is underlined in the linguistic items that make up that particular proverb. The metadiscourse marker employed by the speaker in the discourse

facilitates the listener's understanding and connection of the proverb to utterances made before it by the speaker through the metadiscoursal device used. An instance is:

"Our father", "nna anyi", he said, "I have brought you this kola. As our people say, *a man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness...*" (culled from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, p. 15).

"... But I can trust you. I know it as I look at you. As or fathers said, *you can tell a ripe corn from its look...*" (culled from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, p. 17).

"It pleases me to see a young man like you these days when our youth have gone soft. Many young men have come to me to ask for yams but I have refused because I knew they would dump them in the earth and leave them to be choked by weeds. When I say no to them, they think I am hard-hearted. But it is not so. *Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt to shoot without missing, he has learnt to fly without perching.* I have learnt to be stingy with my yams. But I can trust you. I know it as I look at you. As our fathers said, you tell a ripe corn by its look. I shall give you twice four hundred yams. Go ahead and prepare your farm" (Nwakibie, TFA, p. 17)

"We shall all live. We pray for life, children, a good harvest and happiness. You will have what is good for you and I will have what is good for me. *Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let his wing break*" (Nwakibie in *Things Fall Apart*, p. 15).

"I have come to you for help. Perhaps you can already guess what it is. I have cleared a farm but have no yams to sow. I know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yams, especially these days when young men are afraid of hard work. I am not afraid of work. *The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did.* I began to fend for myself at an age when most people still suck at their mothers' breasts. If you give me some yam seeds, I shall not fail you" (Okonkwo in TFA, p. 17).

In the examples given above, the metadiscourse markers are the pronouns ("I", "our", "you", "we", "me", "your", "my", "they", "his", "myself", "their") and the narrators of textual metadiscourse (according to Vande Kopple's classification of metadiscourse as cited in Hyland 2005:32) "As our

people say”, “As our forefathers said”, “Eneke the bird says”, “As our fathers said”. These metadiscoursal indicators in discourse are used by the speakers Okonkwo and Nwakibie in the examples, to connect the proverbial expressions to utterances before it, which are italicized.

Metafunctional Context of Interaction

‘Meta’ means beyond, thus metafunctional refers to function beyond the formal structure which includes the context of situation. The context of interaction contributes to the establishment and construing of meaning beyond the formalistic structure of utterance. Language is used for social interactions and performs ideational, textual and interpersonal functions which can only be found in context of use or interactions of humans. The ideational metafunction refers to how language is used to convey or organize cognitive reality or engage in mental appreciation. Simply put, it is how people see things in their environment and using language resources, draw their experiences. Realities of the world and culture are represented using language resources; thus, language is used to explain contexts. For example, in the context of legal courtroom, lawyers use legal language best fit for the context to do their discourse.

Hoang (2021:10) the experiential aspect of ideational function of language is “the resource speakers/writers draw on to construe their experience of the world-both the real world of physical phenomena and the inner world of their consciousness, feelings, beliefs and reflections.” He further adds that the logical aspect of ideational metafunction is “the resource speakers/writers draw on to construe relations of phenomena and events such as “x and y” as in “You and I”

Interpersonal metafunction expresses the social roles played by participants in discourse. It shows the speakers’ role with the addressees in an interlocution. This function of social roles expression is dependent upon the context of discourse. The context of language use in discourse determines the relationship shared by interlocutors in an interaction. Hoang (2021, p.1) avers that “the resource speakers/writers draw on to establish and maintain social relations (in particular discourse domains)”. An instance is the context of a university, given an interlocution between a lecturer and a student (the social roles). The language use of the student would be the use of title and last name to address the

lecturer and the use of first name by the lecturer to address the student. This shows that the social relationship is unequal in the sense that there is difference in status; lecturer is in a higher rank.

Textual metafunction expresses the structure of information in discourse showing the connectives that are used coherently and cohesively bind parts of a discourse/text to a whole. This is the resource

addressers/writers draw on to construct “texts” or connected passages of discourse that is situationally relevant... in other words, the textual metafunction is concerned with creating relevance between the parts of what is being said/written, and between the text and the context of situation” (Hoang 2021, p.1).

Data and Methodology

Five hundred samples of Igbo proverbs were collected and twenty were randomly selected for analysis. These select samples were chosen to illustrate how meaning is established based on context of use and how the hearer interprets the utterance from speaker with less cognitive effort for high relevance. This study adopted a descriptive research design. This research design was used as it was considered appropriate for this research because the data collected are samples of language of a people; proverb. According to Chukwuemeka, this type of research design is “a type of survey research that tries to unravel the essential elements or characteristics of any phenomenon” (2002, p.34). He further adds that this type of design that is concerned with the collection, presentation, analysis and interpretation of data for the purpose of describing practical beliefs, attitudes on-going process etc.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the relevance theory as propounded by Sperber and Wilson. Relevance theory by Sperber and Wilson is a cognitive psychological approach to discourse which treats the interpretation of speaker’s utterance as a process of human cognition. Relevance, here, is used in a technical sense to describe the degree of cognitive effort required for an addressee (or hearer) to achieve an understanding of what someone means by what they say (Grundy, 2008). According to Carston (p.2), the relevance-theoretic account is rooted in a view of human cognitive architecture according to which

linguistic semantics is the output of a modular linguistic decoding system and serves input to a pragmatic processor. The relevance theory according to Sperber and Wilson is based on how human cognition makes relevance of utterances of speaker(s) in human communication. Human cognition functions in such a way as to maximize relevance of an utterance in interactive discourse which the contextual effects help it in achieving.

Sperber and Wilson (1986 cited in Romandhon, 2021) state that humans tend to pay attention to the most relevant phenomena available; to develop the most possible representations and process them in a context that maximizes their relevance. Romandhon (2021) further adds that they (Sperber and Wilson) claim that information is relevant if it interacts in a certain way with existing human assumption about the world which is referred to as contextual effects. According to Onu & Etefia (2021, p. 84), Sperber and Wilson gave two steps to be followed for (the) hearer to reach the most relevant information that will justify the speaker's meaning, which are:

A] Consider interpretations in order of accessibility, and

2] Stop when your expectation of relevance is satisfied (or abandoned)

Relevance theory has that the key element in human communication is the recognition of the intentions of the speaker which is achieved through the guidance of cognitive inferential processes (Tagunchi, 2002). Communication of speaker's intention is not only arrived at by decoding linguistic items/utterances but also by analyzing the context and using contextual cues towards inferencing, correctly the speaker's intention. Thus, context of use and decoding linguistic items are essential in analyzing meaning. Tagunchi (2002, p.152) asserts that, "context is not limited to external factors such as physical environment or the immediately preceding discourse" but also includes "a set of all the assumptions that the hearer has about the world, including 'expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker' (Sperber and Wilson 1995, p.15).

The goal of relevance theory is to explain in cognitively realistic terms what expectations of relevance amount to and how they might contribute to an empirically plausible account of comprehension (Ezeifeka, 2018). Grundy (2008) avers that, relevance theory accounts for the understanding failures

which occur when the processing load is too great for relevant assumptions to be recovered or when the addressee lacks sufficient contextual resources to infer the explicatures and implicatures which prove the relevance of the utterance.

For an individual (addressee) to achieve relevance of a phenomenon, the phenomenon needs to be processed maximally or optimally by combined efforts of large contextual effects and less cognitive processing load/effort of the phenomenon. Contextual effects, according to Sperber and Wilson (1987) are brought about or realized by mental processes, which like every other biological process requires a certain effort. Contextual effects are the set of human assumptions about the world that is in existence or known (to the addressee and addresser). Contextual effects, according to Blakemore (as cited in Ezeifeka, 2018) are “simply the ways in which a new piece of information may interact with old contextual assumptions to yield an improvement to the hearer’s overall representation of the world. She further adds that contextual effect is optimal “when utterance interpretation leads to multiplication effect of new assumptions, elimination of old assumptions or strengthening old assumptions”, which makes an utterance relevant (Ezeifeka, 2018, p.205). On the other hand, processing effort, which “involves the amount of cognitive input required to process particular information”, is regarded as a negative factor of relevance because the greater the processing effort, the lower the relevance” (Ezeifeka, 2018, p.206). According to Sperber and Wilson, the relevance of a phenomenon is achieved by an individual based on two conditions:

Extent condition 1: a phenomenon is relevant to an individual to the extent that the contextual effects, achieved in processing it, are large, and

Extent condition 2: a phenomenon is relevant to an individual to the extent that the (cognitive/mental) effort required to process it is small. (1987, p.703;1995, p.145)

From the foregoing, relevance of an utterance or phenomenon is achieved or satisfied when the processing effort (of an utterance or phenomenon) is less and the contextual effects are large, while relevance is not achieved or is abandoned when there is more cognitive processing efforts and low contextual effects that are applied in the interpretation of an utterance or phenomenon.

Explicatures and Implicatures Differentiated

An explicature is an inferential development of incomplete conceptual representations or logical forms encoded by an utterance (Romandhon, 2021). For Robyn (2002), explicatures, which he says refers to “semantic representation (or logical form)” is “typically not fully propositional, so does not have a determinate truth condition, but consists of an incomplete conceptual representation which functions as a schema or template for the pragmatic construction of propositional forms” (which is implicatures). Grundy (2008, p. 135) defines as explicature “an enrichment of an original utterance to a fully elaborated propositional form”.

Implicature, for Romandhon (2021) is ‘a communicated assumption or proposition that lies in a human’s intention’ which can be understood by “recovery (of) message is needed by involving both decoding and inferencing. According to Robyn (2002), implicature, a pragmatic system, involves “inferring the intended interpretation (or ‘what has been communicated’); this is a set of propositional conceptual representations, some of which are developments of the linguistically provided and others of which are not’ (2). Toews (2019, p. 18) supports Robyn (2002) opinion by adding that explicatures and implicatures are arrived at by the processes of semantics and pragmatics. Thus, explicatures involves semantics process while implicatures involves pragmatic process. Toews (2019, p.19) adds that explicatures account for any explicit information, due to the grammar, the semantics and the context. The term refers to the elements of the utterance which are arrived at naturally through both linguistic and pragmatic processes. Explicature is not only derived from the logical form but also from the context of the utterance & implicatures include both premises and conclusions derived from an utterance that are not entailed by the propositional form of the utterance (Toews 2019, p.20). An explicature is a construction as a result of logical form development of meaning of an utterance. Explicature is a construction as a result of logical form development of meaning of an utterance.

For Grundy, an implicature is likely to have a propositional form different from that of the original utterance (2008, p.136). Toews (2019, p.17) opines that implicatures are premises or conclusions which are communicated by the utterance but which are not developments of logical form of an utterance. The conceptual content of an implicature is supplied wholly by pragmatic inference while the conceptual content of an explicature is an amalgam of decoded linguistic meaning and

pragmatically inferred meaning (Robyn, p. 5). To exemplify explicature and implicature below (premise and conclusion):

Jane: Shall we play volley ball?

Judith: It is raining

Explicature: it is raining at a particular location (where the volley ball court is)

Implicature: Jane and Judith cannot play at the location. Following the implicated premise (pragmatic system) that if it is raining in a specific location, then the possibility of playing at the location of the court is low. Thus, the implicated conclusion of Jane and Judith giving up on playing volley ball.

Principles of Relevance Theory

Sperber and Wilson proposed two principles of relevance theory, which are: cognitive principles of relevance and communicative principles of relevance.

Cognitive Principle

The human brain has as one of its main functions to break down assumptions or information about the world into comprehensible pieces that relate to our experiences. Cognitive principle in relevance has a function of cognitive effects and processing effects. According to Sperber and Wilson (cited in Teows 2019, p.16), “human cognition tends to be geared towards maximization of relevance”. “Maximization” is to be understood in such a way that cognitive processes attempt to achieve adequate cognitive effects for the least processing effort (Toews, 2019). Cognitive effects are changes that occur in an individual’s cognition in order to refute or support assumption that is in existence (old information). According to Clark (2013, p.102), cognitive effects are changes in cognition to strengthen an assumption, contradict existing assumption, or derive a new, context-bound implication. “Adequate cognitive effects” is the ‘intended’ effects that are achieved for the least amount of processing effort (Teows 2019). In cognitive principle of relevance, relevance (to an individual) is viewed in terms of degree. According to Allott (2013) cited in Romandhon (2021) “the degree of relevance of an input to an individual is a balance between cognitive effects and processing effort: the

more cognitive effects achieved, the more relevant input is; the more mental effort takes to process (an input), the less relevant an input is”.

Communicative Principle

According to Sperber and Wilson (1995) assert that every act of ostensive communication, equally communicates a presupposition for its optimal relevance. They therefore, divided communication in communicative principle into code model and inferential model. The former refers to any form of communication that is established by encoding and decoding messages and this model results in verbal utterances, while the latter, which is based on Gricean theory of intention, has it that communication will be achieved by expressing and recognizing intentions (Romandhon 2021), even though Sperber and Wilson (1995) emphasize this model in order to achieve optimal relevance.

However, Romandhon (2021, p.496) outlines the following points as essential, for interpreting meaning and intention of implied and explicit utterances of speakers:

- a.] constructing an appropriate hypothesis about explicit content via decoding, disambiguation, reference resolution, and other pragmatic enrichment processes;
- b.] constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual assumptions or implicated premises; and
- c.] constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual implications or implied conclusions.

Textual Analysis and Discussion

The proverb samples selected for this study are from the Igbo tribe or ethnicity of Nigeria. Proverbs has contexts of use which includes the discourse, the society/defined geographic setting and participants which contributes to the extent to which meaning is deduced by the hearer or addressee made by a speaker.

Ogbu mma anaghi ekwe ka eweli mma gaa ya n'azu

(A machete wielding person would not want a machete to go behind him.)

This proverb's interpretation or relevance could be deduced from the context of use. Proverbs have contexts in which they exist and here, this proverbial expression could be used by a speaker as a way to chide or reprimand an audience/addressee who literally is aware or has existing presumption of what the speaker intends by using such metaphorically euphemistic and philosophical expressions. When this proverb is used, it serves as a mild way to warn, reprimand, or dissuade a hearer to discontinue being involved in things of bad or negative nature which are harmful to people. "Mma" which means "machete" in English is a metaphor which in Igbo philosophy from which the meaning of this proverb is hidden refers to a negative phenomenon or bad that is perpetrated by someone, and such perpetrators would not want such acts to be done on them. Thus, the context of use of this proverb in discourse makes the proverb relevant to the hearer who deduces the meaning and understands that a warning, chide or reprimand is being done by the speaker to the addressee or him/her

The context of use of this proverb could be that involves a speaker advising an addressee based on the presumption that the person addressed is involved in perpetrating evil act. Thus, a hearer could arrive at the speaker's meaning based on deducing meaning from the context of use, which would make him/her have little processing effort and large contextual effect in order to achieve relevance. A hearer would achieve the relevance of this proverbial expression "Ogbu mma anaghi ekwe ka mma gaa ya n' azu" (an evil person will not want evil to be done to him) if he/she has the assumption. The proverb stresses the fact that a perpetrator of evil would not want the same evil or any kind of evil to be done to him/her. Thus, it is a warning and advice to such individuals to dissuade from such evil act.

Atuoro o malu o mara, atuoro ofeke o fenyé isi n'ohia.

(When a proverb is said, the wise would understand, but the foolish get confounded.)

This proverbial expression buttresses the importance of an individual's ability in interpreting the meaning of proverbs that are used in discourse. A speaker could use this to compel/propel an audience/ a hearer to improve the mental capacity of comprehending proverbial sayings or to know the appropriate moment to take action. A hearer achieves relevance of the proverb based on the existing assumption/knowledge about "o malu", which translates to the wise and "ofeke", the fool, which aids him in inferencing process for achieving relevance of the text in discourse specific context.

Ola agba na-aka adighi eji ugogbe e lele ya.

(A gold that is worn on the hand does not need a mirror to see it.)

In Igbo setting, “ola” refers to jewelry that is attractive to the eyes and the Igbo uses this concept as a metaphor to refer to things/occurrences that happen which are obvious and do not need any sort of facilitator/object to view it. It is usually used to refer to obvious truth or lie that is known and given the known fact, there is no need or sort of assistance to understand the meaning. The hearer easily achieves relevance of this proverbial expression based on the existing assumption he/she has which enhances the inferential process of meaning interpretation in the context of use of this discourse.

Otu aka ruta mmanu, o zuo ora onu.

(If one finger gets stained with oil, it would equally stain the others.)

This proverbial expression could be used in the context where the speaker is giving a warning, advice to an addressee. This proverb shows the effect of an action or cause of one individual that shows its effect on a whole group or community one belongs to. So when, a speaker deploys this metaphorical expression of “one finger”, which refers to one person and the aftermath of their actions or inactions, affects the society. This could be used in context of reprimanding someone’s actions/inactions, which is viewed in a negative light, and the effect would extend to affect the society as whole. Thus, the speaker uses this proverb on the hearer, who interprets the speaker’s intentions easily based on the existing assumptions/background knowledge that the hearer knows what the speaker points at which the addresser mildly cautions in the use of the proverb.

Egbe bere, ugo bere, nke si ibe ya ebela, nku kwa ya.

(Let the kite perch, let the eagle perch, anyone that does not want another to perch, let its wings break.)

A speaker deploys the use of this proverbial expression in a specific discourse as a means to emphasize on the importance of living peacefully in a community/group/association. This proverb portrays the fact that for harmony and peace to thrive anywhere that people are, no one should prevent another from expressing his/her ideology or belief. The speaker’s intentions in the use of this proverb, which

is an advice, is easily inferred by the hearer given the mutual cognitive environment shared by the speaker and addressee.

A tuo ilu ogiriga nkata, onye tara aru amara.

(When a proverb of hidden fact (basket) is made, the one who bites knows.)

This proverbial expression is deployed as a metaphorically euphemistic strategy to point out a guilty person in a midst of people. the speaker uses this proverb emphasize that a truth conditioned statement about someone, who may be a good or bad person, is made, the affected persons knows him/herself based on the existing common background knowledge shared by the speaker and the hearer.

E were ututu chuba ewu ojii, tupu ochichi agbaa.

(Morning/daylight should be used to look for goat.)

This proverbial saying used in contexts where there is urgency for an action to be taken before it becomes late. The addressee/hearer achieves relevance of this proverb used in discourse by the hearer given that something which the two interlocutors have background knowledge on (existing assumption). The speaker employs the use of this proverb as a mild way to issue a direction or command to the hearer to take action on something because there is need for such to be done because delay in doing that may be dangerous.

Anaghi eji mgbagbu ghara ugu.

(One does not avoid war because of being shot dead.)

A speaker employs this proverb as a way to euphemistically encourage or strengthen an audience/ a hearer to not discontinue in venturing into something even if there exist negativities that punctuate such thing. The hearer achieves relevance and infers the speaker's intention of encouragement based on shared knowledge that "ogu" which could mean any venture one wants to embark on may have negatives, such should not forestall one from venturing into that thing because it may also be laden with good things.

Awo anaghi agba oso ehihie n'efu.

(A toad does not run in day time for nothing.)

A speaker in a specific discourse, in Igbo context, employs this proverbial expression as a euphemistic way to show that something unusual or a thing of rarity has happened or is happened. It is a proverb that simply shows cause and effect. Usually, a toad is seen as a nocturnal animal and to see it in daytime is rare except something important/threatening made it leave its hiding place. Thus, in the Igbo context, the hearer of such proverbial expression deduces the meaning underlined ion this proverb based on existing presumption or common background knowledge (mutual cognitive enviroment0 shared by the interactants which enhances realization of relevance.

Ngwugwu aga-ato ato, o baghi uru itu ya mbo.

(A wrapped thing which must be unwrapped, has no need to cut it out.)

This proverb used in discourse is a mild way of halting hastiness on the part of the hearer in getting information about something which would actually be revealed with time, thus making the haste is not important. A hearer deduces the meaning in this proverb based on the existing knowledge that “ngwugwu” must be unwrapped, thus the speaker uses the proverbial expression as a calm and mild way of dissuading an audience/a hearer from rushing into something or prying into something/truth that will certainly be made bare.

Nne ewu na-ata agbala, nwa ya ana-ele ya anya n'onu.

(If a mother-goat chews the curd, its kid watches her mouth.)

This proverb which could be interpreted as “one’s acts/behaviors, bad or good, are being emulated by children or people around that person. This proverb could be employed as a way to praise or criticize one’s act, especially an elder. It is a eulogy if such person is of good character and therefore is being encouraged by the speaker and it is a mild way to criticize if such a person is of bad character and the speaker is afraid that such could be easily learnt by those around such person.

Ebe aka ruru nwanyi ka o na-tukwasi di ya.

(Where a woman's hand reaches; there she holds her husband.)

In this proverbial expression, the speaker emphasizes on the fact that no two persons are equal in all dimensions and that one does something based on one's capability/strength. In the context of use of this proverb, the hearer achieves relevance of this proverbial saying made by a speaker given the common knowledge shared by them. The speaker uses this proverb as a way to encourage one on what one does. So, the meaning inferred from this metaphorical expression is that an individual accomplishes a task based on his/her capability or what his/her strength could carry.

Ihe okuko bu mmiri achu di ya mkpa.

(What the chicken is chasing under the rain is important to it.)

A speaker in a discourse uses this proverb to emphasize the need or importance of the existence of a particular thing. In Igbo, the chicken usually hides during rainfall, but when it is seen chasing something in rain is very important to it. based on this existing/background knowledge shared by the speaker and hearer of this concept, the hearer easily interprets the meaning of urgency or importance of something which the speaker is out to find or discover even when the atmosphere speaks against such.

Agwo no n' akirika

(Snake and thatch/woods.)

This proverb is deployed by a speaker to express danger or insecurity around or that is happening/in existence. The hearer infers the meaning underlined in this proverb based on the metaphorical meaning of "agwo" and "akirika", which is shared by the speaker and the hearer. The snake dwells in the bush/grass and in Igbo context for it to be seen in "akirika" (thatch/debrise) signifies that there is danger/ unusualness of something.

Nkwucha aburo ujo.

(Alertness is not for fear.)

This proverbial expression deployed by a speaker in specific discourse is a means of mildly encouraging an audience/a hearer by stressing on the importance of preparedness which does not signify weakness or fear rather a form of strength. The hearer infers the meaning based on the existing assumption he/she possesses about being prepared at all times for any occurrences.

E gbuwe na-atoro, mmadu agaghi afo.

(If everyone kills their junior/younger ones or those they are older than, no one will remain alive.)

This proverb expresses the Igbo philosophy/ideology that seniority does not translate into intimidating or dominating the junior one. The speaker deploys this proverb in specific discourse to warn or advice an audience/ a hearer to dissuade from using the position occupied to cause harm to another person. The hearer understands the speaker's intention of advising him/her to take caution and not use positions one is in to enslave, kill, dominate or subjugate another, especially one in unequal position.

Onye agwo tara na-agba oso ma o hu isi ngwere.

(The head of a lizard can even scare one who has been bitten by a snake.)

A speaker utters this proverbial saying in discourse to state the effect of an experience one had. This proverbial saying emphasizes the fact that an individual who experienced something difficult that affected him/her, would be scared of things that resemble it even when there is no need to be scared. Thus, when a speaker utters this proverb in a discourse, it signifies weariness on the aspect of the speaker, and the hearer, given the shared knowledge that is common to the interlocutors, he achieves meaning of the proverb in use in context, thus, relevance is reached.

Anu ohia na-adighi ike oso adighi eje ikpa nri n'ehihie.

(An animal that cannot run fast does not come out in the daytime to look for food.)

This proverb is used to buttress the fact that an individual act according to what his/her strength could carry. And also that one avoids things that could bring him trouble which he/she may not be able to tolerate or handle. When a speaker uses this proverb in a discourse, he/she intends to advice an audience/a hearer to do things one could handle and at the appropriate time so as not to get into trouble

or situation that cannot be managed. A hearer achieves relevance of this proverbial expression given the common knowledge shared on the symbolic interpretation of the metaphor of animal used in the proverb which aids in the inferential process of arriving at the correct meaning.

O bu naani udele kara aka na-amapuwu ozu afo.

(It is only a strong vulture that could pierce the stomach of a corpse).

This proverb buttresses on the fact that it a task is given to someone who has experience and skill to undertake it successfully or one who know about a thing that is assigned to take charge of it. A hearer's existing knowledge or background knowledge that it is a strong vulture that could pierce a corpse's stomach, which the speaker also assumes that the hearer has, enables him to achieve relevance of the proverb by inferring the meaning of the metaphor and associating it with the speaker's specific content in discourse.

Mkpi siri na njepu amaka n'ihl na o jere ikwunne ya were muta ka e si asoli imi elu

(He-goat says that travelling is rewarding because he visited his grandmother's place, and learnt how to jerk up the upper lip.)

This proverb is used to emphasize that one gains a lot of experience by travelling or exposure. A speaker employs this proverb in discourse either to support his claim of being an example of having experience through travelling/being exposed or a way to encourage people to engage in travels so as to mix up with others and learn. The Igbo believe that one learns from travelling or being exposed to things and thereby encourages such act to gain experience by travelling. A hearer attains relevance of this proverb given the common knowledge shared by him and the speaker, thus the context of use facilitates the cognitive inferential process of meaning.

O buru na afo na-agba, usuogu a na-enwewanye imi.

(Usuogu, the bat, acquires more nostrils as it continues to spend more years.)

In Igbo setting, it is believed that old age or aging comes with lots of wisdom. The metaphor of the bat and how it acquires more nostrils as day, month or year goes by, is liken to how human beings get

wisdom with the time they spent in living and advancing in age. Thus, a speaker uses this proverb to buttress that as one adds more years to one's age, one ought to have more experience and wisdom. A hearer infers the meaning based on the context of use which could be the speaker advising/encourage the hearer of the need to gain wisdom as it is paramount and marks an elder.

O na-abu nta di mma n'ubochi mbu, achuchaa, a chukwa ozo.

(If the first hunting expedition proved successful that a second one can be undertaken.)

A speaker uses this proverbial saying either, to express the fact that failure in doing a task, once can create despair, and discourage hard work while success in a task serves as a motivation and encouragement to continue. So, a speaker's use of this proverb is to express that if a task he/she wants to embark on could motivate him/her if it is successful while it would be a form of discouragement if he/she fails or loses on the task.

Ewu mmadu abuo na-enye nri na-anwu n'aguu.

(A goat that is fed by two persons is (often) starved to death.)

This proverb is used to emphasize on the fact that a thing generally owned suffers because of lack of care or neglect and inefficiency from those involved. More so, it is usually used when a particular thing is lacking in the way it should be or that there is deficiency in something because that thing is being handled/taken care of by more than one person and the state of such thing brings the speaker to lament and mildly expresses his disappointment in this proverb. The hearer infers the meaning underlying the proverb used because of shared knowledge of the context and the existing assumption the hearer has helps in the comprehension of the proverb and relevance of the proverb is attained.

O bu e lee ka chi nwata ha, e were kenye ya oru.

(The god of a child is first put into consideration before assigning a particular job to him.)

The proverbial saying stated above buttresses the fact that before assigning any responsibility, one's capability should be assessed so as to give task one can handle successfully. A speaker deploys the use of this proverb in a discourse-specific context to express the need for thorough scrutiny of an

individual's capability and capacity before a task is assigned. Thus, the context of use could be one where tasks are being assigned or report of jobs are done. A hearer comprehends this proverb by inferring the meaning from the context of use as well as the existing knowledge the hearer possesses about assigning task and achieving success or failure in it.

E were ihe na-adi mmadu mma were kwuo ya ugwo, o di ma o dighi o nara ya.

(If one is rewarded with what he loves, he readily accepts it whether it is adequate or not.)

A speaker uses this proverb in context of specific discourse to emphasize on the need that an individual is eager to acknowledge a thing he/she loves as an offer regardless of whether it is sufficient or not. As a way to encourage an individual, he/she could be rewarded with what he/she most appreciates. An addressee infers the meaning of this proverbial saying with the combined effort of existing knowledge he/she has and the context of use, which contributes in having less cognitive effort in achieving relevance of the proverbial saying used by a speaker.

Conclusion

The study of this sample proverbs has thrown relative light on the experience and wisdom that were in existence for several years bundled in one expression. They do not only provide us with the existential information, they also stimulate our attention to the understanding of the essence of such philosophy or belief. Proverbs are, therefore, words of wisdom that underlies the philosophy, world view and culture of a particular people. They are used as a pedagogic instrument to teach younger generation, and used as tool of directive, counselling, reprimanding, instructing and guidance. In specific discourses, participants in a discourse employ the proverbs in their interlocution to bring their points home and to spice up their utterances. Proverb is said to be the palm oil with which words are eaten (mmanu ndi Igbo ji-eri okwu). For an understanding of proverbs used in specific discourse situation, the hearer and speaker must have shared knowledge and assumptions which will enable the easy comprehension of utterance and linkage of proverb to the utterance premise.

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