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PROVERBS AND TRANSMISSION OF MORAL NORMS IN UMUNNACHI DIALECT OF IGBO

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ABSTRACT

Proverb is an important aspect of culture. Many tribes in Nigeria tend to use proverbs in their speech in order to teach morals and values among their citizens. This paper examines proverbs as a tool for transmission of moral norms in Umunnachi dialect of Igbo. The aim of this paper is to analyze some of the Umunnachi proverbs that teach morals. The objectives of this study are: to categorize the Umunnachi proverbs, to project proverbs as part of the cultural heritage of the Umunnachi people and to find out the moral lessons they teach. The data for this study were gathered through interview and introspection of the researcher since the researcher is a native speaker of Umunnachi. Some data were also gotten from the review of related literature. The data were analyzed within the framework of Ethnography of Communication. This study discovered that Igbo proverbs perform the same function in every occasion where it is used in human communication. This is because it teaches moral and maintains conformity to cultural values and accepted patterns of behavior. It is also discovered that there has not been any previous research work or any critical attention given to the proverbs of Umunnachi people which teach morals. This study concludes that Igbo people embrace proverbs as a means of teaching moral norms in their society.

Keywords: Proverbs, Transmission, Moral Norms, Umunnachi, Dialect, Igbo.

Introduction

Every inhabitant of the world has its own culture and traditions which govern and guide their moral behavior. Igbo, as one of the ethnic groups in Nigeria, has a rich cultural heritage and traditional proverbs which is one of the ways by which moral values are passed on. Proverbs are concise sayings which have independent meanings of their own. They are concise, traditional and memorable expressions which express wisdom or general truth. They serve as condensed packages of traditional wisdom, distilled from cultural experiences and passed down through generations. They are very important aspect of African culture and tradition. They also serve as a vehicle through which traditional wisdoms, norms and values are transmitted to the society. They have been and remain the most powerful and effective instrument for the transmission of culture, social morality, manners and ideas of a people from one generation to another.

Proverbs are deeply rooted in the culture and history of a community. According to Igboanusi, in Ayodabo and Kofa (2010), "Culture refers to "the totality of the people's way of life which defines a certain outlook on life, a certain morality, a certain disposition, a certain spirit of the people". We learn our culture from our fore-bearers and contemporaries, and then pass it to future generations. They reflect the values, beliefs, customs and experiences of the people who use them. Proverbs derive their meaning from the specific cultural and social context in which they are used.

Proverbs come from different sources, most of them anonymous and all of them difficult to trace. Its first appearance in literary form is often an adaptation of an oral song. Most literate societies have valued their proverbs and collected them for posterity. There are ancient Egyptian collections dating from as early as 2500 BC. According to Woods, C. (2006, pp. 91-120), Sumerian inscriptions give grammatical rules in proverbial form. Sumerian was the language of ancient Summer. For instance, proverbs were used in ancient China for ethical instruction and the Vedic writings in India used them to expound philosophical ideas. The biblical book of proverbs, traditionally associated with Solomon, actually includes sayings from earlier compilations. One of the earliest English proverb collections is the so-called proverbs of Alfred (c. 1150-80), containing religious and moral precepts. The use of proverbs in monasteries to teach novices Latin, in schools of rhetoric and in sermons, homilies and didactic works made them widely known. It also led to their preservation in manuscripts. The use of proverbs in literature and oratory was at its height in England in the 16th and 17th centuries. John Heywood (1963, p. 6) wrote a dialogue in proverbs and Michael Drayton (1563-1631), a sonnet. In the 16th century, a speech in proverbs was made in the House of Commons. In the North America, the best known use of proverbs is probably in Poor Richard (2004), an almanac published annually between 1732 and 1757 by Benjamin Franklin. The study of folklore in the 20th century has brought renewed interest in the proverbs as a reflection of folk culture.

According to Akporobaro (2019, p. 105), "Like any other major ethnic group, the Igbo people have evolved a very rich tradition of proverbs. These proverbs not only cover all aspects of life, they are for the most part philosophical, pragmatic and didactic". This shows that the Igbo people have very rich traditional proverbs which cover all aspects of life. Some major themes which feature in Igbo proverbs include themes of human nature, human vices, social norms, etiquette, good manners, the value of children and wisdom, the characteristics of women, and routes to a successful life. Other themes relate to situations of despair, courage, deprivation, poverty, riches, childlessness and respect among others. In addition, in societies where the moral behavior of the people is governed by social norms, proverbs are very effective checks on people's behavior. It also censors defaulters or praise those who conform to the ethics of the tribe.

Umunnachi can be classified as a dialect of Igbo which is spoken mainly by the Umunnachi people of Anambra State. According to Umunnachi Improvement Union (2017, p. 9), "Umunnachi is a town in Dunukofia Local Government Area of Anambra State in Southeastern Nigeria. It is made up of five villages and shares boundaries with neighboring towns such as Ogidi, Umudioka, Eziowelle, and Ifitedunu". This means that this town is situated in South East part of the country. It is one of the towns that make up the ancient Dunukofia clan from which the Local Government Area was created. Farming is the primary

economic activity of the people. They also have aquatic life since they have one major Spring Water known as Mmiri Ọka and a Stream Water known as Mmiri Mgbọ. They also have some local markets and also some Government schools. Igwe Felix Onochie was nominated by the people of Umunnachi as their first Traditional Ruler and was crown as the king of Umunnachi on 23rd of December, 1977. He later died on 5th November 2016 at the age of 90 years and was replaced by another traditional ruler whose name is Igwe Engr. Benedict Igwebuike Anochie. This traditional ruler is the present Igwe in Umunnachi town till date. In Nnachi Ọgụ, as the indigenes are fondly called, the ability to use and understand the meaning of a proverb, no doubt, proves that one is indeed a "Nwaafọ". With increased globalization and multicultural interactions, younger generations of Nnachi people are exposed to a wide range of culture and dialects. This exposure leads to a blending of different linguistic styles and a departure from traditional proverbs specific to the Nnachi dialect. This informed the collection of various categories of Umunnachi proverbs which transmit moral norms to the indigenes of this community.

This study will contribute to the study of proverbs as well as show the relationship that exists between Umunnachi people and the rest of the world. It will also serve as reference materials for further studies on proverbs, culture and norms of the Umunnachi people.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Igbo

Following Rafiu and Adekunle (2020, p. 30), Igbo belongs to the kwa language family. This language is spoken by about 24 million people in the south eastern part of Nigeria. It is also spoken in the northeast of Delta State and southeast of Rivers State. Here, Igbo language is described as an aspect of kwa language, spoken in Northeast of Delta State, Southeast of Rivers State and Eastern states of Nigeria. According to Adekunle (2019, p. 6), Igbo is taught at all levels of education in the eastern Nigrian schools, but English remains the principal literary language of the country. Here, Igbo language is used as the language of education and is given status as one of the National languages.

Concept of Proverb

Mohammad and Majed (2019, p. 42) state that "proverbs add flavor to the idea or truth we want to express based on common sense and a community's shared experience". This shows that proverb adds more taste and flavor to the communication of a people based on their experiences. Omoera and Inegbeboh citing Manikas-Forester and Syswerd (1990, P. 17) present their position in these words," …these wise sayings (proverb) describe patterns that operate in everyday life, offering us advice on how to conduct ourselves in various situations". Here, proverb is described as an acceptable way of life which is used in everyday life. It also offers advice to people on how to behave in the acceptable manner.

Concept of Norms

Sherif (1965, p.3) explains norms as the jointly negotiated rules for social behavior, the custom, traditions, rules, values, fashions and all other criteria of conduct which are standardized as a consequence of the contact of individuals. Granovetter (2004, pp. 33-50) defines norms in simple terms as the shared ideas about the proper way to behave. This means individual acts and practices must be in line with the acceptable ways and manners of the society.

Concept of Umunnachi Dialect

Umunnachi can be classified as a dialect of Igbo. Dialect refers to a variety of a language spoken by a particular group of people in a specific geographical area. A dialect is the unique linguistic characteristics and regional identities of the communities that use them. The Umunnachi dialect is spoken mainly by the Umunnachi people of Anambra State. According to Umunnachi Improvement Union (2017, p. 9), "Umunnachi is a town in Dunukofia Local Government Area of Anambra State in Southeastern Nigeria. It is made up of five villages which include Nkwelle, Umueze, Ozzuh, Mgbuke, and Nagbana. It shares boundaries with neighboring towns such as Ogidi, Umudioka, Eziowelle, and Ifitedunu". This means that this town is situated in South East part of the country and is one of the towns that make up the ancient Dunukofia clan from which the Local Government Area was created.

Review of Related Literature

The word 'proverb' can be seen from different perspectives by different people. Different scholars have defined the term proverb from varied perspectives. According to *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (2000, p. 137), "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten. … Use of proverb also enables the speaker to attack an opponent obliquely, without mentioning his name or the subject of the dispute. Proverbs express not only a people's inherited wisdom and code of behavior (…) but also imagination and sense of humour" Here, proverb is described as an essential ingredient used in communication. It also shows the wisdom and code of behavior of the people as well as their imaginations and the sense of humour.

Finnegan (1970, p. 81) notes that " proverb is a saying in more or less fixed form, marked by shortness, sense, salt and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth expressed in it."

Here, proverb is viewed as an expression which usually has a fixed form, sense, flavour and also also clearly known by its general acceptable form of the truth that it expressed.

Taylor (2003, p.13) observes proverbs as "the simple truths of life that contain the ethical, moral and sociological values of a society". This shows that proverbs are simple truths which contain the ethical, moral norms, values and sociological values of a society.

According to Akporobaro (2019, p.78), "proverbs are essential ingredients in African speech and culture. They are powerful carrier of traditional wisdom, social mores, and are effective means for moral education of all members of the society". Here, proverb is described as an important aspect of African communication and culture. This is because in it is embedded traditional wisdom, social mores and moral norms. It is also an effective means for moral education of all members of the society.

Empirical Studies

Different scholars have embarked on various studies on proverbs in the Igbo society. Shelton (1971, p. 89) analyzed Igbo proverbs by mere stitching of words as he found them in Igbo English Dictionary/. For instance, an Igbo proverb: "Ewe (sic) sị na ọ fọdụrụ nwa ntị ma iku arụọ yam ma". He gave the meaning as: "Monkey says that he could have remained a little child, but his eyebrows produced his beauty". But a typical Igbo person who understands the context of the proverb will give its meaning as "The monkey thinks that his eyelashes nearly

cost him his beauty". Shelton's work is faulty since the meaning is not determined by individual words and the meaning of a word resides in the speaker's context of use. This flaw is inherent in the referential theory of meaning.

Ndiribe (2015, pp. 50-59) analyzed few standard Igbo proverbs using the framework of Lakoff (1987, p. 63-100) image schema of metaphorical analysis. This study shows that the image schema like Path, Force, Containment and Casual Schemas play important roles in highlighting the context of proverbs. However, Ndiribe examined proverbs based on contextual meaning. But since proverbs are deeply rooted in specific cultures, the present work took cognizance of proverbs which teach morals using the Umunnachi dialect.

Nwachukwu-Agbada (2002, p.5) makes the role of context much more succinct when he speaks of Igbo proverbs as a documentation of the lives of the people at a particular time and as a way of drawing attention to an event outside of it such that even a non-metaphorical saying is an encapsulation of a course of action or an observation which is a summary of the view of tradition. He argues that it is context that validates a proverb of any society as a tool of communication. He describes Igbo proverbs as a documentation of the lives of the people at an particular point in time. Here, he argues that it is context that validates a proverb in communication. In none of these attempts is proverbial discourse examined from the aspect of transmission of moral norms as this one does. It would therefore be interesting to introduce this dimension of study of Umunnachi dialect of Igbo and in so doing contribute to knowledge.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the theory of Ethnography of Communication in examining the proverbs of Umunnachi dialect of Igbo which teach moral to its citizens. Ethnography of Communication is the study of language use within the background of the social and cultural practices and beliefs of a people. Hymes (1964, p. 160) states that "Ethnography of Communication is the analysis of communication within the wider context of the social, cultural practices and beliefs of the members of a particular culture or speech community". It studies the interactions amid the certain members of a particular culture or a particular speech community, which has its own speaking codes and norms within the society.

The choice of this theory is as a result of its suitability in analyzing proverbs as a vehicle for transmission of moral norms in Umunnachi dialect of Igbo. The use of proverb is general in the Igbo culture and language. In addition, before an elderly Igbo man makes one sentence or gives an advice to a person, he must use some proverbs to drive home his message. This is why Chinua Achebe rightly states that "proverb is like a palm oil with which words are eaten by Igbo people". In addition, for one to be able to use proverbs, one must have some competence in that particular language. Therefore, it is within this framework that every datum in this paper will be analyzed.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

In this section, there is presentation of data on proverbs which teach moral and also sustain moral norms in Igbo society using Umunnachi dialect of Igbo. These proverbs are categorized according to the moral norms or vices which they are transmitting or trying to correct in the society such as theft, laziness, promiscuity or waywardness, unreliable person, farming and

person about to get married. In addition, their literal meanings as well as the moral norm which they are communicating will also be given. These proverbs collected and analyzed so far are all in Umunnachi dialect. In this section, all the necessary syllables of the Umunnachi data are tone marked. Some of the examples of these collected and analyzed Umunnachi proverbs are shown below:

1. Proverbs on Theft

a. ꜜOkáfọ̀ á dīghī èzú órì mànà ọ́gáfèé, íhé èfùé.

Literal/ Figurative Meaning: Okafor is not a thief but whenever he passes, things get lost.

Figurative/ Cultural Meaning:

This proverb simply means that Okafor is a thief. It shows someone who cannot be trusted since wherever he passes, things will start missing. It is a kind of ironical statement which states that he is not a thief, but wherever he passes by, people will start looking for their things. It means that he is a terrible thief. This proverb is therefore teaching the moral norm of not engaging in stealing of any kind. It is discouraging our youths from theft and other negative vices which they practice in the society. It is also communicating the moral value of being trustworthy, living a reliable lifestyle and avoidance of stealing on the listeners and the society at large. It is therefore transmitting these cultural norms in the young ones, indigenes and other individuals in the society.

b. Áná ètí ọ́nyé órí jī ìhé, ̀ọ̀ wèré óbì ná- àpị̀ ̀mbàzụ̀.

Literal Meaning: When a thief is being beaten for stealing of something, he will be holding his digging hoe.

Literal/ Figurative Meaning:

This proverb means that the thief does not have remorse or regret for his actions of stealing. Instead, while he is being punished for his wrong doing, he is busy getting ready for his next escapade. He has stealing in his blood and is not ready to repent.

This proverb is therefore teaching the young ones the moral norm of repentance and being remorseful for their wrong doings. It is discouraging the Igbo people from being unrepentant and stubborn when they are being corrected as well as to desist from any kind of evil. It serves as a warning to anyone living a lifestyle which is in disagreement with the societal norms, values and orientation, thereby, reminding an evil doer that he would pay a regrettable price for his evil deeds. In this way, wrong doing is discouraged and restrained. This brings about law and order in the human society and goes a long way in encouraging the morally conscious person that is living a good life pays at the long run. Hence, that kind of person makes very conscious effort in doing what is right so as to attract goodness to himself and others.

2. Proverbs on Laziness

a. Ngáná kpùchíé útē, águúū̀ èkùghéé yā.

Literal Meaning: The result of laziness is hunger.

Figurative/ Cultural Meaning:

This proverb is teaching the young ones that when one is lazy and does not want to work hard, hunger will force that person to work. It is encouraging the young ones to be industrious and hard working and avoid laziness of any kind.

It therefore serves as a warning to the children, individuals and academics as a whole about the result of laziness in their lives. It is also communicating the moral value of hardworking and industriousness in the young ones and the society at large, as well as discouraging people from being lazy.

b. Áká nā-ējē ózí ̀ngáná ̀ngáná nà- èjé n'ọ̀kụ́ nrī ̀ngáná ̀ngáná.
Literal Meaning: A hand that works lazily during cooking will also go for food dishing lazily.

Figurative/ Cultural Meaning:
This proverb is teaching the young ones that when one is lazy and isolates one's self from the family during work or cooking time, one will not be able to associate with them freely when they are eating or enjoying themselves. But when one works with them and helps them out during the process of suffering, one will join them freely during the time of celebration. Therefore, it then means that if one is lazy and cannot help out during working time, one should not be given food freely when it is ready for eating by the family members.

This proverb, therefore, serves as a warning to the children, Umunnachi people and everyone about the result of laziness in their lives. It is also communicating the moral value of hardworking and industriousness in the young ones and the society at large, as well as discouraging people from being lazy.

2. Proverbs on a person about to Get Married

a. Úkwà rúé ógè yá, ọ̀ dàá.
Literal Meaning: When the breadfruit reaches its time, it will fall.

Figurative/ Cultural Meaning:

This proverb means that there is time for everything under the sun (Ihé níílē nwèrè ógè n'ókpúrù ànyánwū). It also shows that God's time is the best. Whenever the time set by God for anything to happen reaches, it will come to its fulfillment.

This proverb is therefore imparting in the young ones the virtue of patience and total trust in God. This is because God is in control of the universe and everything happens according to his holy will. He is the one who decides when one's marriage will be. He is the one who instituted marriage and the set time for it in everybody's life. It is therefore teaching the youths that once it is time that God approves for them to get married, it will come to pass.

b. Ihé ónyé rùrù ógè yá á bū̀ghí ụ̀sà.
Literal Meaning: When time reaches in one's life to do something, it is not glutton or abomination to do so.
Figurative/ Cultural Meaning:

This proverb is teaching that there is time for everything in an individual's life. Therefore, when one reaches the age of doing something, he or she should do it since it is not an abomination to do so. One should move on with his age mates and peers in fulfilling what things that are expected from them in the society. They should get married when it is their set time for marriage.

This proverb is therefore communicating to the members of Umunnachi the moral norm of doing things at the right and expected time. It is also encouraging the youths to do what their parents do in the aspect of marriage.

4. Proverbs on Promiscuity or Waywardness

a. Á gbáásíạ́ égwū, ò ̩náá n'úkwù.

Literal Meaning: After dancing, it will go down to the waist.

Figurative/ Cultural Meaning:

This proverb simply means that waywardness reduces the lifespan of an individual. This is because the wayward persons have used up their body structure and their life span is therefore shortened. Therefore, this proverb is trying to point out that the reward of waywardness is shortness of life. After flirting around and fornicating during one's youth, one will bear the consequences later on when the person's health condition will break down. This proverb is therefore teaching on the youths the virtue of chastity. It serves as a warning to the youths about the consequences of living a wayward lifestyle. This is because promiscuous lifestyle can cut down their life span and lead them to early grave.

c. Àkwụ̀nà nà - èbé ákwá nwā n'ógè ńkā.

Literal Meaning: A prostitute cries for lack of a child at her old age.

Figurative/ Cultural Meaning:

This proverb simply means that a prostitute cries for lack of a child during her old age. This is because during her youthful age, she is busy embarking on abortions and fornications. However, it is during her old age that she cries and regrets about her childlessness. It is during her old age that she starts experiencing the challenges of not having a child and the comfort which children bring which she does not have. This proverb therefore serves as a warning to youths to desist from all forms of waywardness and promiscuous lifestyle since they will regret their actions during their old age. It also frowns at people embarking on all forms of abortions in order to avoid pregnancy during their youthful age. This is because they will pay a heavy price later in life. This may result in their inability to bear children as a result of abortion or lack of a partner.

5. Proverbs on a Liar or an Unreliable person

a. Ókwú tòó ūt̩ō ̩mánà yá ábù ̩nā n̄nē̄.

Literal Meaning: Let the words be sweet but let it not be the truth.

Figurative/ Cultural Meaning:

This proverb means that a liar formulates and paints words to cover up many lies so that the truth will be hidden. His intention is to say very sweet words to the ears of the listeners, but everything he is saying is a complete lie, without any atom of truth. This is usually seen during political campaigns where politicians made a lot of promises about what they will do for the people if they win the election. However, these promises are mere lip services since they are not ready to fulfill any of those promises but are only lying. This proverb is therefore inculcating in the listeners the moral norm of truthfulness. It is aimed at showing the young ones and youths that lying and speaking with sugar coated-mouth, without having the intention of fulfilling what one promised is an evil act. It is, therefore, discouraging the young

ones and youths from all forms of lying. It also agrees with the ethnographic theory in its preoccupation with culture, language, society and teaching of moral norms in Umunnachi.

b. Ághùghò̩ kà ńsí̩ ègbú ḿmádù̩.
Literal Meaning: Lying kills faster than weapons.

Figurative/ Cultural Meaning:
This proverb means that lying is very deadly and can kill faster than weapons. This is because the person that one lies against will be emotionally injured or will be having emotional problems and may also die of heart break. This proverb is therefore imparting to the listeners the cultural norm of truthfulness. It is also discouraging the young ones from lying against other people. This is because lying is very deadly and can kill faster than weapons.

6. Proverbs on Farming
a. Á lú̩á n'ánwū̩ è ríé nà ̀ndò.
Literal Meaning: If one works under the sun, one will eat under the shade.

Figurative/ Cultural Meaning:
This proverb means that when one works hard under uncomfortable conditions, he will celebrates and enjoy the fruits of his labour in a very comfortable condition. This means that when one works under the sun, one will enjoy the fruits of his labour under the shade. This is because the reward of hard work is success.

This proverb is therefore communicating to the members of Umunnachi the moral norm of industriousness and hard work. It is also discouraging the listeners from all forms of laziness and idleness. This is because it is only after working hard that one will start to reap the fruits of his labour.
b. Áká ájá ājā̄ nà - èbúté ọ́nú̩ ḿmánú̩ m̄mānū̩
Literal Meaning: Hard work brings food to the table.

Figurative/ Cultural Meaning:
This proverb means that hard work bring food to the table. Hard work brings success since there is no food for a lazy man. It also means that if one does not work, one should not eat. This proverb is therefore imparting to the listeners the cultural norm of hard work. It is also encouraging the listeners to always work hard, as well as avoid laziness and idleness of all kinds. This proverb is therefore communicating to the members of Umunnachi the moral norm of goodness. It is also discouraging them from wickedness and involvement in different kinds of evils since they will be held responsible for all their works and actions.

Summary of Findings
Having studied the data for this study through the lens of Umunnachi dialect of Igbo, it is discovered that Igbo proverbs perform the same function in every occasion where it is used in human communication. These proverbs are pointers to ethics and ethical norms among humans which are used to appreciate godly traits and well behaved attitudes while, without hesitation, frowns at the bad vices among the community members. These proverbs are also used to express social approval and disapproval, praise, criticism, warning and advice to control the young ones. One can observe that these proverbs are in different forms and styles

based on the specific purpose they are meant to achieve. These proverbs also serve as a medium for orientation, teaching of norms and values and knowledge which transcend the problems of various cultures.

In addition, all the Igbo proverbs used for data analysis were all tone marked for clearer understanding.

Conclusion

This paper studied proverb as a vehicle for the transmission of moral norms in Umunnachi dialect of Igbo. It gives detail information on the proverbs of Umunnachi people by providing some data for presentation and analysis. Some proverbs which teach morals were selected from these Igbo proverbs. They were also categorized according to the moral norms or vices which they are transmitting or trying to correct in the society. These include theft, laziness, promiscuity or waywardness, unreliable person or a liar, farming or hardworking and person about to get married. Their literal meaning as well as their cultural meaning was also analyzed through the lens of ethnography of communication. This study concludes that Umunnachi people embrace proverbs as a means of teaching moral norms in their society.

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