

IGBO PROVERBS AS EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE TOOLS FOR CURBING COMMUNAL CRISIS IN THE SOUTHEAST GEOPOLITICAL ZONE OF NIGERIA.

By

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Abstract

This work examines how Igbo proverbs can be used as instruments for curbing communal conflicts in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. In order that to achieve this, 10 proverbs were selected by the researcher in relation to interactions with Igbo language teachers and speakers. These are suitable proverbs for specific situations. Through this, the work is able to establish that the speakers use these proverbs to enable them convince and persuade the audience for a desired attitude. The methodologies for this work are quantitative. Collection is done using primary and secondary sources. The framework for the paper is based on M.A.K Halliday's Functional Theory of Language, using the Regulatory Function of Language specifically. The work concludes that there are proverbs that are used to initiate peace back within hostile individuals and communities. These proverbs help to stop individuals or groups from taking violent actions. They encourage individuals and group to tolerate, forgive one another and live in unity with one another.

Key words: Language, Proverbs, Communal clash, Metalingual.

Introduction

The word language has been defined in various ways by various language specialist. Language is considered as a distinctive human system of communication based on oral and written symbols. It is an extremely important aspect of a community. Achilike (2007) remarked that language is appreciated as a means of preserving the people's culture and promoting National interest and unity. She therefore defines language as human and non-instructive method of communicating ideas, feelings and desires by means of system of sounds, symbols used by a nation or race. On a similar note, Obasi (2020) in Salanake (2006) asserts that language is the key to the heart of the people. If we lose the key, we lose the people, if we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door of peace. In other words, language permeates every aspect of life's harmony. Disharmony therefore arise derives from its' deliberate misuse.

Nwabudike and Adedokun (2018), citing (Adedokun 2012) argues that all human beings regardless of their societies, make use of one language or the other to interact among them. Language is an indispensable instrument given to mankind. Man's ability to use language is the most essential features that differentiates human race from other species. Human being use body parts to communicate such as waving, nodding, winking and other facial expressions known as paralanguage. The literature reviewed shows that language is the key for human existence. It is a way of expressing all human activities. Above all, language is a unifying factor especially in a heterogeneous community with diverse culture.

Language is used in every aspect of life. It is the most important part of human communication. Language is applied in every situation, the language we choose is determined by the situation and need at hand. There is also the need to choose a type of language that is most effective for our needs. The most important use of language is information since it helps

us to deliver messages and give new information to our listeners. Secondly, we express our feelings using certain words. These words do not deliver only information but express attitude and feelings of the speaker.

The directive function of language is used to promote certain actions or reactions. It is expected that the phrase will achieve the target for which it is expressed. The aesthetic function of language helps us use words and sentences as a linguistic tool for poetic art and as certain signs. The phatic function of language is to maintain social relationship and to begin, or continue the conversation. Finally, metalinguistic function of language is the use of language to describe another language. It is pertinent to note that the domain of this paper is on the metalinguistic function of language as ascertained from the title, and the word we are looking into is proverb.

South-East Geopolitical Zone

South-East of Nigeria is one of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, representing both a geographic and political region of the country. It comprises five states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. The major cities in the South-East include: Aba, Enugu, Onitsha, Umuahia, Owerri, Nnewi, Awka and Abakaliki.

The zone is bounded by the river Niger on the West, the riverine Niger Delta on the South, the North Central to the North and the Cross River on the East. It is divided between the Cross–Niger transition forest ecoregion in the South and the Guinean forest–Savanna Mosaic in the drier north. Culturally, the vast majority falls within Igbo land, the indigenous cultural homeland of the Igbos. This group makes up the largest ethnic percentage of the South-East population at over 90%. Although the South-East is the smallest geographical zone, it contributes greatly to the Nigerian economy due to oil and natural gas reserves along with a growing industrialization economy. The region has a population of about 22 million people as stated by Nwankwo and Okonkwo (2012). Their population makes up around 10% of the population of the country. They further asserted that Aba and Enugu are the most populous cities in the South-East as well as the 10th and the 14th most populous cities in Nigeria. Other large South-Eastern cities include (in order by population) Onitsha, Umuahia, Owerri, Nnewi, Awka and Abakaliki.

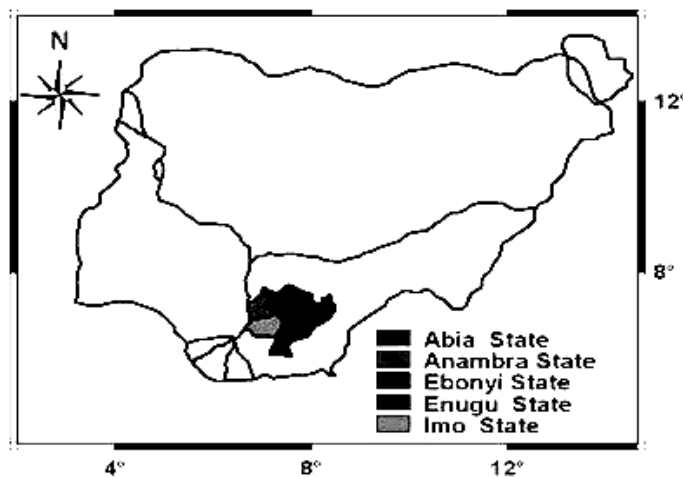


Fig. 1. Map of Nigeria Showing the Study Area

Communal crisis and its causes

Communal crisis is the occurrence of violence that is perpetrated across ethnic or communal lines. The violent parties feel solidarity for their respective sects. Communal violence in different parts of the world is alternatively referred to as ethnic violence, non-state conflict, violent civil disorder, minority's unrest, mass racial violence, inter-communal violence and ethno-religious violence.

Oji, Eme & Nwoba (2014), highlighted some causes of communal clash as follows:

- The indigene and settler syndrome
- Land and territory issues in conflict
- Socio-cultural factors
- Political factors

The settlers import their culture and tradition into their new community to the discomfort of the host communities. The settler latch on the constitutional provision on human right and the problem of definition of status to assert their rights in the places of settlement. For instance, many national constitution and universal declaration of human rights guarantees free movement, free association and ownership of property but at the same time enshrine the principles of federal character and quota system. The nexus between citizenship and indigene ship create an identity dilemma which often breeds hostile relationship between host communities and settler's communities as has been demonstrated in Ezillo-Ezza Ezillo conflict of Ebonyi state (see Ebonyi state government white paper, 2008). The problem is compounded by the inability of the settler or migrant communities to fully integrate themselves with the host indigene /native communities through acculturation. Rather what obtains is tribalism and marginal personality. The allegation and counter allegations of desecration of cultural symbol and tradition such as the naming of markets, schools in the dialect of migrant communities illustrates this view clearly (see memo to the Ebonyi government peace committee on ezillo – Ezza conflict, 2008)

On the second issue, some studies reveal that a reasonable number of communal clash conflict in the South-East geographical zone are traceable to land scarcity, territory disputes and competition for the use of land resources. The Akaeze Ebonyi State, Aguleri-Umuleri conflict in Anambra State are plausible examples, (see Ebonyi State government white paper, 2005).

The chairman of Ayamelum Local government council, Chief Tony Ifeanyi confirmed that the major source of conflict among riverine communities is land. He noted that such clashes usually comes to full force during planting season. This is due to the fact that the communities are predominantly farmers and mostly the bone of the contention is mainly boundary problem. The Ezilo attributes the denigration of their culture and traditional heritage by the Ezza as some of the causes of the dispute between them. This includes flaunting of new yam festival rules by bringing new yams into Ezillo market by the Ezzas before the cultural rites of new yam in Ezillo, killing of fish in the sacred ponds and rivers, looting of people's artifacts and antiquities, desecration of the chieftaincy institution as evident in the beating of the traditional ruler of Ezillo. Ezillo people also alleged that the Ezza people seized Nwafor market and renamed it Eke Ezza.

Political factors also contribute to the causes of communal clash in the South-East geographical zone. Politics interfaces all aspects of social life, justice, basic human right, citizenship / identity etc. communities allege political marginalization against one another. This is particularly the case whenever either party is in position of political authority.

Communal Clash Uprising

On 21st May, 2020, not less than 50 persons were abducted during the communal clash between the people of Omor and Umunbo villages in Ayamelum LGA of Anambra State while 300 others sustained injuries. On 30th June, 2020, two ancient agrarian communities of Achalla and Urum in Awka North Local government Area of Anambra State clashed over claim of ownership of communal land in dispute. The guardian revealed that the land was allegedly given to the Urum community on lease in 1920. It was alleged that Urum opted to claim ownership, allowing their youths to cultivate on the disputed land. This did not go down well with Achella community, and causing them to go on the offensive. In a reaction, Urum people laid Ambush and allegedly succeeded in shooting one person while his companion were purportedly still missing.

Osewezina (2014) reported a violent clash in Akokwa community in Ideato North LGA of Imo state between some Hausa residents and some members of the host community that left six people dead. The violent incident started when a middle aged Hausa man who is a security guard had a misunderstanding with a woman, which resulted to the man murdering the woman. The Hausa man also murdered the woman's friend who was trying to settle the case. On seeing the level of his crime, the Hausa man committed suicide. This led to a reprisal attack by members of the community against northerners in the area which left other three people dead. Ugwu (2022), reported the incident that took place at Awomama community of Orlu East LGA of Imo state on the 18th July. They protested the alleged killing of 14 youths by suspected members of Southeast security network. The victims were killed while returning from a wedding ceremony on 17th July in Otulu community in the same council area. The youths protested demanding justice for victims as they carried them in wheel barrows and trucks. Alaribe (2021) reported a boundary clash between the Usaka Ukwu, Azunchai, Ekpiri Ala-ala, Ariam, Eluelu communities in Ikwuano council area of Abia state and their Nkari and Obot Akara neighbors in Ini and Obot Akara council areas of Akwa-Ibom state. The mayhem resulted to the death of 16 persons while 6 others are still missing. The reporter traced back that the recent clash started from May 2020 when the Nkari people invaded farms belonging to the Usaka community and murdered 16 people. Other communities in Abia state affected by the boundary clash including Oboni-Upa, Ncdiorie, Obogwu and Ekwu. These communities live in fears of their neighbors who always lay ambush and kill people on their farmlands.

According to Njoku (2022), Oruku and Umuode communities in Enugu state had been in crisis for several years. Government has determined their boundary which was in contention as recommended by the judicial panel of enquiry. Some members of Oruku were opposed to the terms of settlements with Umude. Several lives and properties have been lost to the conflict. The guardian gathered that the incessant killings in Oruku have forced many residents to relocate their families to neighboring communities and towns such as Idodo, Akpoga, Onugba and Emene.

It has been established that communal clash crisis is one of the major challenges in the southeast geopolitical zone. Land is often at the heart of communal conflicts that center on group's main livelihood. Communal crisis has caused years of recurring waves of violent clashes that have resulted in many human and material casualties in not only the southeast but Nigeria as a whole Omini (2021) has it to say that the conflict in the Northeast Nigeria involve farmers and herders clash which has claimed much lives and properties. The farmers crop in the land while the herders move from place to place with their cattle and are bound to feed on crops and drink water. This has often resulted to bloody clashes, disrupting the peaceful co-existence of the two groups in different parts of the country, south-east not exempted.

Religious conflicts as regards to Muslims and Christians are almost a yearly occurrence. Ethnic conflict and land disputes have crippled Agricultural and Educational development, with other

forms of development included. Efforts made by the government to put an end to the crisis, or bring peace to reign in those areas have not yielded desirable results.

Land disputes have continued to result in violence for decades despite the existence of national boundary commission. Failure of government at various levels to bring perpetrators of violence to justice has also contributed to oil the wheel of these clashes and other forms of violence in different parts of the country. Against this background, the writer advocate for the use of proverbs as a communal clash crisis resolution mechanism to be effectively explored to resolve brewing conflicts between communities before they develop into full blown violence.

Igbo Proverbs

A proverb is a short intelligent wise sayings, used by the folks. It emerges from the general cultural remark used by individuals. Proverbs are concise in nature and are used frequently, this makes it easy to remember long after one first hear them. Igbo people as other people in Nigeria are known for extensive use of proverbs such that it is a common saying that proverbs are oil with which the Igbo people eat yam. This implies that an average Igbo man always spice his speech with choice proverbs, Onyemaechi & Chinyere (2021). Igbo proverbs reflect the philosophies and cultural values of the Igbo people. Proverbs are consistently employed by the Igbo people in everyday situations to reprimand, advice, caution, praise, condemn, council, strengthen communal bond among others.

Onyemaechi and Chinyere (2021) affirmed to this by asserting that the theme and content of Igbo proverbs centers on their belief system and general philosophy about life. Proverbs occupy a very vital position in creative art. It is applied in different circumstances for instance, in settlement of conflicts, disputes and misunderstanding. Butari, (2018) asserts that there are positive proverbs which are normally used with the intention to create a favorable relationship between the addresser and the listener regarding a matter. On the other hand, negative proverbs may be used to instigate negative relationship between the opposing parties

Theoretical Framework

This work adopt Michael Halliday's functional theory of language, precisely, the regulatory function. The regulatory function of language is language used to influence the behavior of others which is concerned with persuading, commanding, requesting other people to do things you want.

The model stressed that there are positive proverbs which can be used to persuade or request people to do the needful. Those positive proverbs are capable of bringing back peace, restore unity and co-operation among hostile communities. It is in view of the above that proverbs can be viewed as an instrument for curbing communal clash crisis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

On the basis of the above, this work selected ten (10) Igbo proverbs that has the capacity of influencing people's behavior positively depending on the need at hand. For the purpose of context and mutual intelligibility, the writer employs literal and contextual meaning of the proverbs selected. This will enable the application of the meaning in other languages.

1. Egbe bere Ugo bere, nke si ibe ya ebena, nku kwaa ya.

Literal meaning: let eagles perch and let kite perch, if any ask another not to perch, let its wing dislocate

Contextual meaning: live and let live.

This proverb can be used to settle differences, quarrels, fight that occur over the use of common resources, e.g., public tap water, market shops, motor parks etc.

2. Ire oma ka ejula ji aga n'ogwu
Literal meaning: Snail moves on thorns with a good tongue.
Contextual meaning: with caution, one can overcome challenges.
This proverb can be used as an advice to a person or group who offended another, and needs to have a peace talk with the person or group.
3. Ogbu mma na-ala na mma
Literal meaning: one who murders with knife, dies through knife
Contextual meaning: you will reap what you sow.
This proverb is used to remind evil doers that there is a payback time or, there is repercussion in every evil act.
4. Nwanne awo zochaa ya afọ ka nwanne nkapi pichaa ya eze.
Literal meaning: The relations of toad should march out the water in its belly while the relations of shrew should debeak it.
Contextual meaning: there is unity in diversity
One can use this proverbs to advice and settle two groups that have troublemakers each in their groups.
5. Agbachaa oso a guo maili (mile)
Literal meaning: After running, the mile is measured
Contextual meaning: The end justifies the means
This proverb is used to caution somebody or group who wants to apply negative means to achieve a purpose. They should consider the outcome.
6. A nyukoo mamiri onu o gbaa ufufu
Literal meaning: If we urinate together, it will foam
Contextual meaning: United we stand, divided we fall
This is used to advocate for unity to achieve a common goal. It can be used to fight hostility among communities.
7. Anaghi adi abuo ayi ara.
Literal meaning: Two people cannot be mad jointly.
Contextual meaning: Two wrongs cannot make right.
The proverb can be applied to discourage counter reaction among clashing groups or individuals. It advocates for one to tolerate and show maturity towards the other.
8. Oji oso agbakwu ugu mata na ugu bu onwu.
Literal meaning: He who rushes to fight should know that to fight is to die
Contextual meaning: Look before you leap.
This can be used to caution a group that is opting for war, reminding them that there may be lost that will be regretted.
9. A kpaa akpaa, a rahụ n'ute.
Literal meaning: If two agree, they can sleep on the mat.
Contextual meaning: It takes two to tangle.
Agreement is important for peaceful co-existence. For instance, one community needs agreement with the other before making use of their farm land. The proverb can be used by one community to get a go-ahead from the other.
10. Egburu uru tinyere okpukpu, e gburu okpukpu tinyere uru.

Literal meaning: If one cuts some meat into the bone, he cuts some bone into the meat

Contextual meaning: We should tolerate one another
This proverb can be used to address grievances and differences between two opposing groups for peaceful co-existence.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

As can be observed from the above analysis, the interpretation of each of the proverbs has a role that it plays. They can be used to regulate the actions of the people, bringing them to the desired purpose depending on the situation. We can see that proverbs can function in many negative situations by applying the appropriate positive proverb. It can be used to advice, unify, warn and encourage tolerance, forgiveness, peaceful co-existence etc.

On this basis, we can conclude that using the appropriate proverb in the appropriate situation, can yield a very good result in curbing communal crisis more than we may expect.

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