



Odeeokaa Journal of English and Literary Studies

A Discourse Analysis of Igbo Proverbs of Encouragement

Ngozi Anyachonkeya

Abstract

Proverbs are part and parcel of oral literature, orature, for short. There is no speech community that has not its proverbs as its heritage. In each community, we find uniqueness of proverbs in its subcultures, in what we may call regional and dialectal areas. In the Igbo language we notice a more complex diversity of proverbs in the regional and dialectal areas of the Igbo people. Proverbs of all land and clime hinge on cosmic laws. Put differently, proverbs of a people embody universal truths that unveil absolute truths. Thus, proverbs are pedagogic as they enrich and embellish discourse. In this essay, attention focuses on discourse analysis of Igbo proverbs of encouragement. In other words, it beams searchlight on the impact of proverbs of encouragement to individuals engaged in pursuit of purposeful endeavours that are beneficial to the individuals and society. Even though discourse studies may have been conducted on Igbo proverbs of encouragement; however, this essay is unaware of any study that has investigated Igbo proverbs of encouragement in the manner and style it is done in this inquiry. The study has used the Inferential Model linguistic theory; while we base the study through explication of existing literature.

Keywords: language, proverbs of encouragement, subculture, dialectal area

*Odeeokaa Journal of English
and Literary Studies, Vol.1 No.
2 June 2025*

Introduction: Language as a Cofounding Phenomenon

Language is an indispensable tool for communication given to humankind by the Omniscient God, the Supreme Linguist. By means of language, we interact with each other to inspire, love, teach, encourage, reason, persuade, cajole, and disagree, among others. Without language life would be drab, a bore, uninteresting, and hopeless, to mention no more.

Human languages have cognate features that make them harmonize with what we call language universals (UG); those features are sometimes referred to as *design features of language*. There is no human language, described or otherwise, that has not its literary variants. We associate the nonliterary variant with Chomsky's (1965:11) *competence* or de Saussure's (1966:13) *langue*. Besides, Saussure talks about *parole*, which has similar lexical meaning with Chomsky's *performance*. So, when a speaker of the English language or any other language demonstrates knowledge and ability in the

two linguistic terms of Sausure's *langue* and *parole* as well as Chomskian linguistic terms of *competence* and *performance*, we contend, consummate *indices of* grammaticality, why because Chomsky insists that: "Acceptability is a concept that belongs to the study of performance, whereas grammaticalness belongs to the study of competence." Therefore, it is the literary form or aspect of language that we talk about *literature*, the term we have been alluding to. Whereas the language form compares with the basic; let us use, *air* as another illustration. When in motion *air* becomes *wind*. In physics we further liken language to *potential energy* (the power an object possesses while at rest), but when in motion we liken it to *kinetic energy*. In the same vein, the *literary* form of language is *language in action* or *applied language*; in other words, we insist that *language exists basically in literature*. In all, language is the *basic* of this confounding phenomenal gift to humankind by means of which he interacts with, while the literature is the *communicative form*, where the linguistic rules are demonstrated and observed in order to produce well-formed structural sentence. By extension or extrapolation, applied psychology is *guidance and counselling*; applied science is *technology*, while applied basic fundamental movements of *walking*

and *running* are *movement exploration*, such as cartwheel, wheelbarrow walk, walk like a soldier, etc.

Now back to the bull's eye of our study. *Proverbs of encouragement* across cultures are among the "performative" component of language used by humans in the execution of speech acts or in speech event; in this study, proverbs of encouragement among the Igbo are also found in other languages of all language families.

Discourse Analysis and Speech Acts

In discourse analysis, we are interested in ascertaining the way language is *used* rather than what the components of the language are. We strive to find out how language users apply their language to achieve meaningful interaction or communication. In doing this language users seek to make sense from what they read in texts and understand what speakers mean in spite of what they say or recognize well-formed structures as against jumbled or incoherent discourse and in the process participate in the complex activity of conversation in speech events. As we endeavor to interpret discourse, we are involved in the field of study we call *discourse analysis*. Yule (2018: 141) explains our mind thus:

In the study of language, some of the most interesting questions arise in connection with the way language is ‘used’, rather than what its components are.... We are, in effect, asking how it is that language-users interpret what other language-users intend to convey. When we carry this investigation further and ask how it is that we, as language-users, make sense of what we read in texts, understand what speakers mean despite what they say, recognize connected as opposed to jumbled or incoherent discourse, and successfully take part in that complex activity called conversation, we are undertaking what is known as **discourse analysis**.

In an attempt to interpret discourse in speech event, we try to isolate certain structural features that enable us to participate actively in conversation of a given speech event such as debate, interview, lecture, seminar, workshop and all other types of discussions. Such structural features include cohesion, cohesive links, and coherence.

We cannot engage in social interaction in absence of language and since humans are not sociolinguistic robots, we actively participate in speech event in order to inform, reason, reveal or even perform as we exercise our social roles. In speech event we talk about

ethnographic communication, which encases the cultural aspects of the language. O’Grady, Archibald and Katamba (2011:511) state that ethnography of communication “is a way to analyse discourse by using the same sort of methods that anthropologists might use to study other aspects of culture, such as religious practices.” Indeed, each language embodies religious, philosophic or ethnographic, linguistic, etc. thoughts of that speech community. So, as we engage in speech event within the ambit of what O’Grady, Archibald and Katamba refer to as “speech situations”, we engage in discourse analysis. According to them, speech situations pertain to circumstances involving speech usage; that is, for example, the culture of that language that espouses guidance governing interactions. The propositions apply to proverbial usage of each speech community so that it is used aright to communicate meaning. Using proverbs of encouragement, it must be in consonance with the ethnography of communication of the Igbo, the culture and people, who own and use the language in discourse settings or speech event.

The study relies on the Inferential Model linguistic theory instead of the Message Model theory, owing to the obvious defects

of Message Model, which, among other things, “equates the message a speaker intends to communicate with the meaning of some expression in the language (Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish, 2010:387).” Therefore, the Inferential Model linguistic communication is preferred to the Message Model as it takes care of those defects, which the Message Model has. The Inferential Model, for instance, reason Akmajian, et al, “connects the message with the meaning of the uttered expression by a sequence of inferences.” The Model involves a series of inferential strategies, they continue, which, if followed, take the listening audience from hearing the expression uttered to the speaker’s communicative intent. Since proverbs dwell in the oral milieu, it is when proverbs of encouragement are spoken to the hearer that the meaning of them will affect the behavior of the hearer, who may be involved in purposive endeavor or passing through harsh life experiences and thus strengthen the hearer so affected. The Inferential Model, our source explains, includes “referential, nonliteral, and indirect strategies, thereby avoiding” the defects discernible in the Message Model.

The choice of Inferential communicative language theory of this study is apt in view of the fact that proverbs, like, any other literary

expression, is weighted in figurative language. The hearer of proverb of encouragement has to think deeply and reflectively in order to comprehend the undercurrent message of the person who gives it to him before it can affect his behavior.

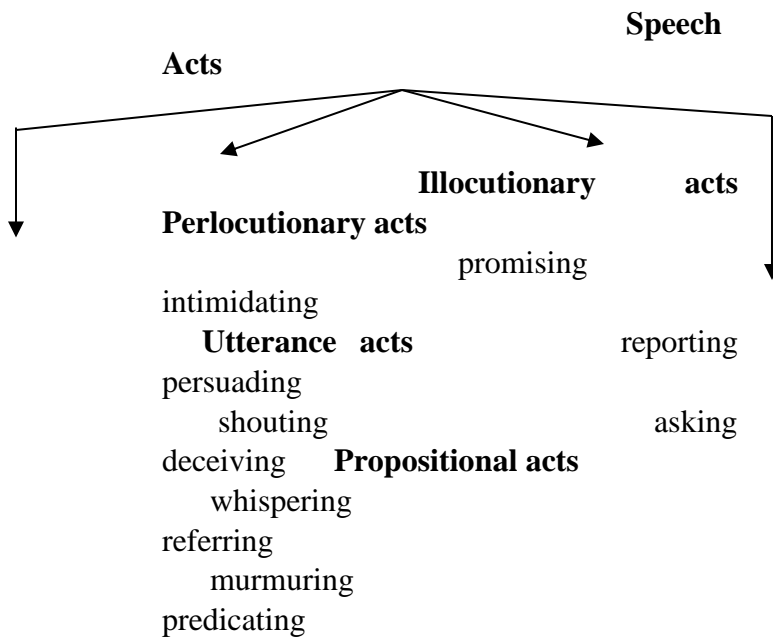
Again, in discourse and communication, we utter, as in the case of proverbs of whatever intent, single words or exclamatory utterances that can be found in virtually all human languages that may fit into UG, phrases and non-sentential utterances or fragments of sentences, or better still deleted transformational informal statements.

Of Speech Acts

Speech acts are acts performed in uttering expressions (in speech event) (Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish, 2010:395). The term – speech acts – in large part, came from Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) in their work of this theory, as researchers into this theory were initially unable to invent appropriate terminology, which could identify or label the four different types or important categories of the acts.

In discourse we delve into performatives and speech acts; and in line with the corpus of this essay, we use some of the performative utterances to console, praise, reassure, or encourage the listener. Let us view the tree-

structure types of speech acts and figure out from which node proverbs of encouragement may belong or emanate from.



Source: Adapted from Akmajian, et al. (2010:396).

Some other utterances we may find under the tree node of “illocutionary acts” are requesting, suggesting, ordering, telling, proposing, thanking, and proposing.

In the speech acts, a theory developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), cited in Akmajian and his associates, Austin and Searle argue that there are four important categories of speech acts used in performative utterances, among others. These four important categories are *utterance acts*, *illocutionary acts*, *perlocutionary acts* and *propositional acts*.

In the speech acts tree, above, we concern ourselves, for this study, with *illocutionary*

acts. This is so because in the *utterance acts* of the first node, left, the utterances performed are simply sounds, syllables, words, phrases and sentences from a language, utterances that are not necessarily communicative as they can be performed by such nonhuman animates like a parrot, a dog, pussycat, etc. and inanimate nominal like tape recorder, or voice synthesizer, in line with the theoretical prescriptions of Austin and Searle (Akmajian, et al, 2010). In effect, we cannot utter or produce proverbs of encouragement via *utterance acts*. Now if we come to *illocutionary acts*, we produce sounds when we utter or communicate something that may produce effect on the hearer; this is also applicable to *perlocutionary acts*. Thus, we should dwell on illocutionary acts, acts that should interest us as well as speech acts theorists, in as much as they will produce desirable effects on the hearer when we give them to the person who deserves proverbs of encouragement. So, it is in *illocutionary acts* that we can produce such utterances like promise, state, ask, tell, thank, request, suggest, propose, etc. that fit into the linguistic aperture of proverbs of encouragement (in) communication.

Oral Literature and Igbo-African Heritage

Oral literature is a heritage of every speech community. The Igbo language as a language, the Igbo as an ethnic group and Igbo culture, all have common oral literature, their oral tradition, unwritten literary inheritance bequeathed to the present generation from ancestors of yore. In sum, this oral tradition may simply be described as *folklore*, to represent all shades of oral literature as delineated by scholars like Emenyonu, Finnegan, Soyinka and others. Patai (1983:17-18) elaborates on this fact and even takes us to the etymology of *folklore* and views and consensus of scholars about it. According to Patai:

The term “folklore” was coined in 1846, by the English antiquarian, William John Thoms, to replace the earlier expression “popular antiquities.” The new term soon established itself in countries outside England, and was definitively adopted by Nordic scholars, among them Finns, who are to the present day first and foremost in this study. As to the precise scope of the science of folklore, there was some divergence in the views of its students ..., until finally there emerged a consensus of opinion of the majority, to the effect that folklore is the study of the mental equipment of the simple folk in civilized countries. This definition

requires some explanation. By mental equipment, as distinguished from technical skill, are understood mainly the traditional beliefs, customs, songs, stories, and sayings, while the technical skill of the people is expressed in popular artifacts such as buildings, furnishings, and clothing, as well as utensils, implements, ornaments, and the like. These latter lie, accordingly, outside the scope of folklore proper, and are studied by its sister science, ethnology.

We have gone this length of quotation to unveil vital points about folklore or oral tradition we find across cultures. For a fact, proverbs, which are essential component of folklore, as amply elaborated by Patai, are integral of a people’s culture, in which language is the arrowhead or culture carrier. Proverbs, as we reel them out, encases the “mental equipment” and “technical skill” “of the simple folk in civilized countries.” We must, however, add, by way of clarification, call it rejoinder, that folklore is not exclusive preserve of the so-called “civilized countries”, since folklore domiciles in speech communities of every land and clime, and more so, no language is superior or inferior to the other; much the same way Igbo proverbial dictum states that no one says that his

mother's soup is bad. Let us distance ourselves from racial bias!

The vital point we wish to make here is that proverbs of peoples, tongues and nationalities incorporate both their mental equipment and technical skill. This goes to underscore the fact that culture can broadly be divided into material (technical skill) and nonmaterial (mental equipment) components. The nonmaterial aspects are abstractions encapsulated in the culture, which we find in sociological or social and ideological components of culture, and which also constitute the people's customs and traditions, relation of peoples as who to marry or not, normative practices and anomie, sanctions (sociological); belief system, fears and aspirations, joys and hates, spiritual values are entrenched in the people's ideological culture. The technical skill or material components of technological or technical culture; are concrete nominal we can touch, such as the people's artifacts such as buildings, agricultural tools, war or military fabrications, ingenuity of their technical knowhow, etc. In effect, the artifacts as identified by Patai, are not strangers in the articulation and study of folklore but part and parcel of the term. All the war fabrications of Biafra – *Ogbunigwe, Shaw Battery, Rockets, ingenuity from her*

Land Army agriculture, oil refinery, etc., all emanate from their folklore, a reflection of their cosmology or *Uwa Ndiigbo*. If a person does not know, his peer or colleague shows or teaches him (**Ihe onye na-amaghi, ibe ezi ya**), for no one dies and buries oneself (**Odighi onye nwuru nu, lie onwe ya**). That is what scholarship is all about. We don't hoard knowledge; rather we spread it.

The proverbial genre is an integral component of oral literature. Other components of oral literature, generally speaking, are myths or folktales or folklore, legends, histories, idiomatic expressions, superstitions, chants, songs, etc. Anyachonkeya's (1997) slice of Igbo oral literature states that Igbo oral literature comprises folklore, riddles, lyric poetry, idioms and proverbs. Later Anyachonkeya (2008:100-120) further expands the scope to comprise riddles, tongue twisters, folk tales, traditional drama, riddles, myths, (and) legend." Emenyonu (1978: 2) presents a full picture of Igbo oral literature in terms of its componential features. He explains that Igbo oral literature "embodies the literary aspects of Igbo Oral Performances such as folksongs, folktales, riddles, proverbs, prayers including incantations, histories, legends, myths, drama, oratory (forensic and otherwise) and festivals." He adds that from the expanded

scope, Igbo oral literature encapsulates Igbo life, its culture and its worldview.

Impact of Proverbs on Discourse

Proverbs constitute essential segment of oral literature. They are oral, we well know, because as other genres of oral literature they are products of preliterate societies. Moreover, they have no authorship with variations in tales' compositions in different subcultures of a language as we have it among the people, who speak and use the Igbo language. Today, we normally describe proverbs and their counterparts of oral literature as always *oral*; nevertheless, the lacuna is avidly being closed because they are fast becoming part and parcel of written literature especially in described languages, as we are *really* doing in this essay. Probably, proverbs and their sister oral genres, stand tall encoded in African Literature, in all genres, we call *Literature in English* for the Anglophone Africa. We find similar situations in Francophone and Lusophone Africa, all of which embellish the Africanness of African Literature. Okunde (2007:519) corroborates our sentiment, when he states:

Orality provides an eloquent illustration of vitality of the African cultural life. It must be noted that African oral tradition manifests itself in

African literature, be it poetry, drama or prose.... The expression, oral tradition, connotes a practice or method as well as its products. The products are basically oral messages anchored on previous oral messages, which are several generations old. The practice or method is the transmission of such messages verbally over a period of time.... From the above indications, most African literature carry the indelibility of ink, which makes it an aesthetic transformation, the literature is culturally garnished with traditional embellishments. In most African writings, there is no distinguishing divide between the oral and the written modes.

Like the neophyte despondent in the art of traditional discourse, who said that others have said what he wanted to say, Okuyade has not only spoken our mind and said all there is to be said or inferred earlier, he, also, has in the process commented on the nitty-gritty of African oral literature as well as the patriotic efforts of African literary writers in which Achebe is the touch bearer and author and finisher of master artistry in the garnishing of African Literature with our oral tradition; we join Okuyade in saying, *your voice, our voice*.

This will now take us near to the task at hand - proverbs - in their generality. When we

speculate on Igbo proverbs, the audience will not hesitate to share our optimism that Igbo proverbs speak the pains and joys of humanity, just as Achebe's Igbo epic *Things Fall Apart*, captures not only the fears and aspirations of the Igbo person during the white man's cunning advent with his Trinitarian union of religion, commerce and rule of law or government, but which message also makes universal appeal.

What *Exactly* Is Proverb?

We seem to be begging the question in this Socratic style; for having seen the mouth of the young bird and turn round to ask from where it feeds! However, if we don't know where to place the hand and cry, we place it at the knee. Be that as it may, let us thus begin this subtask in order to build material foundation as a launching pad to the task proper.

Proverbs, according to Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish (2012: 387), "are traditional sayings having a fixed general sentential form, alluding to a common truth or general wisdom, with some (rudimentary) literary value, used to guide action, explain a situation, or induce a feeling or attitude." From their definition of this genre, we infer that proverbs enhance and stimulate as well give vitality to discourse; they are guidepost to life. A proverb is a traditional saying

which offers advice or presents a moral in a short and pithy manner (Speake, 2015: xi). That proverbs are traditional in intent presupposes that they abound in all cultures of speech communities.

Abrams and Harpam (2012:10) construe proverbs as "short, pithy statements of widely accepted truths about everyday life. Many proverbs are allegorical, in that the explicit statement is meant to have, by analogy or by extended reference." Yes, proverbs are allegorical since by creativity humans even go to the world of the nonhuman animates and reel out what they said or did including mimicking their speech acts! For instance, one Igbo proverb tells us what the he-dog said; why he urinates and raises his leg up, to deny to his kinsmen that he has no elephantiasis of the scrotum (**Nkita si na ihe mere ya ji nyuma mmamiri welie ukwu ya elu bu ka ya gooro umunna ya ago ibi**). The other one is alleged to have been said by the pussycat; why he covers his excreta with sand; so that a person's possession does not become another person's own (**Nwaologbo si na ihe mere ya ji anyu nsi wee kpochie ya aja bu na odighi esi ike ihe mmadu aburu ihe onyeozo**). Yet the other proverb involves both human and the spirit – When the old brave (man) coughs, the old or aged spirits listen (**Ochie dike kwaa ukara, ochie ndi**

mmuo egée nti). We have not forgotten the allegorical proverbial tale of animals getting ready for war, apparently against their human enemies and asked the shrew (**Nkapi**) to lead the battle, simply, as they told him, his meat is not eaten. The shrew reacted: “Ee! Who do you want to be killed and thrown away (**Ee, ma gbuo nu onye tufuo**)?” Or the crab’s lament that he swarm great and small seas; but it is the woman’s soup pot that could “eat” his head (**Nsiko sin a ya egwuo mmiri ukwu, gwo mmiri nta; ma obu zi itofe agadi nwanyi ga-eri isi ya**). These and other countless examples, among others, account for the allegorical nature of proverbs.

Proverb is a short, pithy, common or popular saying, long current, which embodies some familiar truth, expressive and often picturesque language (Anyachonkeya, 2004:580).

Anyachonkeya (2017) also observes that “Igbo proverbs, like all other proverbs of every other speech community, lubricate discourse, invigorate thought, enliven speech (event), and give resilience to logic in sociolinguistic transaction.” Proverbs, of course, paint pictures of the imaginary phenomena to make the truths of the sayings come to life. Proverbs as well serve as oil to lubricate “engines” of thought.

In view of the diverse expositions on proverbs, which point to similar corpora, inform Achebe’s (1975:6) timeless declaration that “among the I(gb)o the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten.” Yes, proverbs, no matter the clime, lubricate thought; they are the “palm oil” with which words are eaten. Name a piece of discourse without a trace of this fascination genre occupying the front burner. They are there to paint pictures with words and justify the *whys* and *wherefores* things are so and point the way forward. Any oral or written discourse without trace of proverbs can be likened a well-dressed maiden without smiles on her face. It is in discourse among the aged and in the countryside that *proverbs up* (**ka ilu na-ari ibe ha elu**), to put it in accordance with language habits and patterns of thought of the Igbo. Any function in Igbo community without the traditional Igbo kola nut, then infer there are no proverbs; just as, the saying, often said, that any place on earth you visited or travelled to and you didn’t see an Igbo person, run four-forty for your dear life!.

Igbo Proverbs according to Regional and Dialectal Areas

Just as Igbo names are available in all regional and dialectal areas of the Igbo land,

so also proverbs. For instance, Igbo proverbs are replete in the following regional and dialectal areas, delineated by Anyachonkeya (2012:8-9):

Enugu covering *Udi, Achi, Nkanu, Ngwo, Nsukka, Kogi* and parts of Benue Regional Dialects; Afikpo and Abakaliki, comprising Effium, Ezza, Izzi of Benue State, Cross River State, etc; Ohaozara/Uburu/Ivo, etc; Ikwere/Etche Axes of Rivers State, including Ahoada, Omoku, Ogba-Egbema; Owerri Subculture (Owerri-Nchi-Ise, Orji-Urrata, Ngor-Okpalla, Mbaise, Mbaitoli, Ikeduru, etc; Okigwe/Mbano; Bende, embracing Abriba, Umuahia, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, etc; Old Aguata; Oguta/Onitsha/Anioma/Obo si; Orlu (Orsu, Oru, Nkalu, Isu; Ngwa/Ukwa/Itumbuzo.

Let us cite, by purposive sampling, examples of proverbs of some of these places according to regional/dialectal areas. From **Enugu**, we learn that: **Dibia olu ike adighi agbara onye ori izu** (A deep hoarse-medicine man does not whisper to a thief). From **Oguta/Onitsha**... bloc of regional/dialectal areas: **Ukwu opitipiti bu onu mmanu-mmanu** (A muddy leg brings oiled mouth. **Owerri: Kama ihe ufu ga-afugbu m, ihe uto togbuo m** (Instead of me to die in pain; let me die of pleasure or of sweet thing).

Orlu: Nwanyi nyomere ala ohuu ya na-agba isi na-ala (The woman who insists on seeing the extremity of her vagina bruises her forehead on the ground (Anyachonkeya, 1997:128); **Onye na-eche enyi ya nwanyi na-anu ikitiukwu ndi mmuo** (He who is waiting for his girlfriend hears the foot sound-rhythms of the spirits); **Onye oko na-ata na ike na-atakwa n'onu, amaghi mgbe oriri nsi** (He who crawl-crawl itches at both buttocks and the mouth at the same time does not know when he has eaten excreta).. **Ikwere/Etche: Nnadi awudi ete/apali eji arii elu** (Vampire kinsman is not rope for climbing). **Old Aguata: Adoobie, zokoo, odighi ezuzi** (If [a] rope is cut and joined together, it is never complete again); **Onu adighi eje bee onu gbara aka.** (The mouth does not go another mouth empty-handed); **Agbuu na-aka na nne** (Genre manifestation is supreme from [the] mother side, etc., etc).

This essay examines the relevance of proverbs in discourse, paying particular attention to their efficacy in dispensing or giving *encouragement*. Encouragement is used by the giver to his fellow discussant, who is facing life challenges like sickness, suffering; according to Tamida (2016) and other concatenations of life; proverbs of encouragement are also used to stimulate and invigorate strength or bolster the morale of a

person who is engaged in worthwhile human endeavor, or positive work engagement. This way, the giver buckles up. One Igbo proverb of encouragement states that if you thank an **akidi porridge** expert, she will be able to dish out again (**Ekele onye akidi, ogwota ozo**). Absence of proverbs of encouragement is comparable to the rare situation where sacrifice is offered without sighting **udele**, vulture. What is shown is friend; **nwanne** or sibling is not shown, because when a corpse begins to smell, a friend supreme or greater than sibling or **nwanne** departs or goes.

Statement of the Problem

The problem that has motivated this inquiry lies on the fact that many Igbo-speakers are not literate in their language. They do not show appreciation on the efficacy of Igbo oral literature, let alone in the genre of proverbs. In discourse session the so-called literate or educated Igbo are unable to sustain discourse for a suitable length without recourse to code switching or code mixing; how much less being competent in the proverbs native to their speech community. Proverbial acquisition comes with age, reserved to the custodians of traditional values of wisdom and higher knowledge. The educated elites are abysmally despondent in the proverbs of their heritage. This study attempts to challenge them to sit up and value

their mothers' soup as good, understand the import in charity beginning at home though should not end there. They should think global but also act local.

Research Questions

The essay leans on the following hypothetical question statements:

1. What is proverb?
2. Which are some of the Igbo proverbs of encouragement?
3. Who deserves to receive proverb of encouragement?
4. Who dispenses proverbs of encouragement?
5. Why are proverbs of encouragement germane in discourse?

Proverb of Encouragement Is for Everybody

Everybody deserves to receive proverbs of encouragement. It may be given to a person in gainful and purposeful endeavor to which the person in which his family and society benefit. That is why we have different types of song-poems for each specific activity of Igbo life. The song poems or lyric poetry, as in any other oral literature of any speech community, are "war songs, work songs, birth songs, title songs, funeral songs and chants, tales songs, children's songs, the praise or court poems. (Anyachonkeya,

2008:102) ” So we freely lavish but purposefully too songs of encouragement in work songs and non-song poems to buoy up the morale of the recipient. For instance, spectators are always there to pour out proverbs of encouragement on actors on stage and players of any game.

Everybody Dispenses Proverbs of Encouragement

Any member of Igbo society can dispense proverb of encouragement, either as commendation or work up the morale of the recipient or to console him in the event of unhappy eventuality. So, proverbs of encouragement are also given to a person, who suffers life calamity such as bereavement, loss of a sponsor, failure in an endeavor, ghastly accident, victim of natural disaster, etc. Some funeral songs contain proverbs of encouragement. Since anybody can become a victim of these life's challenges, he therefore deserves to receive proverb of encouragement sometime as well. Since no man is an island unto himself, we need each other in sorrow and in joy, we identify. That is why the Igbo say “**gidi-gidi wu ugwu eze.**” That is, this proverbs alludes to “united we stand; divided we fall or unity is strength.”

Some Igbo Proverbs of Encouragement

We now address the task proper, that for which a goat was slaughtered: Igbo proverbs of encouragement.

Nkita no na-oke oru, noo na oru. The dog seated at land boundary of a farmland is also at work. We use this proverb to encourage a person, whose role or contribution in a farm work at farm site, probably because of infirmity or ill health but came to work, deserves encouragement to him or her feel relevant or important. This proverb can equally be used in any related situation other than a farmland. We can as well cite a similar proverb, which states that all fingers are not equal (**Mkpisi aka niile ahaghi n’otu**). Since all fingers are not equal, yet they work cooperatively and harmoniously with others to achieve a purpose or success.

Onye nnodoro ugu, ka onye olulu ya. The person who sits by and encourages a person fighting his opponent is greater or supreme than the person in the actual fighting. This proverb stresses the relevance of having an individual beside another in a purposeful endeavor. A similar example of this proverb straddles idiomatic rendition and proverb, and which cannot be truly translated. It is **Gidi-gidi wu ugwu eze.** Another similar transliterated example of this proverb is **Anyuko mamiri onu, ogba ufufu.** (When (we) urine together, it *dances* foam).

Nleta adighi ala oria, ma onaadi ihuu mma (Visiting a sick person (to commiserate with him) does not stop or end the sickness or heal the person, but enlivens the sick fellow). As indicated, this proverb of encouragement is given to a sick person. Any person can give it, because the giver may fall sick tomorrow and another person, or even the person he visited on his sickbed may get well and visit to cheer him up.

Ekele onye nyuru ahiri, ekele onye nuru isi ya (This proverb seems more tenable in Yoruba culture and nationality, where the people reverence their elders so much so that even when an elder fouls the air or releases a fart, the young person around responds: “**Pele Baba [Sorry Baba]!**”). In this sociolinguistic circumstance and ambience, it is believed that releasing the fart is a relief, while habouring it in the body is somewhat a sickness! Therefore, this proverb of encouragement falls under the category of those given to the sick person. This proverb gains entrance into the Igbo linguistic idiolect because it is customarily used by Igbo artiste Zebrudaya when possessed by the spirit or muse of comedy, *Thalla* (Anyachonkeya, 2002:73) on stage performance!

Emenyere Nwogwugwu, emenyere Nwanosike, ma menyekwara Adanne ya noo na ulo (If you favour Nwaogwugwu, you

favour Nwanosike and also favour his elder Sister at home). This proverb is of Ngwa (in Abia State, of Old Imo State) origin. It was popularized by Chief Uzoigwe, Deputy Governor of Old Imo State under the Governorship of **Nde Sam Mbakwe**. This proverb of encouragement is given to a person working in a productive and virtuous endeavor, where others are also doing the same work. If you commend one person, you are bound to commend or encourage the others, either verbally or with concrete positive reinforcement.

Ibu adi mmadu abuo buru, mgbe aga-ato ya, asi omee (A load carried by two persons; when it will be dropped, (we) say: *Omee*, a shout to *drop* it)! As we give encouragement with a proverb, we spread it equitably to all others involved in the same work as they work together in the same vicinity.

Mmekoo adighi agwu ike (Finish up a final work does not tire a person). It is proverb of encouragement, given to the person, who shows signs of fatigue never to give up but continue to finish it up. It is then given to the person to buoy him up to persevere to the end of the task.

Ibu ga-eru ulo, obia na-ariri (When an endeavor or a load being carried is getting homebound, it becomes a nagging challenge (*ariiri*)). To the person who shows such

temper is given or reminded of this proverb of encouragement.

Igwe bu ike (Unity is strength). This proverb is given to all and sundry, to remind everybody that love, peace, live-and-let-live, give-and-take are indices of *unity* and when in unity the people prosper or make progress. The proverb of encouragement is indispensable to forge pan-Igbo spirit, in the family, or in any group with positive or beneficial engagement to the society. This proverb of encouragement agrees in spirit and letter to the English proverb: United we stand; divided we fall.

Odighi onye nwuru nu, lie onwe ya (There is no one, who died and buries oneself). As proverb of encouragement, it is given to a sick person or a person in worthwhile job, to highlight the fact that nobody is an island unto himself. We need each other.

Mmadu diiri ibe ya (We are asset unto each other). That means that nobody, under normal circumstances, would like to live alone. This proverb of encouragement can be given both to a person engaged in positive endeavor or sick person, or any other life challenges. An English proverb close to it is proverb shared is half-solved. That partly explains why in our rustic countryside we have the longing to participate in moonlight games/plays, in the days gone by, when the

shrew used to blow the horn and his kinsman, the frog, kept leaping and leaping. Enekwe (1986:1) takes us to memory lane of the rustic bliss we enjoyed without paying a dime for it:

*I come from a land
where the Sun
smiles in the day,
the moon at
night,
and electric
has not killed the
stars*

Agbako-agbako kwanye nwa-nwa na olulu, odighi awa afa (When collectively push a maternal child into a pit, he does not exact divination). This proverb can be given by a person to another guilty of misconduct the society frowns at in which others present as a group concur while pronouncing sanction to the guilty person, who deserves it. **Onye ruuo, orie** (He, who worked (hard in a purposeful endeavor to achieve success or receive a prize) reaps. The proverb is dispensed to commend a person for having worked hard; thus serving as a lesson to the lazy around. This proverb of encouragement has similar semantic import with **Ukwu opitipiti, ma obu ukwu aja-aja bu onu mmanu-mmanu** (The swampy leg brings oiled mouth); also: **Aruuo na anwu, erie na ndo** (If you work under sun, you eat or reap under a relaxed condition); also: **The firewood one fetched in the dry season he uses in a rainy season**; also: If you fetch

water in the morning, it will appear it will not be drunk (**Ewere ututu chuo mmiri, odi ka agaghi anu ya anu**). The “n” letter in “anu:” is a nasal sound, to mean “drink.” Those warning proverbs of encouragement hold universal message for all from all walks of life and divides; that he who works hard to achieve a purpose deserves success for a work well done; that success has so many fathers but defeat is an orphan; that failure makes a person bitter, but cruel success improves on the character of the man; that there is no short cut to any successful career in life; that to work is to pray (*Laborare est orare*, L), or that the hood does not make the monk (*Habitus non facit monachum*, L (Anyachonkeya, 2004: 259;266)).

Ike wu diokpara uba (Hard work is the first son of riches). Hard work is antidote for riches. This proverb of encouragement is given to encourage a hard-working fellow or counsel to a lazy person to embrace hard work as indispensable asset to success; but that hard work must be anchored in Godly-fear. That is in tandem with the Latinate proverb *Laborare est orare* (To work is to pray); because there is nothing a person has that is not a gift from God. A somewhat antithetical proverb in English is “There’s no food for lazy man.” Even the utopian

literature, the Christian *Bible*, admonishes the lazy person thus:

*Go to the ant, you
lazy one;
Observe its way and
become wise
(Proverbs 6:6).*

Amara bele-bele gbuo mmadu, alaruo ulo, awuru dike (With shivery a person is killed; but when at home, (the assailant) becomes a brave man). Of course, we work with the figurative rendition of the statement, hence proverbial. The proverb of encouragement has similar meaning with the English proverb, which states that *Fortune favours the brave* or *Fortune smiles on somebody* (Anyachonkeya, 2007:114; *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 2008:564).

Mberede nyiri dike, ma mberede ka eji amara dike (Emergency overwhelms the brave, but from emergency (happening) the brave is known). The proverb of encouragement is administered to an individual engaged in an endeavor society approves to urge him to soar high the more; that in unexpected challenges a brave and courageous person is known. It also draws our attention that in life we will always anticipate challenges and so must be prepared to contain those unexpected eventualities.

Mgbe amuru dike na mba, ka amuru ibe ya (The time or period a brave person is born

in a distant land is also the time or period his counterpart is born). This proverb admonishes us that we should not underrate each other's capacity to achieve feats. There should never be feeling of inferiority complex, vis-à-vis, when facing a peer or competitor in a contest of wits, or whatever. Life is full of storms; therefore, a smooth sea does not make for a skillful mariner; we remember this always. The proverb of encouragement applies to all, no matter gender or age. We must not be afraid of an opponent on a slippery ground (**Adighi m aso dike na mgbarapiti**).

Oburu na onwu egbughi nwaeghu, aka ga-eru ya na ikenga (If the death did not kill the young goat, its hand will get to *ikenga*). This proverb of encouragement has similar semantic meaning with **Oburu na onwu egbughi utuu, oga-eri ihe gbara ajii**. This proverb of encouragement to a hard-working person is a transliteration of Achebe's (1978:142) "Unless the penis dies young it will surely eat bearded meat." *Arrow of God*. Chapter Thirteen). In other words, *Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty*, an English proverb. These proverbs of encouragement are declarations of optimism. The Igbo put it in another way, in a lyric work song: (**Kama nga-anwu, ka m ndoliwa** (*dacapo*); **uwa wu ndoli-ndoli**), Instead of me to die, let me

trudge on; life is replete in trudging and trudging. Or even **Mpem-mpe ndu ka onwu mma**. That is to say, an impaired life is better than the death. The philosopher-King Solomon puts it this way in the utopian literature:

There is hope for whoever is among the living, because a live dog is better off than a dead lion (Ecclesiastes 9:4).

With these proverbial words of encouragement – English and Igbo – we keep on jogging, as it were, since the world is not a bed of roses, after all rose flowers have thorns on them!

Uzo di mma, agaa ya ugboo abuo (When a road or journey is good, it is walked or trod again). The proverb applies to all in honest pursuit. If an endeavour proves lucrative and successful, we intensify efforts to consolidate. If we don't speculate we cannot accumulate.

Onya asi jide ka oji, oputara na ihe oname di mma (If a person is asked to hold unto what he is holding, it means that what he is doing is good). Positive reinforcement or motivation is sine qua non, *an indispensable condition*, an elixir of life, which everybody in a wholesome work pursuit, needs and desires, for the outcome of which will turn out well *pro bono public* (for the good of the people), as it pleases God and man.

Implication of Findings

From the foregoing, the Igbo language as well as the owners of the language and the culture itself that is the powerhouse of proverbs of encouragement, is like the bush that has both bees and wasps for having all it needs in going for battle. Igbo culture is a beehive of proverbs of all sorts, especially the slice of it on encouragement considered in this discourse; that more research findings are recommended to dig and excavate more of the nuggets of wisdom endowed to the people by the Supreme Linguist and Cistern of proverbs infinite to excavate till the young eternity that humans will never explore the unfathomable ways of God, the Igbo call **Obinigwe, Ama-Ama-Amata Amata, Nwoke a noo N'elu, ma ogodo ya ana-akpu na-ala, ma obughi oversize; Ossai, Chukwu Okike, Chineke, Ezechiteoke, etc.**

Conclusion

This investigation has shown beyond all reasonable doubts that proverbs are part and parcel of oral literature and there is no speech community that has not its proverbs as its heritage from time immemorial of ancestors down to the present-day generation. These proverbs demonstrate resilience and exhibit uniqueness according to subculture and

regional and dialectal areas; the proverbs of Igbo culture theatre are no exception.

We asserted that proverbs of all land and clime hinge on cosmic laws in that they embody absolute universal truths, dispensed according to circumstances of each speech event, either as pedagogy, entertainment, information, ennobling of thought, morale bolster, inter alia.

This essay focuses attention on encouragement Igbo proverbs in discourse, in line with speech acts semantics of illocutionary and perlocutionary acts of Austin and Searle. The inquiry relied on the Inferential Model linguistic theory; while we based the study through explication of existing literature.

This essay makes a disclaimer. It has not claimed to have said the final word on the proverbs of encouragement among the Igbo. It definitely has scratched the parcel of Igbo literary goatskin bag without daring to open the ripped maize for fear of fouling our lore. The study is confident that there is no work of man that can meet perfect artistic finish. In effect, it beckons on scholars to come over to Macedonia and help us by conducting further research inquiries to unveil as much as it is possible the robust length and breadth of proverbs of encouragement among the Igbo of Africa. Till then, when the thief will

perform the funeral rites of his late mother,
we come to look for our lost spoons.

References

- Abrams, M. H. (2012). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. N.p: Wadsworth, Crenage Learning.
- Achebe, Chinua. (1975). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- (1978). *Arrow of God*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish, (2010). *Linguistics: An introduction to Language and Communication*. MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Anyachonkeya, Ngozi. (1997). *Once Upon a Time: A Slice of Igbo Oral Literary Heritage*. Owerri: Colon Concepts.
- (2002). *Dagogo*. Owerri: Colon Concepts.
- (2004). *The English Language Usage: Form and Style*. Owerri: Hudson-Jude Nigeria.
- (2007). *English Language and Communication*. Owerri: Chukwuemeka Printers and Publishers.
- (2008). "Orature." In Ndukwe Agwu, and Ngozi Anyachonkeya. Eds. *The Anatomy of Literary Criticism*. Owerri: Chukwuemeka Printers and Publishers: (100-120).
- (2017). "Nigerian English and Igbo Proverbs." A Paper Presented at the 33rd Annual National Conference of English Scholars Association of Nigeria (ESAN), Held at the Department of English and Literary Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (Samaru Main Campus) from 27 – 30, November,.
- (2021). "Semiotics and Naming among the Igbo of Nigeria". A Paper Presented at the 4th Chinua Achebe International Conference, in Collaboration with Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC), Organized by the Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, March 8 – 11.
- Chomsky, Noam: (1965). *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Emenyonu, Ernest. *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.
- Enekwe, Ossie. (1986). "Jocker." In *Broken Pots*. Nsukka: Afa Press.
- O'Grady, William, John Archibald and Francis Katamba (2011). *Contemporary Linguistics: An Introduction*. Harlow: Longman.
- Okuyade, Ogaga. (2007). "Defiance with Orature: A Study of Tanure Ojaide's *Labyrinths of the Delta & The Endless Song*." In *Convergence: English and Nigerian Languages: A Festschrift for Munzali A. Jibril*. By Ndimele, Ozo-mekuri. Ed. Port Harcourt. M & J Grand Orbit Communications Ltd. & Emhai Press: (519-527).
- Patai, Raphael. (1983). *On Jewish Folklore*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Speake, Jennifer. (2015). *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*. Oxford: Oxford University of Press.

Saussure, de Ferdinand. (1966). *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Tamida, Elsie Abashe. (2016). "A Pragmatic Analysis of Tugbiri Proverbs of Encouragement." In *Linguistics, language and literature: A festschrift for Taiwo Olufunto Gani-Ikilama*. By Aje, O. Samuel, Gbenga S. Ibileye, Upah Nahum Butari, Onah El-Kanemi Patrick and Oreooluwa Abraham Solomon. Eds. Zaria: Department of English and Literary Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria: (129-137).

Yule, George. (2018). *The Study of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.