

A Literary Study of Mbube Proverbs

Jonas Egbudu Akung

Department of English and Literary Studies
University of Calabar, P.M.B 1115-Nigeria
Calabar-Nigeria

jonasakung1970@gmail.com

+2348037063754

Abstract

This paper examines the literary and aesthetic content of proverbs of Mbube people of Northern Cross River in Nigeria. Proverbs are pithy statements embodying community's ethical and philosophical values and rich in artistic value and performance. A study of these proverbs helps in understanding the people's culture and world view. Mbube proverbs which are rich in idioms and metaphors effectively perform the functions of inculcating moral values. The paper examines the literary content of Mbube proverbs using the anthropological and cognitive views of proverbs. This theory sees proverbs as species of metaphor. Through participant- observation, about 100 proverbs were collected taking into consideration the occasion and contexts of performance. The paper concludes that proverbs in Mbube function effectively in deepening and enriching communication and help in fostering communal harmony and cohesion and their poetic content provides for economy of words.

Keywords: proverbs, communication, Mbube culture, aesthetic.

Introduction

Traditional Mbube speech performance cannot be effective without the use of proverbs. It therefore becomes imperative to state here that proverbs serve as a veritable tool or vehicle for cultural transmission. They reflect the people's world view, shape their perception of life and enhance social cohesion as well as speech mannerism. They also serve political purposes especially the art of oratory. Mbube proverbs and by extension African proverbs are deep aphorisms. To make their stories realistically African, the African creative writers spice works with proverbs and idioms. On the other hand (Adeeko 1998:49) explains that 'proverbs are simultaneously figurative and literal. They are true and untrue, realistic and unrealistic, local and idiomatically and universal in their assumptions. Because of these

attributes proverbs are unable to transport a cultural unconscious; they can be quoted at length at all times'. Adeeko's position is to shade light on the significance of African proverbs which he views as having meaning beyond the local, though he is also of the view that proverbs are too short and this tends to weaken their worth. We may not query his position but it is important to note that it is not the length of a speech that gives its worth but the quality of such a speech. African proverbs, when analyzed, show that the quality of one's speech lies in the impact of such a speech on the listeners. This position agrees with the views of (Kiyimba 2010:36) who argues that 'The proverb, like the narrative, is a key medium of expression'. This makes it imperative to state that proverbs perform the same function as in longer narratives like prose. It is also germane to note that proverbs do not operate in isolation as they perform alongside prose narratives as prose borrows extensively to enrich its communication.

The Mbube people

Mbube is one of the second largest ethnic communities in Cross River State south-south Nigeria. Linguistically Mbube is divided into two: Mbube East and Mbube West with M be or Obe as the dominant languages spoken by the people. Mbube has a very rich cultural heritage which makes her unique among other ethnic nationalities in Cross River. The social institutions as well as the political institutions from the pre-colonial era till date have helped in maintaining law and order, and social cohesion. The family is the strongest unit as each person must belong to one. The families are named after their founders, like *Ndem Akung Ojong* meaning the family was founded by Akung Ojong. Ndem means family unit. Prior to the advent of Christianity each family unit had a deity known as *Bedem* and no matter how great a man is he must submit himself to Bedem. This deity guarded the community on the path of honour and helped in the social cohesion of the society. It prohibited incest and the punishment was *anampere*, this means that when a person commits incest, except when prescribed sacrifices are performed, all children born from such a relationship or subsequent marriages would not survive beyond the age of five years or less. The sacrifice was usually a male dog. It must be noted that human life is sacred to Mbube people hence, human sacrifices are not allowed.

Jonas Egbudu Akung

In his study (Egbeji 1980:77) observes that:

The death of an elder was however conceived of as a thing of joy. The elder is going to bliss where in conjunction with those who have departed this world before him saw to the protection of their children... elder may even be more useful in the next world than here on earth...the departed elder has gone to the next world to shower on his children on earth with the much desired blessings of reproduction, fertility and wealth.

Just as the Mbube people believe in ancestors for their well-being, they also believe in supreme deities that watch over them. Such deities include: Nfam, Okporo, and Ekwong these deities are all responsible to the almighty Oberekpabe Ochuewe-Adeh. Though the advent of Christianity has affected the people's belief system, however, many people have continued to retain this belief.

Oral literature and education

The place of oral literature in education of the people is very important. The wellbeing of any society lies solely on the moral standing of members of such a society. A society that lacks moral codes is bound to fail. Prior to the advent of Western education the education of the society was based on oral tradition. The expected behavioural codes were not taught in the classroom they were all embedded in the oral performances of the people. The songs for instance eulogized good virtues and deeds, and also satirized bad ones with the sole aim of correcting the society and instilling in them moral values. Also in the folktales as well as the proverbs, the society learns more from these rich performances and proverbs. An example of such proverbs will suffice here *owawa owo, owawa obieno* (if you die early, you will reincarnate early) on the literal sense this proverb appears to be encouraging early death, but on the deeper level it is discouraging slothfulness and encouraging the need for hard work. The proverb *ejì bishi adodor okap le bom le bubu* (where the soil is soft you make a big mound) this proverb is mostly directed to young boys and girls advising them to settle down and to avoid promiscuous lifestyles which can lead to diseases like HIV/AIDS. One will notice in these proverbs that because the Mbube people are agrarian, most the proverbs are drawn from the agrarian environment. Closely related to

this proverb is: *besan eji eme be bepie mpel* (it is when you urinate on one spot that makes foam). This means that a promiscuous life style is bad and will not help the individual to progress, but a life lived with care would make the individual progress and by extension the society. A good deal of the proverbs will be discussed when we analyze the literary significance of the proverbs. The place of oral literature in the education of the community cannot be overemphasized. To this end (Dinslage 2001:46-47) argues that though in many communities in Africa there may have not been formal education in the European sense but; 'that does not mean that children in those societies are brought up without rules and codes according to the respective ethnic groups. There are many methods by which children are taught to take their proper place in the community'

The context and performance of Mbube proverbs

The study of African oral literature cannot be removed from the context and performance. Early scholars like Bronislaw Malinowski (1926) have emphasized the significant of the context which need not be over labored here. However, it is expedient to note that in the performance of proverbs the context must be taken into serious consideration. (Nwachukwu-Agbada 2002:26) observes that 'the relevance of a true understanding of proverb referents has to do with the socio-cultural significance of metaphors'. This socio-cultural significance has to do with the context of their usage. He further states that 'a proverb text is much more than its wording' (Agbada 31). The words alone cannot carry the burden of the proverb message, but the context of their performance adds to the total understanding of the proverbs.

Mbube proverbs like any other African proverbs take into serious consideration the context of their usage. They are performed at specific occasion by people who command high competence in Mbe language, the knowledge of the language helps the user of a proverb to exploit the linguistic resources of the language to his advantage. The context of the performance of Mbube proverbs may include but not limited to the following: family/community meetings, court, religious admonishment, songs, folktales, fables real life experiences, marriages, and funerals, among others. Taking into consideration the fact that Mbube is an agrarian community, most of the proverbs are drawn from such sources like animal and the farm including the natural setting. During family meetings very important issues are not discussed in plain language, they have to be given with proverbs. For example, the proverb *bebio erom emborr le yan enkworr-*

you cannot hide a palm bunch with cocoyam leaves was used during a family meeting when a young female member of the family was accused of being pregnant and she continuously denied it, before one of the elders used that proverb; meaning that pregnancy is like a palm bunch with thorns and you cannot hide it with cocoyam leaves because the thorns will pierce the leaves and everything would be revealed. Another related proverb to the one above is *miel reki lolue obielo atcheki bi liong* a woman in labour will not hide her vagina meaning in all matters of human dealings the sanctity of truth and integrity must be up hold at all times. During a political meeting a failed politician who had squandered all opportunities given to him came to village soliciting the votes of the people, an elder replied him using this proverb *mom be gbalo afe begbalo abe le nto adamo mom afe begbalo abe le okpomang* a wise man hides his wisdom in a calabash while a foolish man hides his in a bottle. This deflated whatever promises the politician would have used to deceive the people. Using proverbs for admonishment my grandmother once use this proverb to tell me to be careful with life and multiple sexual partners *besan eji ame be bepie mpel* it is only when you drop your urine on one spot that you can see foam and *ezi beshi adodor okap lebom le bubu* where the ground is soft make a big mount. Similarly the proverb *oriki sam sam bele oba eyuro* the person with a running stomach should not fear darkness. This proverb means that as leader with pressing needs, you must cast aside all shame and tackle the issues as they come. These are some of the contexts where Mbube proverbs are used. There are several other contexts which we shall make reference to in the discussion of the proverbs. Below are some Mbube proverbs which shall form our working list:

Table 1: A List of some Mbube proverbs

S/N	Mbube proverbs	English translation
1.	Beh yab yab obong beh ma kue erom.	You do not by-pass palm branches to cut the palm nut.
2	Okrong orunruen onyue bebel e muan.	When a female squirrel gets old, it suckles from its children breasts.
3	Liwu lekuekue epang, ekuekue erom.	Death harvests both the ripe and unripe palm fruits.
4	Abi ashia mume e anyali ehe	Excreta cannot resemble the person who passed it.
5	Mi inkwa ekwe inyiki wutche obami.	A man cannot fall longer than the length of his height.
6	Mkpaki ebam le eji obe	You can only hang your bag

A Literary Study of Mbube Proverbs

	owami okumo	where your hand reaches.
7.	Muan e be kweni le bitchem abitche eji be makeh lehe eri le elong.	A child on its mother's back does not know that the journey is far.
8.	Minkpedo eti okweno lafal, mkpedo eti okweno le bishi.	You don't start climbing a tree from the top, you start from the bottom.
9.	Kenen aku ke gano lafal kenyue beleb le bishi.	A bird that flies high up comes down for a drink
10.	Wutu wu yorewe yor lempi orue tche we otchebo wutu.	When darkness meets you on the way you would claim not to be afraid of the dark.
11.	Okekel mume ariki lang achiwe le akpikpe tchungni tche ntefeh ofiki kel mum eke asorue le bebom.	If you see someone to help you load and carry your seedlings in your old farm, you may not see somebody to help you drop it in your new farm.
12.	Binyung bi bebeh wushu.	The hair is afraid of the face.
13.	Muakuen e asuelisue bebeh be bamban alielie belie le agboro.	A child who washes his hands clean would eat with elders.
14.	Eti eme e pia nkem.	A tree does not make a forest.
15.	Liswal liyuyor le likwor li lebki obeno, oyuyob ntong liswal ome osuelki le obeno	A bunch of broomsticks cannot be broken, but a single broomstick can easily be broken.
16.	Kibong kiyuro kipual kireno le obuab.	Two calabashes cannot be put together without making a noise.
17.	Binyin abi we opiale le binyung abi bishien bibi we oriki lie le binyung abi biban.	It is the things you did with your dark hair that you will enjoy with your grey hair.
18.	Obe osusue okparo, okparo osusue obe.	The hand washes the mortar and the mortar washes the hand.
19.	Obiar orue tche wuyielo ohe ari le wutem empi.	The toad says that his savior is on the middle of the road.
20.	Obamo emor oruetche ete elie ekwen eboro	The land squirrel says that his father left a debt for him which is

Jonas Egbudu Akung

	eh yi mume akwano ehe le etor.	why one cannot meet him at home.
21.	Nkuel arue tche he abeno uwa, ekpa ehe yi epie ayi ekielo.	The tortoise says that he is seriously dancing, but it his shell that is preventing it from showing.
22.	Olokpo orue tche wu oromi rom lafal otche kwe lebishi ne mume ator ehe he atotor mior ehe.	The lizard says that when he jumps from a height to the ground, even if nobody praises him he would praise himself.
23.	Mpie arue tche benyin bekwan wushu le bitchem.	The dog says that it is good to play both front and back.
24	Biwor ayunki etuntom e mpuong.	A rabbit does not forget its old hole.
25	Nmu arue tche he asuelo le bibedo.	A snake does not get satisfied with food in its folds.
26.	Ogboro awu onyuam oyoro le etor-etchong e muakuen elor le omen.	When a good elder is in the compound, a child's yam does not get burnt in fire.`
27	Miel abiebiel afe ogboro awu onyuam alalo le bikob mkpam.	If a woman gives birth to a child in the presence of an elder she would sleep on "mkpam's" hide
28.	Onam le obe bifeh korodide.	The thigh and the arm are not the same.
29.	Be tuabo eluel wukwu.	You don't follow a widow on her wailing.
30.	Oriki samsam beheh oba eyuro.	A person who has running stomach is never afraid of the dark.
31.	A person who has running stomach is never afraid of the dark.	It is not yet time for the widow to mourn her husband.
32.	Kitungni kiri le wushu edumo.	The final dance is in front of the drum.
33.	Miel arili biebiel a biyo	A woman in labour will not hide

A Literary Study of Mbube Proverbs

	eko.	her vagina
34.	Bebio erom e mborr le yan e nkworr.	A palm bunch cannot be hidden or tied in cocoyam leaves.
35.	Asoboro arue tche he ate bitebite yi he arumo.	Rain says it is barking because it is remembering things.
36.	Nkab ayielewe orue tche ama le beleb le bemi.	When you miss an antelope you would say it should go with its watery eyes.
37.	Ketorr kerue tche ete le ene be yieb ehe nkem he ayiebo anung?	Frutambo says his parents left the forest for him, who will he leave it for?
38.	Mpie e alomki mume a nyiki bekoh atonke.	A dog that bites a person does not first show him its teeth.
39.	Oriki fifaro wulom obeno etang.	When you are going to war you do not talk much.
40.	Mpie arue tche lifuamo lifuamo he akelo le bishi.	The dog says that he can only know if a feast was okay from the ground.
41	Bikor le muor apie kezuzoro.	A chicken in palm oil is always frightful.
43	ewel ke bongni bedzang ewu bikor.	It is better chase the fox in order to retrieve the carcass of the hen.
44.	Mpuel arue tche yan ayi enyuam eromki elong liken.	The sheep says, a good leaf is gotten from afar.
45.	Be la wuken le liji.	You don't see a good host on feast day.
46.	Bekweh be tobo eju le libie.	Slaves always discuss their secrets in the farm.
47.	Muambel apomo lipom nten e mpob ofuokifuo.	An orphan does not talk when there is a wind.
48.	Muan e bekobkile ekpabe abi are mpi libie ori le elong ochu.	A child on her mother's shoulder does not notice how far the farm road is.
49.	Ogalo ekwen ogeb beleb onyue.	When you pay a debt you drink water.
50.	Wutal keporo le etor	A grinding stone for cam wood in

Jonas Egbudu Akung

	wu belo keporo	a compound is not always valued compared to the one from outside the compound.
51.	Odumo beleb le mpuom nji oma le mpuom wunyin.	You cannot swim in a river without going to the river.
52.	Muan e agbalki bereb kike alulue ene arikike adzang benue liken bepual le linue ene limeh.	A child who is running to cross its mother must take two steps for each one taken by its mother.
53.	Beturo bessar be lia wulie wumeh	Three chiefs do not fight the same fight.
54.	Etieme epia nkem.	A tree does not make a forest.
55.	Bebio erom emborr le yan enkworr.	A palm bunch cannot be hidden or tied in cocoyam leaves.
56.	Opomo ayilelu mpom obe orue tche opom ehe.	When you talk about the knee's own, the elbow would want you to talk about its own as well.
57.	He afali mkpukoro hihe abil eji ayame.	It is the person who wears the shoe that knows where it pinches him.
58.	Ogboro awu onyuam oyoro le ator etching e muakwen e lor le omen. Wutchuor wubuo wuloh wunyin.	When there is a good elder in the compound, a child's yam does not get burnt in fire.

The literary content of Mbube proverbs

The literary content of Mbube proverbs will be examined from their ethnographic point of view. This theory by Hymes (1962) holds that language should be studied within the social context or situations. In this way we can see Mbube proverbs as an art that helps in the communicative process of the people and carries the experiences and the people's world view. In doing this we shall take into consideration the importance of context. (Mensah 2011:90) has explained that 'it is the contextual variables that determine whether the use of proverbs is appropriate'. The appropriateness of proverbs cannot be overemphasized, as the context of their usage adds to their

meaning. (Okpewho 1992:226) has noted that early collectors of proverbs who were in most case foreigners said 'nothing of the situations in which the proverbs are used or performed'. The place of oral literature in the education curriculum and in the inculcation of moral values is very central to the people of Mbube. Proverbs in Mbube reflect the people's world view and belief system. In the proverb *owawa owo owawa obieno* if you die early you will reincarnate early does not only tell us about the dual cosmology of the people, but the idea of life after death. Death for the people of Mbube means more than mere biological cessations of life; it is a transition to the ethereal world where existence continues with the ancestors who occupy prime position in the existence of the people. The death of an older person is seen as a celebration of life and such a person is seen as a forerunner who had gone to prepare a place for others coming after him. When death takes a younger person, the people sometimes resign to fate and the following proverb is often used. *Lewu le kokwe erom le kokwe ipang* death harvests the ripe and the unripe. This resignation to fate shows man's helplessness in the face of death and also goes on to explain the futility of existence.

Many proverbs in Mbube communicate advice and admonition. For example, the proverb, *kenen etitop wuyue ke etche etor* a bird that sings to much hardly build a nest is usually used to call on young men and women to work rather than lazy around and getting into cheap gossip. Hard work brings dignity, prosperity and reduces crime in the society. Another proverb that communicates this is *ogali wawa le liyel eburro liyel etokurto-* if you wake up to early in life you will be soaked by the dew of life; here the advice is to inculcate in the people the spirit of hard work. This comes as a result of the quest by the younger generation for material wealth. This in many cases has been the remote cause of violent crimes, hooliganism robbery among other vices. The proverb: *wutal keporo le etor wubelo keporo* the grinding stone for cam wood at home is not as good as the one outside. This proverb is the same as the prophet is not honoured in his land. One must expect opposition because of the complex nature of human society, but the need for tolerance to opposition is also seen in this proverb; *kibong kiyuro kipual kireno le obuab* two calabashes cannot stay together without making noise. This again points to the complex nature of society which counts on the call for tolerance of one another. Another proverb in this category is *Mkpaki ebaam le ji obe okumo* – I will hang my bag where my hand reaches, which tells us to live within our means. From these proverbs, one could glean the wisdom the proverbs communicate and this which agrees with (Okpewho 1992:226) position that:

Like every other piece of oral literature, every proverb must have started its life as the product of the genius of an individual oral artist. But it becomes appropriated by the people at large (the folk) because it contains a truth about life (whether local or universal) accepted by them and appeals to their imagination.

Okpewho's position is that African proverbs are not merely folk wisdom, but works of genius, imagination and creativity. As a result one can see Mbube proverbs from this point of view taking into consideration the fact that literature is essentially works of imagination and creativity. This also affirms (Lindfors 2002:5) position that proverbs in African literature 'help to invoke the cultural milieu'. Proverbs serve as medium of understanding the people belief system and more importantly their culture. Proverbs provide the window in which this culture can be explored.

Taking into consideration the dynamic nature of contemporary society, one cannot still refer to Mbube as a pre-literate or semiliterate society and the proverbs also reflect this dynamism in the society. During a political rally one politician who came to seek a re-election was told this proverb *mum begbalo abi begbalo abe le nto afe bi begbalo abe le kpoma* – a wise person will hide his wisdom in a calabash and not in a bottle. The occasion here told of a man who took the people's votes, only to return during another election bid, but the people have become wiser noting all the political deceptions of the politicians. In another occasion the proverb *ewu mum e esulo lelepi* a corpse can never fill the grave shows that the Mbube are people who are contented and they do not strive for excessive materialism. Because Mbube people are hospitable people the proverb *wufro okelo wuken e mum ogbe ejarr mgbe* – the day you see a visitor that day you wear rags. This proverb is used to lament the inability to host a guest. This proverb laments the inability to offer service to a guest. Again the proverb *be tuabo wukkwo le eluel-* you don't follow a widow from her wailing. This means that the wailing of a widow may be deceptive and it may mislead you, therefore, one must be careful to avoid mistakes. As stated earlier in this study when we considered the sources of Mbube proverbs, it is important to note the style of these proverbs. In the performance of these proverbs their authorship is usually traced to animals. The following proverbs will suffice:

Table 2: Mbube proverbs with animal authorship

S/N	Mbube Proverbs	English version
-----	----------------	-----------------

A Literary Study of Mbube Proverbs

1	<i>Okorong orunruen onyue bebel e muan</i>	when the female squirrel gets old it suckles from the children's breast
2	<i>Obiar oruetche wuyielo ohe ari le wutem mpi.</i>	The toad says his savior is on the main road.
3.	<i>Biwor ayunki etuntum mpoung</i>	The rabbit does not forget its former hole
4.	<i>Mpie aruetche lejie lefuamo he kelo le bishi</i>	The dog says if the party was great, he can only see the evident on the ground
5.	<i>lefel le ruetche beyin wutchue benabo be kwelo betal le bemi.</i>	The puff adder says night play is dangerous sand can get into your eyes.
6.	<i>Mkpor aruetche he ayorr le eneh letor ama pie arobeta leshe</i>	The he-goat says he cannot have a mother at home and goes out to commit adultery.
7.	<i>Keyorru keru tche okukwel ofefe he ye he afaleewu</i>	The weaver bird says the spear grass respected her that is why she respected it.

In the proverb (1) it tells us of the need to support the aged people. This group of people because of their age, have become vulnerable to many things like: old age diseases, problems in mobility among others. The female squirrel often suckles from its children's and it is from this that this proverb is used. In the proverb (2), the toad is used as a metaphor. Whenever it is chased by a snake it runs to the main road because there its saviour lies. This again teaches that Mbube is still a close community and the pains of one are shared by all and the need to be our neighbour's keeper is greatly emphasized. The proverb in (3) stresses the need to appreciate and remember those who have been our friends and ally. It discourages hatred and the pull him down syndrome, but rather encourages appreciation and reward for excellent. In proverb (4) the dog metaphor explains the contemporary issues were there have been continued craved for the dividend of democratic governance in Africa. The government claim of improved infrastructure, better service like: steady power supply, water, road network healthcare delivery among others, can only become meaningful when they get to the ordinary citizenry. That is why the dog says the party is only great when he sees bones on the floor. Proverb (5) shows that the people are not cowardly people they are ready to defend her people at any time and will not allow any person or group of persons to toy with the lives of her people. Proverb (6) explains the existential view point of the

Mbube people. Proverb (7) shows that respect is reciprocal and must be earned by those who deserve it.

Like most patriarchal societies Mbube proverbs also communicate gender. The proverbs that communicate gender somehow appear very obscene. These proverbs though obscene, communicate strong moral values and the people philosophy of life.

Table 3: Example of obscene proverbs

S/N	Mbube proverbs	English translation
1.	<i>Liong le fele nchang le ri buan buan</i>	the vagina may be without pubic hair, yet its produces children
2.	<i>Beshan emiel beyiki ekoko etche</i>	the urine of a woman cannot cross a log of wood
3.	<i>Bebu liong ere bebielo muan</i>	it is not the size of the vagina that determines the one that will bear children
4.	<i>Miel ariki lolue obielo atcheki bi liong</i>	A woman in labour cannot hide her vagina

In the proverb (1) the term vagina may appear obscene or derogatory, but the message it communicates is that appearance is not reality or not all that glitters is gold. This proverb is usually performed by elderly women as an advice to would-be couples before the traditional marriage rites are performed. The same goes with the proverb in (3). This shows that most would be young couples and their parents would prefer to marry into families that are rich, parent match-make their children either to retain their social status to maintain some previous agreements. It becomes imperative to advise them that it is not the social status that makes a good wife or partner. The proverb in (2) indicates the limitation of the woman in the patriarchal society. She is limited by the simple fact that she is a woman based on her biological nature and not her inner being. This according to (Kiyimba 2010 :35) shows that proverbs ‘contribute to a process that constructs the male in the dominant role because they derive from powerful ideologies of male superiority that permeate different forms of oral literature.’ The proverb in (4) talks about the vagina in a very obscene way but the actual meaning of that proverb is the sacrosanct nature of truth which must be spoken at all times not minding who ox is gored. It is on the principle of truth that the society will advance to greatness. Truth will eliminate corruption, reduce crime and violence. That is why it is liken to the vagina during labour,

though preserved for the husband alone, but during labour whoever is attending to the woman would see it. The language of the proverb here is compressed which agrees with (Finnegan 1970:389) position that 'the proverb is a model of compressed or forceful language'. The proverbs above used in compressed language express the people's belief system and their attitude toward women. This also agrees with (Oha 1998:97) in his study of Igbo proverbs on women where he opines that 'the proverbs of womanhood in Igboland attempt at denigrating and disempowering the woman'. It is important to note that though these proverbs are used in close community circles and their meanings could be seen transcending those ethnic limitations to express national consciousness. However, on the other hand, (Frischherz 2015 :252) is of the view that in most cultures, gender communication issues about female genitalia are considered as public in-appropriateness 'and this cultural discomfort with the vagina, and women's bodies more generally, is evident today in both public political and everyday social milieus'. It is this that accounts to why some gender communications are seen as obscene. Again Frischherz explains that:

This discomfort, correlated with the feelings and orientations of shame and disgust, emerges because the vagina is figured, culturally, as a problem...the way women relate to their sexual bodies are contingent upon how women's genitalia are negatively represented-if they are made visible at all...women's genitalia are dangerously absent from sociocultural representations...(252).

From this stand point one notes gendered related proverbs as obscene within the context Mbube culture which is to some extent is driven by patriarchal ethos. Mbube proverbs have striking literary qualities that enhance the language of the people and their world view, which agrees with Manjate's position that African proverbs 'reflect the Cosmo vision of the community' (12). The proverbs in Mbube form the most profound linguistic feature of the speech act of the people and they are rich in idioms, euphemism and metaphors and they 'Convey more meaning than ordinary everyday expressions. (Adedimeji 1). For example a woman who is menstruating is described as *ami yul bikwe* meaning she has killed a lion. Here the woman strength is equated with that of a lion because it is only a lion that bleeds that much and still stays alive. It also

showcases the strength of the woman which goes beyond muscular to emotional strength. Again it could also mean a euphemism because most traditional men would not have contact with a menstruating woman. A wayward man is described as a cat but a more sensible man is a dog like in the proverb *alie mpie le kewue* he ate like a dog or a cat. The dog can leave its duty post to meet its sex mate and returns to the duty post before morning while the cat won't return after finding a sex mate outside its home. The dog is often referred to with the metaphor of a prostitute but in Mbube the dog is seen as a seasonal virgin; because dogs mate only during their heat period, their sex life is purely for procreation.

Conclusion

What we have done in this study is a study of Mbube proverbs to see their literary content. From the analysis we discovered that Mbube proverbs are rich in content and help to enhance the language of the people. Mbube proverbs like any other proverb help in the cultural reconstruction of the people. A person who demonstrates high competence in the performance of proverbs is well respected in the community. There is high creativity in the performance of proverbs as the audience will always applaud such a person saying *lepom le ri le mpue*—a speech is in its creativity. This also agrees with A.C Jordan's position when he avers that a proverb is a 'product of the popular mind...the proverb is more serious...give guidance to conduct in a particular circumstance' (par 2). Mbube proverbs help in the education of the community to tow the path of honour as these proverbs praise virtues and satirize follies and evil in the society. The euphemism in them makes them less offensive and obscene, and metaphors and symbolism add to their literariness and give them their value. Proverbs in Mbube community function effectively in deepening and enriching communication, educating the community, and helping in fostering communal harmony and cohesion. They also help in promoting the culture of the people. W. Jay Moon points out that "Proverbs are time-tested stepping stones that reveal the soul of oral cultures"(1). It is through proverbs that the soul of Mbube culture is revealed; and their poetic content provides for economy of words which makes them not merely folk saying. Though women perform proverbs in Mbube but this study reveals that proverbs in Mbube are mainly performed by adult male which makes the performance or use of proverbs a a cultic language.

References

- Adeeko, A. (1998). *Proverbs, textuality and nativism in African literature*. Gainesville: University of Florida P. www.aas.osu.edu
Retrieved on 28/2/14
- Adedimeji, M. The semantics and pragmatics of Nigerian proverbs in Chinua Achebe's *Things fall apart* and Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to blame* www.unilorin.edu Retrieved on 26/12/14
- Agbada-Nwachukwu, J.O.J. (202). *The Igbo proverb: A study of its context, performance and functions*. Enugu: John Jacob's Press
- Dinslage, S. (2001). Traditional education and oral literature: A comparative study of the moral codes of sexual behavior in folktales. In R. H. (Ed.) *Kaschula African oral literature: Functions in contemporary contexts* (pp46-53). Cape Town: New African Books
- Egbeji, J. E. (1982). Social history of pre-colonial Mbube clan in Ogoja: 1800-1915. Unpublished BA thesis, Department of History, University of Calabar.
- Finnegan, R. (1970). *Oral literature in Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Frischherz, M. (2015). Affective agency and transformative shame: The voices behind *the great wall of the vagina*. *Women's studies in communication*. 38(3). Pp 251-271
- Hymes, B. (1962). The ethnography of speaking. In T. Gladwin and W. Sturtevant (Eds) *Anthropology and Human Behavior* (pp 15-33). Washington DC: Anthropological society of Washington
- Jordan, A. C towards an African literature: riddles and proverbs. www.disa.ukzn.ac Retrieved on 28/12/14
- Kiyimba, A. (2010). Men and power: masculinity in the folktales and proverbs of the Baganda. In H. N. Mugambi and T. J. Allen (Eds.). *Masculinities in African Literary and Cultural Texts* (pp 35-49). Oxfordshire: Ayibia Clarke
- Lindfors, B. (2002). *Folklore in Nigerian literature*. Ibadan: Caltop Publications.
- Malinowski, B. (1926) *Myth in primitive psychology*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Manjate, T. (2014). Representation of power through oral literature: The Tsonga proverbs. www.jelt.org Retrieved on 26/12/14
- Mensah, E. (2013). Proverbs in Nigerian pidgin. *Journal of anthropological Research*. 69 (1). www.unm.edu 86-115

Jonas Egbudu Akung

- Moon, Jay. W. African proverbs: stepping stones within oral cultures”
www.oralstrategies.org. Retrieved on 26/12/14
- Oha, O.(1998). The semantics of female devaluation in Igbo proverbs.
African Study Monograph. 19 (2). October. 87-102
www.jambo.africa.kyoto-u.ac retrieved on 27/12/14
- Okpewho, I. (1992). *African oral Literature: Backgrounds, character and continuity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Proverbs as African literary form www.naijastories.com retrieved 26/12/2014.