

ENCOURAGEMENT PROVERBS AND THEIR DISCOURSE RELEVANCE: A CASE STUDY OF OGHE DIALECT OF IGBO

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Abstract

Proverbs are said to be the palm oil with which words are eaten. Nigerian languages grow vigorously or luxuriantly on the deployment of proverbs to ground their social import of numerous conversational exchanges. The Oghe people likewise particularly employ the use of these proverbs as a condiment to flavour and decorate or beautify their speeches, regardless of the general characteristics of the meaning of what is being discussed. Proverbs are the heart of language use among the Oghe people. In all the cultures of the world, proverbs exist and have invariable applications as garments of thought. Proverbs imbue the speaker with the ability to make his or her expressions more flashy and culturally relevant to the topic of discourse. This is the reason why Africans employ them in conversations to accomplish acts which cannot be realised by ordinary words. Be that as it may, certain proverbs in Oghe dialect of Igbo are used in different settings. Using the Use theory, the objective of this paper is to examine the competence level in the use of encouragement proverbs between the older generation of Oghe speakers and the younger ones. It is also to highlight some proverbs used in different settings in Oghe dialect of Igbo including encouragement proverbs and those that mostly use them. The data for the analysis were oral interviews and were gathered during numerous episodes of conversations among native speakers of the dialect under discourse. Related literature on the topic were equally reviewed. Findings show that most youth speakers lack competence in the use of proverbs let alone encouragement proverbs. It was equally found out that encouragement proverbs and proverbs generally motivate and make the speaker a good orator. It concludes by stating that proverbs are inevitable and that proverbs should be properly integrated in the day to day life of the people.

1.0 Introduction

Language is meaningfully patterned to serve as a means of expression of thought, ideas and feelings. It is also used to impart information in a variety of ways and situations which may be used to express the user's feelings or to arouse desires and emotions in other people. Language is the life blood of the people's culture, through which norms, values, traditions of the people are preserved and transmitted from generation to generation. Effective communication makes for intelligent use of stylistic devices to spice up the linguistic utterances and one of such spices is proverbs. Though proverbs are short expressions, they convey a lot of ideas and understanding.

Every language or dialect has proverbs that are uniquely associated with it. Apart from conveyance of the values, ethos and deep-rooted beliefs of the people, proverbs denote an indepth knowledge or mastery of any language or dialect. Proverbs exist in all the cultures of the world and have invariable applications; as garments of thought, they imbue the speaker with the edge to make his or her expressions more ornate and more culturally relevant (Nwode and Azubuike 2015).

According to Lawal (1992:19), proverbs seem to contain the richest pool of pragmatic factor since a proverb properly contextualizes, provides data that are once linguistic, philosophical and cosmological. It thus have some of the greatest pragmatic constraints on

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language users. If there are any group in Nigeria that honours the use of proverbs in communication, it is the Igbo people. In the words of Ndibe (2015:2),
as language on the macro level is a highly formidable instrument in the formation of human character, so also is proverb required in the micro Igbo society for the transmission of societal norms and values from one generation to the other.

This implies that proverbs form a major medium through which the Igbo man artistically expresses his views. Proverbs still form a veritable tool available for the inculcation of the following values in the minds of human beings, which include: cultural assimilation, encouragement, entertainment, contentment and sharing of various experiences of positive value.

2.0 Definition of Proverbs

Proverb is an adage, saying or maxim that expresses conventional truth. Such expressions are generally short and are expressed in words that are simple, entertaining and easy to remember.

According to Esere (2001:13), “proverbs are short clever saying full of wisdom, intended as rules of conduct and behaviour”. It is a short rhetorical saying expressing a general belief. In the words of Onwudufor (2008:14), “proverb is a saying in a more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and salt and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it”. Proverbs form part of the various figures of speech in language, it is an embodiment of the wisdom and ethics of the traditional societies.

A proverb is a condensed but memorable saying embodying some important facts of experience that are taken as true by many people. Norrick (1985:73) opines “proverb is wisdom of many and the wit of one, the experience and wisdom of several ages gathered and summed up in one expression”. The Yoruba people describe proverb as the horse that can carry one swiftly to the discovery of ideas while the Igbo people describe proverbs as “mmanụ e ji eri okwu” (the palm oil with which words are eaten).

Wilson and Smith (1970) say that proverbs are multifunctional and flexible instruments of everybody’s reasoning although they maintain solidified attitudes or traditional modes of thoughts of certain cultures. A proverb is a proposition loaded with hidden feelings, wishes and interactions of the speaker.

Onuekwusi (2011) sees proverbs as popular, common and numerous, they are pleasant expressions which adorn the rhetoric of a people. Proverbs constitute a part of oral tradition of a people which is unconsciously acquired from generation to generation.

Kewulezi (2004:17) opines that proverb is a tool for the purpose of rhetorical adornment and persuasion. They are used to express the morals as well as the ethics of the society.

A proverb according to Nwode and Azubuike (2015) is a short saying or a sentence generally known by many people which usually contains words of wisdom, truth or morals based on common sense or practical experience. It is often a description of a basic rule of conduct that all people generally follow or should follow.

According to Mieder (1993:24), a proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed from generation to generation. Obadan (2015:4), opines “proverbs are the basis by which words or conversations are made.” She goes further to say that in Africa especially in Nigerian context, expressions are not considered rich and intelligent except when they are duly laced with proverbs, which are many in our diversified cultures.

In view of the above, it could be observed that proverbs were handed down from the ancestors. This is why in Oghe, every proverb is often attributed to the ancestors thus “Ndihi shi” (the ancestors said). The much any one can do is to twist them but not to add new ones.

The Oxford Advanced learners’ Dictionary defines proverbs as a short well known saying that is a general truth or gives advice, for instance: Nothing goes for nothing. Similarly, an Oghe proverb will have it this way, “A na-agbaha aka emegbee ashi” (it cannot be done empty handed).

Therefore, from the views of the above scholars on how they see proverbs, it is clear that proverbs have to do with wisdom and image. So among the Oghe people, the wisdom of a person is judged by how frequent he/she applies or aptly injects proverbs into his/her speech. This is one of the reasons why any person who uses proverbs frequently to flavour his/her speech in Oghe is always regarded as one who was given birth by his father (oṣ nna gh mälə gh). One who lacks this wisdom and is often shy to apply this condiment is regarded as “nkətə waaya zulə” (a dog trained by a female which seldom barks but only wags its tail) “Nkita nwaanyi zuru”. In Oghe, a proverb is not interpreted or explained as the belief is, that if it is done, it means that the dowry paid on his or her mother becomes a waste or useless, (ego a xlä niishi ne eye nalə niyi).

Proverbs are the vehicle of thought among Oghe people; when the truth is elusive, it is proverbs that is used to elicit it and according to Achebe (1958) proverbs are palm oil with which words are eaten. With such affirmative statement as these, it may be safely asserted that proverbs are at the heart of nearly all conversational engagement among culturally conscious Oghe people.

As we have many proverbs that exist in Oghe; so also their functions differ. In Oghe, proverbs must be culturally relevant to the tenor of discourse otherwise, the proverbs will be misused and the speaker seen as one who is not culturally oriented in the use of his or her language. That is to say that proverbs are grouped/classified according to their types and functions (Nke a gosiri na ilu a ga-atu ga-adabar[r] adaba n’ihe a na-ekwu maka ya). The proverb must correspond with the topic of discourse. There are proverbs used for caution like “waaya chokwalə iwhu nkə otəne eye jendelə ke egwu ishi na anə” (a woman who wants to see the depth of her vagina will fall with her head). Though this proverb contains a verbal picture of nudity (otəne - vagina), the speaker is not taken as one who says distasteful expressions or taboo words or being vulgar. This is because its use is a culturally bred practice and need not be frowned at if produced with vulgarity, rather the listener/s will take the talk serious, hence the need to apply caution. According to Fakoya (2007) in Nwode and Azubuike (2015:3), proverbs found in this classification are generally de-emphasized by some members on account of morality or religious affiliation, such members at talk, may either not deploy them at all or employ other more socially appropriate ones – although such people need only to be reminded that the use and meaning of proverb is defined by context.

There are proverbs used for self-confidence. Some proverbs are deployed as discourse markers, and as soon as such proverbs are produced, the interlocutors cannot be in doubt as to the member’s boldness, confidence or self-reliance. Others include the ones used to visualize a resolution, forbearance, entertainment, contentment, encouragement etc.

The focus of this study is on proverb of encouragement; their contextual relevance, the situations that may warrant them and their general conversational values.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This work uses the Use theory of meaning to propound its position. The use theory asserts that the use of a certain word by a person can become adopted and used by that person as well as others to have a particular meaning or interpretation. According to Ndimele (1997:20) in Ndibe (2015:10), a German scholar named Wittgenstein in his book, *Philosophical Investigations* proposed this theory as an alternative to other theories on meaning. To him the meaning of any linguistic expression (be it a word, a phrase or a sentence) is determined by the context in which it is used. So, for one to know the meaning of a word, one has to listen and see how it is used by the speakers of that language.

Accordingly, one must listen to the proverbs as expressed by the speaker, listen to interpretation given by the speaker as well as the application of the proverb to the given situation or context. It is through that way the listener benefits and can readily make good the use of proverbs.

3.0 Oghe proverbs and Culture

The people of Oghe are culturally well refined. This is affirmed by conduct especially during turn-taking and face to face interactions. So much is proverb a part of the Oghe culture that it is generally asked, whenever anyone seems to be inattentive to the dictates of the situation, “*Ị bəhọ oye Oghe, I b[alə abja?* (Are you not from Oghe, are you a visitor?). According to Fakoye (2007) this type of question is not probe of the person’s place of birth, but an insinuation of a lack of cultural corrections befitting an Oghe man.

Oghe people have expectations connecting every aspect of life and living, not the least, the use of proverbs. In Oghe, proverbs are products of accumulated experience and are built on frequently occurring situations that demonstrate human behaviour, social traits, certain habits or customs that are associated with the people of Oghe. Some of these proverbs are influenced by the beliefs of the people, their birds and other animals. In Oghe, a brave or strong man is called ‘Agə’ (lion). Hence the expression “*Agə machie agwa, ya nə ụmụ anəmanə akpawa*” (when the lion cools down, it will associate with other animals).

There is no special method of acquiring proverbs in Oghe. It is mainly by being close to the elders and those who have gifts of speech. One can acquire proverbs if he attends family meetings, village or community meetings where those who have the gift of speech speak. The youths who stay close to elders use proverbs as if they are old people, mostly those in the rural areas.

There are other factors that influence proverbs in Oghe such as plants, sands, land, rivers, wind, household items etc. It also comes from myths, legendary and folklore which are handed down from one generation to another. The fact that most proverbs in Oghe begins with a mention of the ancestors or animals, lends credence to the above assertion. For example, the tortoise (mbe) is one animal that is usually made reference to whenever the Oghe people want to use some proverbs, thus ‘*mbe shị* (tortoise said). For instance “*mbe shị na ahwịa sukwe ya egbuo waya də ime, lu ka ahw[a sulə, oye ọzọ gbuo waya dị ime, e kəwe mbe*” (The tortoise said he will kill a pregnant woman when there is commotion in the market; eventually another person killed a pregnant woman when there was a commotion in the market, mbe was held responsible).

Proverbs are solemn components of kolanut communion (igọ oji). This is commonly seen in Oghe whenever libation is poured or blessings said on kolanuts. For example

3.1 Example A

1. Ndihi bja taa oji
2. Anə Akama Ogwugwu Ebenebe bja taa oji
3. Anə Amankwo Achala Isuanə bja taa oji
4. Anə Oyohwo Ngamikpo bja taa oji
5. Anə Iwolo Omashi akpita bja taa oji
6. Anə Oghe neeri bja taa oji
7. Ipe neemelə Oghe Ipe
Oghe neemelə ipe b[a taa qj]
8. Ndə neemekwe ipe də mma bja taa oji
9. Oye ekəkwelə kuo ibe eye
10. Egbe belə, Ugo belə
11. Ohwu shikwa ibe eye ebene
12. Nkə kwafu niike
13. O bjalə egbə ayi, gbuo owo ye
14. Oye shikwa na ayi ekehe adə
15. Ya vələ okəkə uzə lahə ɔla
16. Oo ohwo bə idide ji awa anə ibe
17. Q b[alə baay[, ab[agbəne ay[
18. Mgbq nakqkwa, mkrəmkpə afənakwaa nə xkwxta

The above are translated thus:

19. The ancestors come and eat kolanut
20. The land of Akama autonomous community come and eat kolanut
21. The land of Amankwo autonomous community come and eat kolanut
22. The land of Oyofe autonomous community come and eat kolanut
23. The land of Iwollo autonomous community come and eat kolanut
24. The land of the ten autonomous communities in Oghe come and eat kolanut
25. The things (forces) that help Oghe which Oghe help come and eat kolanut
26. Those ancestors that do good things come and eat kolanut
27. Whoever is invited should invite others
28. Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch
29. Whoever says the other should not perch
Let its wing break by sudden
30. It is with justice, the flood erodes the soil
31. A visitor should not be a threat to his host. In his going let him not develop a hunch back
32. Whoever wants to kill us, will first of all kill himself
33. Whoever says that we shall not live, let him go in before the chicken goes to roost (let him die early)

In Oghe whenever a kolanut is brought, libation is poured. Proverbs such as the ones above are deployed to commune with the gods of the land. It is interesting to note that all the communities that make up Oghe and its shrines are invited to partake in the communion. In the libation, whenever the ancestors, the autonomous communities or the deities are mentioned, a lobe or piece of kola or drop of wine is always thrown to the ground. That is a way of making them have their share. The use of proverbs in Oghe is far reaching because they help to shave

with the world the practical wisdom the people learnt in their ways of life. Take for instance whenever kolanut is presented in Oghe, the first libation is “oye wetelə ọjị, wetelə ndə; ndə ka ata kenhə atata ndə”. That is (he who brought kola brought life and those that will eat the kola will eat life). The reason for the above in Oghe does not mean that it is the person who brought the kola that gives life to people. What it actually means is that whenever a kolanut is brought, libation for long life will be offered. “Ye ayị ogonogo ndə na ashị ishi ike” (Give us long life and health).

4.0 The Use of Encouragement Proverbs

One may like to ask who uses the encouragement proverbs and who encourages who, using the encouragement proverbs? Encouragement proverbs or any proverb at all is not reserved to any class of people. So, anybody can use proverb to flavour his or her speech or write up. Adults can encourage children; children can as well encourage adults using proverbs. But in actual sense, adults are generally proficient or well skilled at using proverbs to encourage, but not without situational constraints. Though youths in the villages who are culturally oriented or grounded in the pragmatic relevance of proverb are able to ground their conversational contributions with one or two encouragement proverbs, their city counterparts, on the other hand, hardly imbue their speeches with proverbs, let alone knowing their cultural relevance since they are somehow alienated from the culture that uses proverbs as ingredient to beautify speeches.

In Oghe, among adult members, certain situations generally call for the use of these proverbs and other linguistic forms that may help to encourage others and give hope or revival to their lives. It could be asserted that many proverbs that are used for encouragements are best deployed in conversational encounters involving a few culturally conscious members. Let us look at the underlisted proverbs.

3.1.2 Example B:

Father, mother and son:

30. Ugomba: Papa nə mama iφe m shị m gwaa m unu bə nacholə m iso Xbagx gbago Ugwu
Awusa je məwa ke eshi alụ ọlụ kapinta
31. Sqosọ iφe m chọlə na aka unu bə ngodzi unu
32. Nna: Wa m, ụwa egoshi m nə ị bə wa nee ziokwu.
33. Nne: Wa, o goshikwulu m na ala m bụ iφe ị ghələ
34. Ọ ka na adələ gh mma wa m
35. Ugomba: mama ị mete m
36. Nna: Nə ije gh qqma , Chukwu nə ndə nna ayị hwa ka anoyelə gh
37. Ije gh ka abə ije ọma, ma mịtakwa edzigbo mkpələ
38. Mkpəkpa kpalə gh nə uje ka akpa gh nə ụna
39. Ndə ajọ madụ afəhọ hwụ gh
40. Ọ nekwa aha nə ihu, ị ka anọ nə ụkwuta
41. Ọ nekwa aha nə ụkwuta, ị ka anọ nə ihu.
42. Nne: Ogbuewhi, kə I kwulə bə kq ọ melə
43. Nna: Iφe ọbəna ị tiyelə aka ka ana agalə gh wolowolo
44. Maka nə nna ayị hwa shị nə Chukwu yelə watakịlị ji ọhọ, keeye ngwu o ji egwute e
45. Oye chi eye kwọ nə ụkwuta, egwu ada anaha atụ ọ
46. Jebewe ha
47. Ayi ka ana ekpelə gh ekpelə mgbọbuna

48. Ugomba: Papa ì metebe m ha, ntị ka anə iḡe ana aha ha kə okpu ata

Gloss

49. Ugomba: Father and mother what I want to tell you is that I want to follow Xbagx up to the North to learn carpentry work.
50. The only thing I need from you is your blessing.
51. Father: My son this move has demonstrated that you are a true son.
52. Mother: Son it has also shown that you sucked my breast.
53. It will continue to be well with you my son.
54. Ugomba: Thank you mother
55. Father: In this your journey, God and our fathers will be with you.
56. Your journey will be a good one and very fruitful.
57. Everything good will follow you both in your going and your coming back.
58. The evil ones will not see you
59. If evil is in front, you will be behind
60. If it is behind, you will be in front
61. Mother: Ogbuehi, as you said, so be it.
62. Father: Whatever you put your hand in will be prosperous.
63. For the elders say that the God who gave a child a yam in the wilderness, will give him the strength to harvest it.
64. Whoever his God carries at the back needs fear no fall.
65. So go well.
66. We shall always pray for you.
67. Ugomba: Thank you very much father, a word is enough for the wise.

The cultural import of a saying like the one in examples 37, 38, 40, 41, 44 and 45 will definitely reassure the son of his parents support and encouragement. Proverbs such as these have the cultural bearings of the father occupying the highest status in the conversations. The son on the other hand, cannot easily miss or forget the point of the father's use of such proverbs, unless the son is not properly schooled or grounded in the use of proverbs. Even if the son is not well grounded in the use of proverbs, the imagery created in the proverbs will give him a suiting encouragement.

3.1.3 Example C: In a gathering

68. Amalu: Ibaay[kwənə
69. Qha na eze: Iyaa
70. Amalu: Ibaay[kwezuonə
71. Qha na eze: Iyaa
72. Ndə baay[, nna ay[hwa kwulə sh[nə qgaala anaha anq nə xnq egħu amxq nq qgb[l[
73. Ay[ahwxchakwaa kə okwu mma shilə də
74. O wehekwe iḡe qzq na bəhq ay[ikwete nə Qhwaga ka anə Mgbochukwu.
75. Ndə nna nna ay[hwa sh[lə nə madx anaha abə watak[l[nə anə o gbulə
76. Qhwaga mqwx, egwu atəna gh, ay[kwulə ghə n'xkwxta
77. Oye nna aya dzilə oshi, neeji qkpa akpaka xzq.

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78. Amalu: Greetings to our people

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79. Audience: Greetings to you too
 80. My people, the elders said that an adult does not stay at home while the goat delivers in its tethers.
 81. We have looked at this issue critically
 82. There is nothing more than to encourage Ofoaga to marry Mgbochukwu.
 83. After all, our people say that no one is a child in an animal he killed.
 84. Ofoaga man, don't be afraid, be encouraged, for we are solidly behind you.
 85. One whose father sends to steal, breaks the door with his foot.
- Looking at the above proverbs in examples (72) and (75), the use of the proverb by Amalu is enough to reassure Qfqaga of the elder's seriousness in their resolution to encourage him to marry Mgbochukwu.

3.1.4 Example D

86. Udo: { bqq chi Agbo une m woke
87. Agbo: { bqq Udo, I tetekwe?
88. Udo: Eeyi
89. Papa m sh[nə [chqlə [hwx m
90. Qq kwa ya bə m ji b[a
91. Agbo: Eeyi une m
92. Achqlə m [hwx gh maka iɸe papa gh kqqlə m maka xgwq akwxkwq gh.
93. M sh[m malə m kə I shi mende e
94. Maka ndə bq qgaala sh[akp[r[kp[solə esolə ma q ka mma na onwuho qkə
95. Udo: Une m woke, Chukwu mekokwe ike eye, na agbayegh nə q dəhq nso
96. Agbo: Iɸe I kwulə bə edziokwu wa m
97. Udo: Ejekosolə m ndə madx xmx irighiri qlə iji ma neke m ewete ego qqhə.
98. Ikekwe nə mgbə mbido akwxkwq ne elukwe ne ego qqhə ke ezu
99. Agbo: wa m, q də m mwute ne ewehe m ike iyelə aka
100. Kama wee nchekwube maka nə ndə bay[kwulə nə kpqm kpqm mii na atə ne eju agbəgba
101. Chukwu ka agba gh ume.

Gloss

102. Udo: Good morning uncle Agbo
103. Agbo: Good morning my son. I hope you slept well.
104. Udo: Yes uncle
105. My father told me you wanted to see me
106. That's why I am here
107. Agbo: Yes my brother
108. I want to see you concerning what your father told me about your school fees
109. I say let me know how far you have gone about it.
110. For our elders say that the log of wood should be in fire, even though it produces no flame
111. Udo: Uncle, God has been kind, even though it has not been easy.
112. Agbo: What you said is true my son.
113. Udo: I have been doing some menial jobs to raise the money.
114. I am hopeful that before school resumes, the money will be complete.
115. My son, I just wish I could help

116. But be courageous, for our elders say that droplet-by-droplet, a tank is filled
117. God will strengthen you.

In view of the foregoing, once the hearer is presented with a proverb such as the one in example (94), the kernel of the discourse has been provided and he is therefore expected to heed to the advice encoded in it. From the discourse, in the present situation of Udo, the proverb deployed in example (100) will help encourage him and also reassure him to be steadfast.

5.0 Summary and conclusion

Proverbs as cultural expression mean different things to different cultures. Achebe (1958) sees it as the oil with which words are eaten. To Oghe culture however, proverb is much more than the oil with which words are eaten. It even includes the salt, the onions, the pepper and every other spices that make the concoctions go down well with the words. Within the culture of Oghe, conversational success often hinges on the relevant proverbs deployed to support the turns making up the discourse. Conversations, in other words are potentially an opportunity for interlocutors to deploy relevant proverbs in any discourse.

The findings of the paper present a clear picture that different types of proverbs are deployed for different purposes, such as encouragement, forbearance, caution etc. Although these proverbs are divine gifts from the ancestors which is handed down from generation to generation, the general discourse value is the reason for its use, the tenor of situation as well as the sensibilities of the receiving members will ultimately determine its deployment. Proverbs are inevitable and should be properly integrated in the day to day life of the people.

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