

Metaphor to Meaning: Culture, History and Interpretation in Ibibio Idioms

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Abstract

Language is a vehicle for the transmission of cultural materials from generation to generation. One of the forms which facilitate this endeavour is the idiom. Often created using metaphor, a significant number of them convey information on the historical trajectories of a speech community. This paper identified idioms which give insight into the patterns of the lives of the Ibibio people of Southern Nigeria in the remote past. It specifically situates the literal meanings of the expressions within beliefs and practices which held sway in the Ibibio society in traditional times and utilizes The Metaphoric Frame Based and Metaphoric Symbol Based frameworks to explain how the metaphorical meanings which are culturally grounded are motivated for the interpretation of the idioms. Participant observation, semi structured interviews and native speaker intuition were utilized to gather selected idioms and obtain information on the historical resources embedded in them. It discovers that aspects of the traditional religious and superstitious beliefs and practices, culinary activities, hospitality, entertainment, and education constitute domains from which abstract concepts are referred to in the idioms. This study reiterates the role of language in the transmission and preservation of a people's cultural heritage. It highlights the importance of speakers' exposure to traditional beliefs and practices to the understanding of the figurative meanings of the idioms. This paper recommends that idioms which capture the sociocultural peculiarities of the traditional Ibibio society should be documented. This is to foster their continuous use and understanding, intergenerational transmission and eventual preservation.

Keywords: Language, Culture, Idioms, Metaphor, History, Interpretation

Introduction

Language is a repository of the cultural resources of an ethnic group and a tool with which contemporary experiences can be relayed and

cultural artefacts can be transmitted. Though it is an intangible aspect of culture, it conveys tangible aspects such as costumes, food, arts and craft, the weather, farming activities and tools as well as totems using words and expressions. Some of these materials have existed since traditional times. Therefore, through language, the history of an indigenous people can be accessed. Knowledge of the norms, values, practices, traditions, beliefs and worldviews of an ethnic group, which have existed over time, can be conveyed by linguistic forms such as idioms.

Culture is a term with varying definitions depending on perspective. It is attributed to the activities of groups of people who share certain characteristics. To this end, one could refer to pop culture, economic culture and political culture based on the peculiar ways of doing things. For the purpose of this paper, the term “culture” is restricted to the features shared by a group of indigenous people who inhabit a particular geographical location. In a bid to show the influence of culture on Ibibio personal names, Ukpong (2010) defines culture as the totality of the life of a people which embraces everything which provides the capacity for man’s survival in the world. In an attempt to investigate

African culture based on the values which define them, Idang (2015) acknowledges the common notion that culture encapsulates everything which is peculiar to a group of people in a way that they are distinct from other groups. Such distinction is viewed by Sinha (2017) as what gives meaning to a group of people. This is because meaning is at the centre of what constitutes a people’s culture, where the patterned behaviour of a people expresses meaning which is unique to them. Sinha (2021) suggests that culture should be viewed from three perspectives. The first, is as “practices”, where the way a group of people do things can be investigated. The second is in “mental models, schemas, worldviews, ideologies and structure of feeling”, where ways of thinking and feeling can be examined. The third is in “discourses”, where the manner group members speak can be interrogated. Such approaches can provide a holistic view of what constitutes the culture of an indigenous people. Language can also be used to interrogate these perspectives. This is because of the interaction between language and culture.

The interface between language and culture has received considerable attention. Varying views on the points of intersection also exist. The

interaction had earlier been observed and interrogated by scholars in the field of anthropology, such as Franz Boas, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. Allard-Krop (2020) refers to language as a defining aspect of culture. The work posits that the two roles played by the language of indigenous people in particular are the definition and reflection of speakers' beliefs about their identity as parts of a group. Holmes (2013) also observes that linguistic systems and peculiar uses of language can give understanding of the perception, values and beliefs of a community of speakers. This is in addition to the practices and traditions of linguistic groups. In the application of this notion to an ethnic group, words, phrases, expressions and oral tradition carry imprints of the folk of an indigenous people. Following an exploration of cultural conceptualizations, schemata, categories, metaphors and precedential phenomena, Hrivitkova (2020) submits that the interface between language and culture is mutually symbiotic, and can be approached from two perspectives. First, many cultural characteristics and the way they are conveyed using language can be investigated. Secondly, units of language which are potential carriers of cultural contents can be interrogated using

language as the focal point. While a study of several specific aspects such as events, rites, traditions, and associated vocabulary linked to a culture can facilitate the attainment of the earlier purpose, the examination of components of language including precedential phenomena, proverbs and sayings can achieve the latter. In submission, Mensah (2016) corroborates the view that the relationship between language and culture is a balanced one, with language being the vehicle, and culture being the mirror.

Language, an intangible cultural material is capable of capturing other cultural resources. Notably, the availability of such information in forms of language such as idioms exist. For instance, the English idiom *join the bandwagon* points at a period in the transport history of American speakers of the language when they moved in wagons from place to place. This picture is made possible by metaphor, where intended meaning is expressed in idioms by comparing one thing with another in a direct manner. In this case, idiomatic meaning which reflects the cultural heritage of speakers was created using their experiences in traditional times. As a result of this, the invaluable information on how particular ethnic groups existed in time past is captured by language in

general and idioms in particular. While studies have investigated the role of other oral traditions in the transmission of the cultural artefacts of an ethnic group, there is little evidence on the contribution of idioms in this regard especially with regard to idioms in Ibibio language and people. To this end, this paper identifies idioms in Ibibio which showcase the cultural history of the speakers. It also identifies and describes the traditional beliefs and practices which are captured in the idioms. The paper examines how figurative meanings can be motivated and how cultural artefacts can be accessed in their expressions as a result of the comprehension of metaphor.

Literature Review

Idioms are multi-word expressions which cannot be interpreted from knowledge of the meanings of their individual lexical constituents. They are non-literal expressions like proverbs. Their internal structure does not comprise more than three clauses and their meanings are conveyed using tools such as metaphor. It is believed that idioms occur in all human languages. Scholarly works on idioms in English (Kleiser. 2010), Arabic (Elshamy, 2016), Hebrew (Horvath & Siloni, 2009), Finnish and Italian (Majuri,

2014), Portuguese (Galvao. Baptisca & Mamede, 2019) and Ibibio (Udosen, Offong & Eka, 2017) have been carried out. Stern (1998) observes that idioms are usually used in informal and formal communicative events including meetings with family members, business meetings, and newspapers. It is the language of the prudent, (Emma, 2012) and are used to carry out the ideational-discursive function of language Langlotz (2006), which Osisanwo (2003) earlier explicates to be achieved in addition to other things, when a speaker expresses their experiences of the real world. This translates to the relay of their day-to-day collective experiences, including their patterned behaviour which are occasioned by cultural nuances. Ferrando (2017) adds that idioms are used deliberately for cognitive conceptualization functions. In this case, the meaning of an idiom is a product of hearers' ability to gain understanding based on the ideas expressed through analogy or the equation of what is known to what is being referred to. One of the ways through which an idiom conveys meaning is metaphor. It is a form of analogy and a medium for giving expression to what occurs in our individual and collective lives (Mey 2001). A metaphor comprises the source domain and the target

domain. The earlier is usually a concrete entity, event or situation while the latter are mostly abstract. According to Offong (2024), the message which is conveyed using metaphor is often an abstract or semi-concrete idea which must be understood using concrete or near concrete things. For instance, the abstract concept “pride” which is the target domain is visualized in the raising of one’s shoulders which is the source domain, in the Ibibio idiom *dippe afara ke enyong*. Offong (2024) observes that metaphors are products of speakers’ everyday lives and can be individualistic or collective, for mere comparison or for conveying a concept which is foreign to speakers of an ethnic group. It can also be a whole rich system of metaphors known as conceptual metaphors. According to Kovecses (2017), the reasons source domains are paired with target domains is because the two things or events are similar or resemble each other in some ways. Martinez (2016) highlights that idiomatic meaning can be comprehended through key words present in the idiom. Metaphors are produced from people’s social reality. Offong (2024) asserts that an idiom can be understood if the people share common lived experiences. Validating the ability of idioms to capture cultural contents, an idiom is

defined as an extended and standard metaphor which may be universal but is more often cultural (Horvathova & Tabackova, 2018). Offong (2024) observes that idioms capture the culture of ethnic groups in two broad ways. Words which emanate from the tangible aspects such as the physical environment, religion, socio-economic activities and the political landscape are employed to convey meaning in idioms using metaphor. Secondly, idioms reflect the collective thought pattern of indigenous groups concerning concepts. Ayers (2005) also emphasizes that cultural context is basic in understanding figurative language, one of which is idioms. He affirms that “language expresses meaning through the words that give verbalization to the experiences which humans share” (p. 6). While Boers (2008) and Onyukka (2011) aver that idioms which have universal meaning across cultures is as a result of physical experiences which are universal in meaning due to the physical experiences shared by the entire humanity. Rizq (2015) links the meaning of some idioms within specific cultures to their unique socio-cultural nuances, explaining that though concepts like love, success, honour, shame, anger, wealth and marriage exist in every human race, they can be expressed

and interpreted in diverse ways based on peculiar social and cultural differences.

The culture-language interface is also evident in second language teaching and learning, and translation. In an attempt to explain why learning English as a second language poses challenges to learners, Jandt (2007) hints that acquiring knowledge of idioms in a language is an effective way of knowing the culture of their speakers. This is in tandem with the submission of Laksmi and Al-Fauzanb (2019) that it is important for learners of foreign languages to have adequate knowledge of what is referred to as “the fine points “of a foreign language. Such fine points include the cultural context within which the meaning is situated. Horvathova and Tabackova (2018) note this in the translation of idioms in a German text to Slovak, using the compensation strategy. The paper identifies cultural aspects which underlie phrasemes, such as idioms. They are Textual Dependence to a written text such as The Bible, The Quran and William Shakespeare’s works, Cultural Symbols which are used to refer to certain contents, and Pre-scientific conceptions of the world which include folk belief or superstition. Others are Culture-Based Interactions which give insight into the social experience of specific

cultures and Material Culture such as the Nagila or Sisha of Arab culture.

Ayers (2015) asserts that an understanding of the cultural background and history of a language is crucial in the interpretation of non-transparent idioms. This is emphasized by Qualif (2017) whose examination of the difficulties and strategies involved in translating idiomatic expressions from English to Arabic. In the work, it is suggested that a translator of idioms requires not only the ability to speak the two languages, but the adequate knowledge of both cultures. In Chen and Lai (2013), it is observed that rote learning and memorization proves obsolete and ineffective for Chinese who are learning English idioms. It also heightens the awareness of learners of conceptual metaphor as the underlying motivation behind idioms. Some of the idioms in English could not be understood because the meaning is situated in the historical background of native speakers. The reason for difficulty in retrieving the meaning of idioms in another language is corroborated in Martnez, Mella, Jara, Pena, Perez, Riqueline, Núñez & Valdez (2014) study on the cognitive mechanisms required to interpret and retrieve the meaning of idioms. The work asserts that the institutionalized meaning of idioms cannot be

recovered by non-native speakers because they do not belong to the conceptual network of indigenous speakers of a language. They do not also possess the cognitive structures for understanding them

Also linking knowledge of the meaning of idioms to culture, Maalej (2005) suggests that culture specific metaphors give birth to idioms which have no equivalents in another language. He emphasizes Thyab's (2016) opinion that the connection between an idiom and its meaning may be based on physical experiences which are universally shared or based on specific domains which are culture specific. Offong (2024) submits that idioms reflect the culture of its speakers in two broad ways - the tangible aspects such as their agricultural practices, food processing, trading activities, arts and craft. On the other hand, the thoughts of language users concerning concepts are found in these expressions. Sometimes, those thoughts are based on their human and bodily experiences.

Kleiser (2010) provides evidence of the presence of aspects of culture on American English Idioms. Expressions such as *a day late a dollar short*, *go under the hammer* and *a New York minute* convey the unique experiences of the Americans in the United States. They emphasize

the dollar, which is an aspect of the economy of the American English-speaking people, highlight a practice which takes place during the auction of items as well as the culture of time management in New York, a place revered as the economic capital of the world, respectively. The absence of this knowledge makes the idiom opaque and its idiomatic meaning unknown. English is replete with idioms which point at occurrences of English native speakers in times past. Historical sources reflect the influence of the Bible and the Christian religion on native speakers of the language. Idioms emanating from such interaction include "turn the other cheek", "be your brother's keeper", "A good Samaritan" and "bear one's cross". Classic literary works have also left their footprints on English with expressions from poetry, prose and drama contributing their quota. The idiom "Be an Oliver Twist" emanates from the popular classic literature *Oliver Twist*. Reference to lovers as "Romeo and Juliet" is traceable to Shakespeare's classic love drama with the same name. "Bell the cat" is traced to William Langland's retold fables of Aesop in *Piers Ploughman* (1377 Ammer 1997), where the mice decide to put a bell around the cat's neck in order to be warned of its movements. Lakshmi and Al-Fauzanb (2019)

observe the presence of expressions in Arabic folktales and fables in English idioms as well. The expression “An open sesame” is a pointer to this. Greek mythology also provides English with idioms. A history of the adaptability of the English people is seen in their openness to myths from around the world. Idioms such as “Herculean task” and “Achilles Heel” point at this enterprise. Ammer (1997)’s Dictionary of Idioms shows a substantial number of English idioms whose origins are found in cultures within and without those of the native English people. “back to the salt mines” is traced to the 1880s and is said to originate from the Russian practice of punishing prisoners by sending them to work in the salt mines of Siberia. Dvalidze (2019) also notes, that the meanings of some words in English which have lost most of its original meaning are being preserved in idiomatic expressions. An example is “beck”, a word which was used between the 14th and 19th century to refer to a gesture of command, which is found in the idiom “be at someone’s beck and call”. This idiom means “being ready to serve someone at any time”.

In an attempt to analyse the origins of some idioms in English and their alternatives in Uzbek, FarSU (2021) reveals the origins of some English

idioms. For instance, “caught red handed” emerged on account of the old English law that anyone who slaughtered someone’s animal could only be convicted when they were caught in the act with the blood stains of the animals on their hands. “Bury the hatchet” emanates from the warring Puritans and native Americans decision to tow the line of peace by burying their weapons of war. Also, “Armed to the teeth” is traced to the action of 17th century pirates who tried to ensure that their weapons did not run out by putting them in every part of their bodies, including holding knives between their teeth. The origin of the popular English idiom, “Kick the bucket” has been speculated about. Circumstances which birthed this English idiom are from varying accounts. It is sometimes said to originate from a method of execution where persons met their death after the buckets on which they stood to have their necks tied on a rope were pushed away. Other accounts link this expression to the historical trajectory where animals were placed before they were slaughtered, goats ruined their milking process by kicking the bucket which was used to collect the liquid, and the catholic custom of placing holy water buckets at deceased persons feet for their relative to sprinkle on the body. Such

speculations would be inexistent if a documentation of the idioms rooted in the cultural history of speakers were carried out.

It is important to add that idioms begin as novel creations which later become conventionalized through their adoption and continuous use by a group of speakers. While some of them are products of the conceptual system of speakers of particular languages, others are created from their everyday social and physical experiences. However, such experiences continue to change. For instance the use of wagons to move music groups, circus bands and political campaign rallies and in the United States of America in the 19th century birthed the idiom *jump on the bandwagon*. This means of transportation has been replaced with other vehicles such as luxury buses. While the use of idioms of this nature could dwindle among contemporary English speakers, the rich historical knowledge surrounding speakers of the language at the time of the expression's creation is also largely unknown.

According to Langlotz (2006), idiomatic meaning is opaque where there is no symmetry between the literal meaning of the idiom construction and its figurative meaning. In the case where such idioms utilize metaphor to express its

meaning, addressees do not establish a correspondence between the source domain and the target domain. The reason for this is the absence of motivation, a term in cognitive linguistics which refers to the ability of speakers of a language to reactivate or remotivate the figurativeness of an idiom in a bid to understand the expression vis-a vis its literal meaning. Motivation is what bridges the gap between idiom transparency and opacity. Using the English idiom *kick the bucket* as an example, even for native speakers of the language, the figurative meaning cannot be retrieved by someone who hears it for the first time. This is due to the absence of a construal between the source domain which is the act of "kicking a bucket" and the target domain which is "death". The idiomatic meaning of this expression for them just has to be learnt.

Motivation is the possibility of interpreting the basic mental image of an idea in a manner that makes sense of the use of a particular idiom in the meaning conventionally given to it, (Dobrovols'kij and Piirainen 2018). It is a cognitive term which is used to explain how people understand idiomatic meaning based on literal meaning. Its success is guaranteed when language users can relate the literal expression with idiomatic meaning and can see the connection

between them, (Martinez et al 2016). This author emphasizes that motivation is made possible when conceptual or image schematic correspondences between the literal and figurative meaning are established. The comprehension is also influenced by cultural factors. Types of motivation are the metaphoric type, the symbol-based type and the intertextuality derived type (Ding 2018).

This work therefore corroborates the position that knowledge of the culture of a people is imperative in the understanding of the meaning of idioms by drawing instances from Ibibio. It also offers a fresh perspective by asserting that the meaning of idioms which utilize metaphor to capture events and phenomena in the distant past, are motivated by frames and symbols.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This research utilized the qualitative descriptive design. The idioms were gathered through participant observation of interactions of traders in Akpan Andem and Ika Ika Oqua markets in Uyo and Calabar metropolis. The earlier location is the indigenous habitation of Ibibio speakers while the later hosts a significantly large population of indigenous Ibibio speakers.. This

method of gathering data was necessitated by the importance of natural conversations, which facilitates the spontaneous use of idioms. The intuition of two researchers of this work who are native speakers of Ibibio of over four decades and their experience as linguists was also brought to bear in the identification of idioms from the swathes of conversations recorded. The audio recorder was utilized to record the interactions, after which the required idioms were extracted and coded. Semi structured interviews were also conducted on six Ibibio speakers between the ages of forty-three and ninety years who are versed with the knowledge of the traditional beliefs and practices of the Ibibio people. Their consent was duly received after they were informed that the information sought were strictly for research purposes. Interview sessions revealed the figurative meanings of idioms which were not known to the researchers. Knowledge of traditional beliefs and practices which these idioms reflect, and specific details about them were also provided in the sessions. Data are presented in themes.

This work adopts the Metaphoric and Symbol-based types of motivation for analyses. The framework is also used to explain how the absence of the cultural history of a speaker can

hinder the understanding of the figurative meanings of culture-reflective idioms in Ibibio. Ding (2018) reiterates Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Lakoff (1987) positions that the metaphoric type of motivation occurs at two levels. One of them is the superordinate level of the conceptual metaphor otherwise referred to as the level of abstract metaphorical model. This can be instantiated with the Ibibio idiom *kid mpo* (see something). This expression captures the concept of “experience” which is an abstract idea, using the source domain of “sight”. The second type of motivation occurs at the basic level of categorization. This type of motivation is encoded in the structure of the lexical constituents of idioms. This is also called “the basic level cases” of motivation frame based metaphors (Ding 2018). The

example used in the work is *be a red rag to the bull*. In this instance, the expression is motivated by pieces of speakers’ knowledge of the bull fight frame and all its paraphernalia. According to Ding (2018), this type of motivation can be explained from the perspective of Baranov and Dobrovol’skij’s Cognitive Modelling of Idiom Semantics.

Symbol-based Type of Motivation is another framework within which the lack of knowledge of cultural artefacts and its effect on the comprehension and use of culture reflective idioms can be explained. This type of motivation is facilitated by one lexical constituent or the concept behind it (Ding, 2018). Additional information about the constituent such as its character or function is necessary for the retrieval of idiomatic meaning.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Dance Performance

	Idiom	Literal Meaning	Figurative Meaning
(i)	<i>Díppé étó míá íbìd</i>	Carry a stick and beat a drum	Act impulsively
(ii)	<i>Ben uta ke fid ke</i> or <i>itie mfen</i>	Take one’s (uta) performance to another place	Take one’s nuisance or problem to another location.

Religious and Superstitious Beliefs and Practices

- | | | | |
|--------|--|--|--|
| (iii) | <i>FΛk áwó ékpó</i>
someone
<i>ñkám ànyèn</i> | Cover someone with a ghost
which dims the eye | Deceive |
| (iv) | <i>Ifód átá idem</i>
oneself | A witch /wizard who eats
responsible for their
predicament | Someone who is |
| (v) | <i>Sin mkpo ke anyen</i>
foresight | Put something in the eye | Have instinct or |
| (vi) | <i>DΛk ikod wuo usΛn</i>
with <i>no awo</i> | Enter the bush and come out
to the road for someone | Be extremely angry
with someone. |
| (vii) | <i>FΛho ekpo yak awo</i>
someone <i>asaña ikod</i>
someone passes through
the bush. | For someone to put on
a masquerade attire and | Relate with
like a |
| (viii) | <i>DΛk mkpo</i>
Society | Enter something | Be a member of a secret |
| (ix) | <i>Nie mfon iso</i> | Have a good face | Be lucky |
| (x) | <i>Mia eba esid no</i>
<i>awo</i> | Beat the breast (of the chest)
for someone | Curse someone |
| (xi) | <i>Sin ekpo usΛñ idim</i>
<i>no awo</i> | Put a ghost for someone on the
way to the stream. | Be an obstacle or
hinderance to someone |
| (xii) | <i>Akpa ndiehe abod</i>
the world. | The first time I am coming to
Person | A naïve or ignorant |

- (xiii) *Ukpoñ adi wuo awo* For one's soul to come out Be extremely
of someone apprehensive or anxious

Culinary Activity and Hospitality

- (xiv) *Dùòk ín/ñ ké nsìà* Pour salt on the intestines of a Engage in a futile venture.
Ébìòñ porcupine

- (xv) *Nìm ùsùñ ké úd/ñ* Keep *fofofo* in the mortar for the Postpone a matter to
béd àsén visitor a later time

- (xvi) *Dia mkpo ke afere* Eat something in soup Enjoy largesse

- (xvii) *Afere obu obu* Mere crayfish soup An ordinary
achievement or mean feat

- (xviii) *Da ke ud/ñ* Stand on a mortar Be immature or incapable

- (xix) *Udua ikpa enañ* The price of cow hide A very high cost or price

- (xx) *Dia afañ ta ikpa* Eat Afañ and chew (cow) hide. Live in affluence

Traditional Judicial Practice

- (xxi) *Tá mbiàm!* Chew an oath Swear
(xxii) *Sin iko ke ufok* Put a matter in a house Conclude or
summarize a matter

Education and Knowledge

- (xxiii) *Wod titia itaad* Show (a) teacher (a) stone Exhibit
knowledgeable
on a subject matter

- (xxiv) *Ayen akaan anwaan* The child of an old woman A knowledgeable
and dexterous person

Other Beliefs and Practices

- (xxv) *Bod abañ sio inua* Mould a pot up to Complete a task
the mouth

- (xxvi) *Anwunwaan afoñ* A woman of clothes A mere
woman

afoñ

(xxvii) *Mboppo atooro idem* A fattened maiden who praises One who engages in herself. self-praise

Metaphoric Frame-based motivation occurs when metaphors have conceptual structure which is grounded in the lived experiences of speakers of a language. Their meanings are motivated at the abstract metaphorical model. The idiom *FΛk áwó ékpó ñkīm ànyèn* is situated within the conceptual metaphor COMPREHENSION IS SIGHT. It literally means “cover someone with a spirit that covers the eye”. It alludes to the traditional Ibibio belief that an individual can be hypnotized through voodoo or sorcery with the use of incantations which mobilize spirits to influence a person’s sense of reasoning by waving a piece of cloth over the victim’s face. The intrinsic cultural element is the belief in a metaphysical entity which can make people unable to reason clearly, thereby causing them to make wrong decisions. David, a thirty seven year old man blamed his absence of sound reasoning which led to the purchase a dilapidated television set by using the idiom. The pragmatic function of the use of this idiom is to provide an excuse for an action. *Sin mkpo ke anyen* points at the belief that a sorcerer’s use of liquid concoctions

on the eyes of a person can enhance one’s intuitive knowledge. This was a practice in traditional Ibibio societies. Enobong, a thirty five year old speaker of Ibibio who likened her pastor’s ability to accurately predict what would happen to a church member to having “put something in the eye” informs hearers of the person’s enhanced ability to discern. It belongs to the conceptual metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS SIGHT, where knowledge of events in one’s future is determined by one’s visualization of it. *DΛk mkpo* “enter something” highlights the Conceptual metaphor SECRET SOCIETIES ARE CIRCLES. It is used to provide information about the social status of a person who belongs to a secret society. Referring to the cause of the death of a wealthy fellow trader, Uduak, a fifty year old woman remarked that the deceased had joined a secret society which facilitated his untimely death. This creation of this idiom is anchored on the existence of secret societies like the *Inam* cult in traditional times. The metaphor is based on the strict initiation processes, conduct of members and spiritual and material benefits which accrued only to them. This made such societies enclosed

groups which could only be “entered” when the strict initiation requirements were met.

Samson, a fifty-two year old trader on fabrics used the idiom *Akpa ndieehe abod* to taunt his teenage son for selling some yards of fabric below the cost price. This idiom represents the conceptual metaphor EXISTENCE IS TRAVELLING. It alludes to the Ibibio people’s longstanding belief in re-incarnation, with the notion that deceased people return to the world to live again, entering as babies. This notion is revealed in the literal meaning “the first I have come to the world”. The child is therefore seen as the traveller who has arrived their destination for the first time. Children who display wisdom and wit are said to have existed in this world in times past. On the other hand, individuals with naive and gullible dispositions are believed to be existing in the world for the first time. The argument is that anyone who has been in the world before has gathered experience and acquired enough knowledge to navigate the challenges in their present lives. *Nie mfon iso* “have a good face” is derived from the Ibibio people’s belief that each individual’s earthly existence has been predetermined, and the occurrences in human lives are determined by fate. When positive events take place, a person is

perceived as having a “good face” while the occurrence of negative events leads to the conclusion that the individual is ill-fated because they have a “bad face”. This idiom is situated within the conceptual metaphor FATE IS AN INDIVIDUAL POSSESSION and the use of the idiom as a remark refers to being lucky. Using the idiom, Udeme, a 29 year old trader remarked that on a particular day, she hardly sold any fruits because that was her fate for that day. This portrays her acceptance of the situation in good faith.

The meanings of the second category of idioms are motivated because they belong to the basic level cases of The Metaphoric Frame Based Metaphors. They are cultural representations of the lived experiences of speakers in the remote past, howbeit structured cognitively. Earlier stated, motivation takes place at the level of the lexical structuring of the expressions. The frame is formed from the literal meanings of the words in the idioms..

Díppé étó míá íbìd which literally means “act impulsively” is derived from the beating of traditional Ibibio drum *íbìd* which requires the use of sticks *étó*. It idiomatically means “being hasty”. This idiom metaphorically represents the creation of melody from beating Ibibio native drums in a coordinated

manner. This requires knowledge of the song and steps to be drummed for, which are not carried out hastily in order not to ruin dance performances. It was used by Edet, a thirty three year old Ibibio trader to explain the reason he would not rush into stocking up a product he was unsure of making huge sales of. According to him, he did not want to incur losses. The resultant lack of melody is the source domain, while the losses which would likely be suffered, is the target domain. This idiom expresses a moral philosophy which is the importance of self-restraint as a survival strategy. It is usually utilized to advice. *Dùòk ínÀñ ké nsìà ébìdòñ* which idiomatically means “engage in a futile venture” is equated with the act of pouring salt on the stomach of a porcupine which is being prepared for a meal. The fact that its bitter taste is not altered by this act is the source domain from where the meaning is derived. The unchanged bitter nature is the metaphor from which the futile outcome is captured.

The idiomatic meaning of *Tá mbìàm!* is derived from the traditional practice of chewing a mixture of leaves or barks of trees to take oaths. These materials, believed to be sacred and capable of indicting or vindicating suspected offenders were employed in traditional adjudication

processes. The frames within which the expression is placed are accused persons, deities and shrines which they appear before, where they prove their innocence. This is in addition to the statements which request the deity to instantly condemn or vindicate those who appear before them. The outcome is where an offender is swept away by a river in which they stand to be judged if found guilty. This idiom highlights this practice as a social norm. It emphasizes the traditional religious belief in the justice served by spiritual beings. For instance, an offender could be swept away by a river in which they are judged, at the instance of a river goddess. It represents the Ibibio traditional religious belief in the involvement of metaphysical entities in the maintenance of social order. Uko, a twenty five year old trader in dry pepper used the idiom to threaten a tax agent who denied collecting any levy from him on a market day. The source domain within the idiom is the process of oath-taking, while the target domain is swearing.

Another idiom motivated by frames domiciled in traditional Ibibio society is *wod titia itaad*. It literally means “showing a teacher a stone”. It’s metaphorical meaning is framed within formal education in the remote past. Learners pointed at the stone

slabs to show understanding of what was taught. This took place as teachers inspected their classwork. The source domain is the traditional experience of formal education while the target domain is literacy. Illiterates are referred to as “those who had never shown a teacher a stone”. Enobong, a fifty six year old used the idiom to explain the reason she did not understand the instruction on a medication she bought the previous day. The use of this idiom fulfils the pragmatic function of informing. It highlights the importance the Ibibio people place on formal education *nìm ùsùñ ké údΛñ béd àsén* which idiomatically means “keep a matter for an appropriate time”, the concept of waiting, which is the target domain is drawn from the the traditional practice of hospitality where yam foofoo is left in a mortar, in preparation for the entertainment of guests who are being expected. This idiom projects the Ibibio perspective of hospitality and importance of adequate preparation for guests, which was usually carried out using dishes such as the staple “foofoo”. The pragmatic function of advising is performed, where Effiong, a trader in second hand wears used the idiom to restrain his friend against explaining the latter’s reason for refusing to pay for damaged wares he received from his

supplier. According to him, it would be better to explain the situation in the right forum.

Sin iko ke ufok was used to instruct parties in a negotiation where a meeting of stakeholders was held to decide the penalty for staying within the market beyond six pm. Isaiah, a thirty- three year old shoe mender explains that his use of the expression which literally means “put talk in a house” was to make them conclude a matter. The idiom is motivated by the process of adjudication in most Ibibio societies when elders of villages returned inside the house where the meeting was held, to give their submissions over a case which is being judged. In order to give the right judgement, they usually stepped out of the space where they listened to testaments and viewed evidence. This moment enabled them to discuss their opinions on the undergoing case and come to a conclusion which would enable the community head to come to a final verdict which would be fair. While the source domain is the return to the meeting location, the target domain is the summary or conclusion of a matter. In addition to this, *Ben uta ke fid ke itie mfen* which alludes to *uta*, a performance in the traditional Ibibio society features the horn, an important instrument for the performance of the dance. This performance, which is characterized

by dancing, singing and traditional music instruments usually drew the attention of communities where they occurred forms the source domain for the target domain “trouble” or “nuisance”. This is because for those who are not interested in the cultural performance, it became a nuisance. This idiom was used to instruct a buyer who insisted that she would not buy a piece of dry fish for a particular amount of money. Eka Sunday, explained that the idiom was used due to her several experiences with the particular buyer as someone who always prices her items very low. The idiom admonished the buyer to take her nuisance to another seller. An altercation had occurred at the time of gathering the data, leading to the use of the idiom. This idiom is a product of dance performances which was a feature of the Ibibio entertainment in traditional times.

The idiomatic meaning of *D/k ikod wuo us/Λn no awo* is conveyed using the action of an ekpo masquerade who is infuriated by the action of someone or something they come across in their outing. This act is the source domain for the target domain “indignation”. The researcher has personally witnessed an occasion where an ekpo masquerade veered into the bush and cut down plantain trees with a machet in a bid to express its anger upon being

approached by another masquerade from a neighbouring village. Edet, a 93 year old speaker of Ibibio explains that masquerades usually displayed such anger when they engaged in a show of superiority. This was often marked by the inscription of esoteric riddles for the opposing party to solve. The feud was usually resolved when riddles, written on the floor before them, were solved. The idiom showcases the existence of secret societies and their activities in traditional Ibibio societies. Paul, a 41 year old trader in household plastic items says that he used the idiom to warn someone who had not submitted his money for a contribution scheme earlier agreed by them. *Da ke ud/Λn*, which draws imagery from *ud/Λn*, a traditional kitchen utensil used for pounding food items into fine textures is another idiom which provides insight into the ways of life of the Ibibio people. Literally meaning “stand on a mortar”, this act is the source domain for “naivety” or “ignorance”. The analogy is drawn the use of the mortar as a platform for increasing the reach of children who need to reach the top of native kitchen pantries. Magaret, a 51 year old trader on tomatoes used the idiom to question her nineteen year old daughter’s sale of her wares which resulted to their incurring losses. While it captures the significance of

wisdom attributed to age, this idiom provides a window through which the contents of the Ibibio can be visualized.

The third category of idioms is comprehended as a result of the Symbol Based Type of Motivation. Certain properties are ascribed to key lexical items in the expressions. Such characteristics are due to the way the Ibibio society views them. *Mboppo atooro idem* reflects the practice of fattening maidens in the Ibibio traditional society. Before a maiden was handed over to her husband, she underwent a period of confinement where she was fed with sumptuous meals to increase her size and give her a voluptuous look. Native cosmetic materials were also rubbed on her to make her skin glow. At the end of the stipulated time, she was handed to her husband amidst fanfare and celebration. She was also praised for her size and beauty. The figurative meaning of this idiom is in the fact that she was not supposed to praise herself as this would be indicative of pride or arrogance. This idiom presents the *Mboppo* as a symbol of beauty and grace which is an obvious characteristic. She is therefore scorned if she decides to engage in self-praise. From traditional Ibibio society, a witch is a symbol of destruction and the

idiomatic meaning of the idiom *Ifód átá idem* points to this. The idiom figuratively refers to an individual who is responsible for the predicament which befalls them. It alludes to the practice of witchcraft in Ibibio land where it is believed that witches eat their human victims. This it is said takes place in their covens in the metaphysical realm. In this case however, the destruction is carried out by “eating” oneself. Madam Nko, a fifty five year old trader on dried crayfish used the idiom to justify what befalls her friend’s son-in-law, who had just been arrested for being in possession of indian hemp. According to her, he had been warned repeatedly to refrain from engaging in the sales of the item. The latter had therefore brought the trouble on himself. *Ukpoñ adi wuo awo* projects the Ibibio people’s belief that a human being has a soul which can leave the body in moments of pressure and metaphysical encounters such as near-death situations. The soul is a symbol of mobility in the traditional Ibibio cosmology. Used by Essien, a fifty five year old seller of frozen fish, the idiom informs listeners of the apprehension he approaches his suppliers to question the reason for their delivery of a smaller carton of fish when he paid for a bigger one.

The value placed on the female gender in traditional times is obvious in the attribution of values to her based on outward adornment or clothes, rather than abilities. The meaning of *Anwunwaan afoñ afoñ* is motivated by this notion. This expression highlights the patriarchal nature of the traditional Ibibio society and their perception of the female gender in terms of materials of adornment which they visualize as her preoccupation. The figurative sense conveyed by this expression is based on what the female gender represents, which is that they of little value. Akan, a twenty seven year old seller of goat meat used the idiom to taunt a fellow meat seller who had appeased the family of his estranged wife in order to bring her back home. The use of the idiom highlights the value placed on the female gender by the Ibibio society in the remote past. Other symbols present are in *Udua ikpa enañ* and *Dia afañ ta ikpa*, where the cow is visualised as a symbol of affluence, and the consumption of its meat is seen as a show of luxury. In traditional Ibibio society, the consumption of meat and its use for meals served in occasions was the reserve of the rich. People sometimes boasted when they slaughtered life cows for occasions like burials. They proudly said that they had “staked a cow” for the

entertainment of guests at their deceased family members funerals. Lucy, a thirty three year old trader in children’s second hand shoes exclaimed *ndad mo idem udia afañ nta ikpa* when she was congratulated for buying a brand new android phone. This statement meant that she could not have bought the phone, since she could not afford it. It turned out that the phone belonged to a customer who had forgotten it in her shop. Within this context, the idiom was used to mock.

The Ibibio people’s idea of soup as a culinary delight is projected in the idioms *dia mkpo ke afere* and *afere obu obu*. The earlier expression is derived from the traditional soup and *foofoo* combination which formed a staple in the traditional Ibibio society. Soup was an important part of everyday culinary experience. It is usually accompanied with a firm paste (*foofoo*), produced from yam, cocoyam and cassava or *garri*, a dry, flaky substance which is made into a firm paste using boiling water. The ingestion of soup which exists in various forms was enjoyed by the people. Using this idiom, Naomi, a twenty five year old owner of a restaurant within the market remarked when her colleagues teased her about enjoying increased patronage of her services. Soup as an important feature of the traditional

people's menu is also highlighted in the second idiom. However, the use of crayfish (*obu*) which symbolizes lack draws from the absence of meat provided by hunting activities which men in the society engaged. Also, the use of crayfish alone does not provide the needed taste and appeal when served. It is also visualized as ordinary, hence the analogy is made between the two domains. The expression *Idooho afere obo obu* was used by Ekerete, a forty two year old seller of chicken feed to refute the statement that retail grocery sales is more profitable than wholesale ones. The Ekpo masquerade is a symbol of fear and dread. The idiom *FΛho ekpo yak nsaña ikod* which literally means "cover the masquerade let me walk in the bush" is derived from the traditional religious belief that masquerades are spirits of dead ancestors. These beings are said to superintend over the affairs of mortals and help maintain law and order. To this end, the masquerade, being spiritual entities were not supposed to display familiarity to anyone. As the masquerades walked through the community, initiates and non-initiates were expected to keep a safe distance from them. In a bid to put pressure on a supplier of bottled drinks to sell to him, Usen, a forty-four year old drinks vendor used the idiom on the earlier. It served as a

reminder of the long standing business relationship they have. *Sin ekpo usΛñ idim no awo* is derived from the age long belief that spirits of dead persons can be invoked to interfere in the affairs of humans. These spirits were also feared and putting one of them on the path to the stream, which the idiom literally refers to, stops individuals who go there. Emmanuel, a thirty nine year old provider of wheel barrow haulage services used the idiom to warn a colleague who contended with him to ferry a customer's bags to its destination. Lastly, old age, which is a symbol of wisdom and dexterity, is domiciled *akaan anwaan* (old woman) in *ayen akaan anwan*, while the woman as a symbol of nurture and parental authority is captured using the "breast" in *mia eba esid no awo*. In the earlier instance, The Ibibio community's acknowledgement of the wealth of knowledge in the elderly members of the society and their ability to impart skill, tact and prudence is made available. This is in addition to the place of the woman in the inculcation of the needed values for the proper conduct of children in the society. Ekaete, a twenty two year old hair dresser used the earlier idiom which literally means "the child of an old woman", to justify her ability to manage her young family and

business successfully. The Ibibio strongly believe that the sacrifices a woman makes to raise a child bestows upon her the capacity to curse them when they exhibit delinquent behaviour. Eka Ebong, a sixty year old trader in plantain used the latter idiom which literally means “beat the breast of the chest for someone” to threaten her son who refused to assist her sell in the stall.

Discussion

This paper analysed idioms in Ibibio using the Metaphor Frame-Based and Symbol Type frameworks. This was in a bid to identify the cultural motivation, cognitive patterns and historical experiences within which the idioms investigated are situated. They emanate from the metaphors which highlight the source domains which provide the frames within which the concepts referred to are culled are mostly from religious and superstitious beliefs and practices, as well as culinary activity and hospitality. The dominant use of domains in religious and superstitious beliefs shows the intersection between the Ibibio people’s cosmology and belief in the interaction of mortals and metaphysical entities in the traditional society. The extent of this engagement is found in the conceptual metaphor FATE IS AN

INDIVIDUAL POSSESSION, with the latter being the source domain and the earlier, the target domain. The experience of distinguishing one person from another due to their distinct facial features underpins the fact that one’s face only belongs to them. To this end the reference that fate also belongs to a particular individual and no other, is established in *níé mfón ísó* . In SECRET SOCIETIES ARE CIRCLES, the target domain ‘secret societies’ are conceptualized in terms of the practice of initiation which ushers a male member of the society. According to Edet, a 93 year old cultural historian, the process of initiation included the act of oath taking and issuance of a password which initiates were warned not to divulge. The fulfilment of these requirements among other things made them join the circle of members of secret societies such as *Ekpo Ekooñ* and *Abon* . They were also confined to the obedience of other rules of the cult. This is exemplified in *dΛk mkpó*. The influence of the supernatural can also be visualized in COMPREHENSION IS SIGHT, KNOWLEDGE IS SIGHT and EXISTING IS TRAVELLING This is visible in *FΛk áwó ékpó ñkím ànyèn, Sin mkpo ke anyen* and *akpa ndieehe abod*. These idioms capture the spirits’ ability to destabilize a

person's reasoning, an enhanced capacity to foretell the future using sorcery, and the superstition behind reincarnation, respectively.

The existence of basic level metaphors cut across all the domains identified in this work. They are distributed evenly across traditional religious and superstitious beliefs and practices, dance performance, culinary activity and hospitality, knowledge and education and the justice system. These wider domains provide the frames within which metaphors can be understood and the idioms can be interpreted. The involvement of metaphysical beings with humans is visible in the use of hypnotism, and the maintenance of social order through the deliverance of judgement. Found in *tá mbiàm* and *fΛk áwó ékpó ñk#m ànyèn*, the act of oath taking and hypnotism constitutes the source domains for swearing and deception. These frames provide the idioms with metaphysical metaphors. The use of frames from culinary activity and hospitality also reveals the importance the Ibibio attached to certain dishes as well as the resources and methods used to prepare them. This domain accounts for the second highest number of idioms extracted for this study. For instance, the acts referred to in the idioms *dùòk ínΛñ ké nsìà ébìòñ* and *nìm ùsùñ ké údΛñ béd àsén* serve as the source domains for

the concepts of futility and waiting. They provide the idioms with food metaphors. Other metaphors discovered are entertainment metaphors, adjudication metaphors and education or knowledge metaphors. They are etched in the historical trajectory of the Ibibio people. Examples of idioms identified are *díppé étó míá íbìd*, *sín íkò ké úfòk* and *wód títià ítiáád*. the concepts of haste, concluding or summarizing and literacy are drawn from the acts of picking a stick and beating a drum, putting a matter in a house and showing a teacher a stone, respectively.

Symbol Based metaphors are expressions which are grounded in the ways of life of the people. Idioms within which they feature are predominantly from religious and supernatural beliefs and practices as well as culinary activities and hospitality. The symbols identified for the earlier are 'ghosts' or 'spirits', the *Ekpo* masquerade, 'the soul' and 'the witch'. They are found in *fΛhó ékpó yàk áwó ásáñà íkód*, *sín ékpó úsΛñ ìdìm nò áwó*, *úkpòñ àdí wùó áwó* and *ìfód átá idem*. Ghosts or spirits are indices of the belief in life after death, with those in the afterlife being seen in fleeting moments and experienced by so humans as harmful and sometimes deadly. The *Ekpo* masquerade is traditionally seen by

the Ibibio as an icon of law and order. It was known to instil discipline in the society by carrying out sanctions among other things, on offenders. The soul is also an iconic symbol. It represents the experience that part of humans which the Ibibio believe to be what hold the body together. On the other hand, the witch is a symbol of destruction. The traditional Ibibio society believed that witches killed their victims through cannibalism and the manipulation of their human spirit. Symbols from the latter group are 'soup' and 'cow meat'. They occur in idioms like *díá mkpó ké áféré*, and *díá áfàñ tá íkpá*, The symbolism of soup as largesse is drawn from its place as a culinary delight on the menu of the people. On the other hand, cow meat is constructed from the people's general disposition to modest living, due to their socio economic status as subsistent farmers, hunters and fishermen at the time. Symbols like the *mboppo*, a woman's breast and old age are iconic. They are drawn from traditional practices such as the 'fattening of maidens', 'nurture' and 'old age'. The idioms within which they occur are *dó mbòppó átòrò idem*, *míá ébá ésid nò áwó* and *áyín ákààn ànwààn*, These symbols are formed from The Ibibio people's experience in traditional times.

This work observes, that while complete experiences provide the source domains from where the target concepts in conceptual metaphors are adopted, individual acts are used to refer to concepts at the basic level of metaphor. This is in contrast with the use of symbolic items for the Symbol Type of motivation which uses items, people, action and events as symbols.

Conclusion

Language remains a veritable tool for the transmission of materials which are domiciled in the cultural and historical realities of materials from one generation to another. A form of language which effects this transfer is the idiom. In this paper, the role of figurative expressions in achieving not only the communicative function of language, but the transmission of a people's cultural heritage and historical artefacts cutting across different domains has been established. Ibibio idioms carry meanings that are constructed from speakers' shared experiences, religious inclinations and traditional practices, comprising rich encyclopaedic knowledge of how communities operated in the remote past. Through an investigation of the metaphorical and symbolic motivations which constitute the mechanisms for interpreting culture reflective idioms in Ibibio, this study

also shows how cognition and culture on one hand, and the literal and figurative meanings of the expressions on the other hand are bridged to facilitate understanding and transmission of these forms from one generation to another.

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