



Proverbs in Igbo Discourse

Michael Chukwualuka Uyanne, PhD.

&

Vivian Kaosisochukwu Ejiaso

Department of English Language and Literature

Nnamdi Azikiwe University

Awka, Anambra State

Nigeria

Abstract

In contemporary African societies, proverbs are repositories of values in a constantly evolving world through its meta-discourser status in human development. Proverbs are used in different contexts to share experiences within the psycho-social domain which affects diverse identities, ideologies and social standings. Their role is therefore functional in reflecting human peculiarities and thoughts. This paper looks at meta-communication through proverbs in the context of their meta-functional expressiveness. It focuses on their intellectual content, the wisdom they reflect, and the understanding they engender culturally when deployed in conversations. Relevance theory is used in data analysis. The theory prioritizes intention in human communication. Two hundred and fifty Igbo proverbs were purposively collected from which twenty-five were randomly selected for analysis. The study is descriptive and qualitative. Findings show that proverbs reflect ancient wisdom, philosophies and communal ideas and serve as conscience markers in society.

Keywords: explicator, language, meta-function, proverbs, relevance theory

Introduction

The literary content of a discourse impacts the contextual meaning. Thus, language is a spectrum that leverages socio-cultural and political contexts of discourse in its meta-functional expressiveness. Proverbs are deployed in communication among participants in specific discourse situations. They are metaphorical expressions of the philosophy, ideology, wisdom and culture of a people. They are the most reliable forms of

oral tradition that provide authentic worldviews of peoples in preliterate societies, and also a storehouse of ancient wisdom and accumulated experiences of past generations (Ikenga-Metuh, 1991, p. 23). In addition, they serve as tools of pedagogy, instruction and counselling from a cultural perspective.

In human cognition, the comprehension of the utterances of a speaker by a hearer in specific context depends mostly on the mutual cognitive environment shared by the participants. This makes the utterances of the speaker relevant with minimal effort at cognitive processing with wider contextual effect and maximal relevance. Thus, there is frictionless communication as participants engage in discourse. To test this perspective, twenty randomly selected Igbo proverbs were examined using the relevance theory of Sperber and Wilson (1995) to show how meaning is established in proverbial contexts and how participants make out meanings of proverbs relevant to them.

Rhetoric of Proverb

Proverbs are “short, pithy statements of widely accepted truths about everyday life” (Abrams and Harpham, 2012, p. 10). They are ageless and philosophical expressions in varying length (short or long structures) that are heavily clad in or laden with wisdom, truth and life experiences and are relevant in certain situations of use in discourse. Ehondor states that, “proverbs comprise a good portion of common sense, experience, wisdom and above all truth” (2017, p. 3). Proverbs contain compressed information about life and comprise a people’s thought pattern, philosophy and way of life. Tadi asserts that “proverbs are generally considered to be words of wisdom because they contain the distilled thoughts, ideas and philosophies of a people” (2008, p.1). These philosophical wise sayings are works of antiquity or ancient elders and they are passed on from generation to generation through words of mouth. According to Adeyemi and Salawudeen (2014, p.188), Usman (2008, p.3) and Mieder (1985, p.119) cited in Bashir and Amali (2008, p.1), proverbs are short philosophical thoughts and sentences generally known among a

particular people and which are passed down from generation to generation.

Proverbs are speech ornaments that enrich linguistic expressions. They are status symbols of communicative competence among elders and wise persons. Thus, effective use of proverbs is evidence of oratory skill. Tadi opines that proverbs aid in developing the communicative competence of people as it enables people to perfect their language skills” (2008, p.2-3). Communicative competence is “the totality of linguistic repertoire that is required of a competent language user to communicate effectively in his or her language, understanding when and how to use certain utterances” (Moshood, 2016, p.66). The literary icon, Chinua Achebe stated in his masterpiece, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), that “proverbs are the [palm]oil with which words are eaten” (p.5).

Proverbs play active roles in the social life of people as mode to advise, warn, analyze observe, criticize, admonish and console (Tadi, 2008, p.1). Mckenna (1996, as cited in Sheba and Oyewo, 2008, p.2 & Tadi, 2008, p.2) further adds that “...[proverbs] are used to teach some lessons to the young ones and to awaken the consciousness of other members of the society to the fact that the truths of the society should not be forgotten but be zealously guided” (p.2). For Maalej, “as an indirect mode of speaking and understanding, proverbs offer their users [and listeners] a measure of freedom to say indirectly what they would have thought about twice before saying without offending their targets” (2008, p.2). The use of proverbs in communication are indirect ways of expressing feelings or ideas politely so the hearer can deduce meaning using hints the context provides.

Discourse Specificity

Discourse refers to spoken or written communication. Discourse, according to Fairclough (1995, as cited in Ezeifeke, 2018, p.4), is “more than just language use; it is language use, whether speech or writing, seen as a type of social practice”. Discourse specificity looks at discourse and language use in a particular contextualised situation (The specificness an interlocutor has in the discussion of a particular topic in a cultural interlocution). Proverbs, for instance, are used in discourse to express and highlight philosophical realities of a particular culture that is the context of discussion. They are used in contexts where the hearer or addressee can easily interpret the proverb uttered in relation to the premise of the conversation. Speakers ought to be conscious of their language in the domain of the thing being said in order not to deviate but stick to the subject matter of discourse which entails the specificity of discourse.

Metadiscourse of Language

Metadiscourse means beyond discourse; that is, the use of discourse to talk about discourse. The term is coined by Zellig Harris to account for ways to understand language in use, representing a writer’s or speaker’s attempts to guide a receiver’s perception of a text (Hyland 2005, p.3). According to Kopple (1985, as cited in Yousefi and Risekh 2010, p. 159), it is “discourse about discourse”. For Yousefi and Risekh, metadiscourse refers to “the ways writers or speakers project themselves in their texts to interact with the receivers” (2010, p.159). Crismore et al (1993, as cited in Uba, 2020, p.57) view it as “features of textual organizations”. Uba corroborates this by asserting that writers use metadiscourse to achieve the consideration of the readers’ social influence and any possible impact on the readers because, “... the construction of meaning of a text lies between the shared knowledge and practices of both the writer

and the reader” (2020, p.57). To Mu, Zhang, Ehlich and Hong, metadiscourse refers to “the devices or resources which writers use to organize the discourse, engage the audience and signal the writer’s attitude” (2015, p.135). Metadiscourse includes linguistic items which refer to the speaker or writer, the listener or reader and the text, which could be written or spoken. It refers to the “commentary on a text” (Hyland, 2017) made by text producer “speaker or writer in the course of having a discourse say in form of speaking or writing. Hyland claims that metadiscourse is what helps relate a text to its context by using language to examine readers’ needs, understandings, existing knowledge and prior experiences with texts. A sample of discourse may realise both functions.

Metadiscourse of language are those discursal devices that are deployed by speakers or writers in their text production to convey meaning in such a way that the reader or listener is considered because he/she will be influenced by what is produced in the text. Metadiscourse markers are essentially important in discourse as they are “means of facilitating communication, supporting a position, increasing readability and building relationship with an audience” (Hyland 2005, p.5). Hyland further adds that metadiscourse plays a role of signaling the writer’s communicative intent in presenting propositional matters (2005, p.20). Examples of metadiscourse markers are: “I hypothesize”, “fortunately” (attitude markers), “she will certainly agree that” (commentaries), “according to Smith” (narrators), “first” (text connectives), “perhaps” (hedges), use of examples to illustrate a point and so on. Hyland differentiates between items that function “metadiscoursally” and “propositionally” using such words as: “therefore”, “in contrast”, and “as a result of”. These

linguistic items can function as metadiscourse in a text by “connecting steps in an argument” and function as a proposition when they are used “to connect events in the world outside the text”; the real world (2017).

Metadiscourse markers, as deduced from the foregoing, are evident in discourses even when a speaker or writer wishes to include proverbs in the discourse. A speaker could choose to deploy proverbial expressions in a particular discourse whose meanings are underlined in the linguistic items that make up those particular proverbs. The metadiscourse markers employed by the speaker in the discourse facilitate the listener’s understanding and connection of the proverbs to utterances made before them by the speaker through the metadiscoursal devices used. Here are some instances:

“Our father”, “nna anyi”, he said, “I have brought you this kola. As our people say, a man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness...” (culled from Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, 1958, p. 15).

“... But I can trust you. I know it as I look at you. As our fathers have said, you can tell a ripe corn from its look...” (*Things Fall Apart*, p. 17).

“It pleases me to see a young man like you these days when our youth have gone soft. Many young men have come to me to ask for yams but I have refused because I knew they would dump them in the earth and leave them to be choked by weeds. When I say no to them they think I am hard-hearted. But it is not so. Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt to shoot without missing,

he has learnt to fly without perching. I have learnt to be stingy with my yams. But I can trust you. I know it as I look at you. As our fathers said, you tell a ripe corn by its look. I shall give you twice four hundred yams. Go ahead and prepare your farm” (Nwakibie, in *Things Fall Apart*, p. 17).

“We shall all live. We pray for life, children, a good harvest and happiness. You will have what is good for you and I will have what is good for me. Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let his wing break.” (Nwakibie, in *Things Fall Apart*, p. 15).

“I have come to you for help. Perhaps you can already guess what it is. I have cleared a farm but have no yams to sow. I know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yams, especially these days when young men are afraid of hard work. I am not afraid of work. The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did. I began to fend for myself at an age when most people still suck at their mothers’ breasts. If you give me some yam seeds, I shall not fail you.” (Okonkwo, in *Things Fall Apart*, p. 17).

In the samples above, the metadiscourse markers are the pronouns “I”, “our”, “you”, “we”, “me”, “your”, “my”, “they”, “his”, “myself” and “their”. The narrators of textual metadiscourse (according to Vande Kopple’s classification of metadiscourse as cited in Hyland 2005:32) are, “As our people say”, “As our forefathers said”,

“Eneke the bird says” and “As our fathers said”. These metadiscourse indicators in discourse are used by the two speakers, Okonkwo and Nwakibie, to connect the proverbial expressions to utterances which are italicized.

Metafunctional Context of Interaction

‘Meta’ means beyond, thus metafunctional refers to function beyond the formal structure which includes the context of situation. The context of interaction contributes to the establishment and construing of meaning beyond the formalistic structure of utterance. Language is used for social interactions and performs ideational, textual and interpersonal functions which can only be found in context of use or interactions of humans. The ideational metafunction refers to how language is used to convey or organise cognitive reality or engage in mental appreciation. Simply put, it is how people see things in their environment and using language resources draw their experiences. Realities of the world and culture are represented using language resources, thus language is used to explain contexts. For example, in the setting of the courtroom, lawyers use legal language fit for the context to do their discourse.

Hoang (2021) explains that the experiential aspect of ideational function of language is “the resource speakers/writers draw on to construe their experience of the world - both the real world of physical phenomena and the inner world of their consciousness, feelings, beliefs and reflections” (p. 10). He further adds that the logical aspect of ideational metafunction is “the resource speakers/writers draw on to construe relations of phenomena and events such as “x and y” as in “You and I”.

Interpersonal metafunction expresses the social roles played by participants in discourse. It shows the speakers’ role with the addressees in an interlocution. This function of social roles expression is dependent upon the context of discourse. The context of language use in discourse determines the relationship shared by interlocutors in an interaction. Hoang avers “the resource speakers/writers draw on to establish and maintain social relations (in particular discourse domains)” (p.1). An instance is the context of a university, given an interlocution between a lecturer and a student (the social roles). The language use of the student would be the use of title and last name to address the lecturer and the use of first name by the lecturer to address the student. This shows that the social relationship is unequal in the sense that there is difference in status – the lecturer is in a higher rank.

Textual metafunction expresses the structure of information in discourse showing the connectives that are used coherently and cohesively to bind parts of a discourse/text to a whole. This is the resource addressers/writers draw on to construct “texts” or connected passages of discourse that is situationally relevant... In other words, the textual metafunction is concerned with creating relevance between the parts of what is being said/written, and between the text and the context of situation” (Hoang 2021, p.1).

Data and Methodology

Two hundred Igbo proverbs were collected and twenty were randomly selected for analysis. These select samples were chosen to illustrate how meaning is established based on context of use and how the hearer interprets the utterance from speaker with less cognitive effort for high relevance. This study adopted a descriptive research design.

This design was used as it was considered appropriate for this study because the data collected are samples of people's use of proverbs. According to Chukwuemeka (2002), this type of research design is "a type of survey research that tries to unravel the essential elements or characteristics of any phenomenon" (p.34). He further adds that this design is concerned with the collection, presentation, analysis and interpretation of data for the purpose of describing practical beliefs, attitudes on-going process etc.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the relevance theory as propounded by Sperber and Wilson. The Relevance theory is a cognitive psychological approach to discourse which treats the interpretation of speaker's utterance as a process of human cognition. Relevance, here, is used in a technical sense to describe the degree of cognitive effort required for an addressee (or hearer) to achieve an understanding of what someone means by what they say (Grundy, 2008). The relevance theory according to Sperber and Wilson is based on how human cognition makes relevance of utterances of speaker(s) in human communication. Human cognition functions in such a way as to maximize relevance of an utterance in interactive discourse which the contextual effects help it in achieving.

Sperber and Wilson (1986 cited in Romandhon, 2021) state that humans tend to pay attention to the most relevant phenomena available, to develop the most possible representations and process them in a context that maximises their relevance. Romandhon (2021) further adds that Sperber and Wilson claim that information is relevant if it interacts in a certain way with existing human assumption about the world which is referred to as contextual effects.

According to Onu and Etefia (2021), Sperber and Wilson gave two steps to be followed for [the] hearer to reach the most relevant information that will justify the speaker's meaning, which are:

- i. Consider interpretations in order of accessibility; and
- ii. Stop when your expectation of relevance is satisfied (or abandoned) (p. 84).

Relevance theory posits that the key element in human communication is the recognition of the intentions of the speaker which is achieved through the guidance of cognitive inferential processes (Tagunchi, 2002). Communication of speaker's intention is not only arrived at by decoding linguistic items/utterances but also by analysing the context and using contextual cues towards interpreting correctly the speaker's intention. Thus context of use and decoding linguistic items are essential in analysing meaning. Tagunchi (2002) asserts that, "context is not limited to external factors such as physical environment or the immediately preceding discourse" but also includes "a set of all the assumptions that the hearer has about the world, including 'expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the mental state of the speaker' (cited in Sperber and Wilson 1995, p.15).

The goal of relevance theory is to explain in cognitively realistic terms what expectations of relevance amount to and how they might contribute to an empirically plausible account of comprehension (Ezeifeke, 2018). Grundy (2008) avers that relevance theory accounts for the understanding failures which occur when the processing load is too great for relevant assumptions to be recovered, or when the addressee lacks sufficient contextual resources to infer the

explicatures and implicatures which prove the relevance of the utterance.

For an individual (addressee) to understand the relevance of a phenomenon, the phenomenon needs to be processed maximally or optimally by combined efforts of large contextual effects and less cognitive processing load/effort of the phenomenon. Contextual effects, according to Sperber and Wilson (1987), are brought about or realized by mental processes, which like every other biological process, require a certain effort. Contextual effects are the set of human assumptions about the world that is in existence or known (to the addressee and addresser). Contextual effects, according to Blakemore (as cited in Ezeifeka, 2018) are “simply the ways in which a new piece of information may interact with old contextual assumptions to yield an improvement to the hearer’s overall representation of the world. She further adds that contextual effect is optimal “when utterance interpretation leads to multiplication effect of new assumptions, elimination of old assumptions, or strengthening old assumptions”, which makes an utterance relevant (p.205). On the other hand, processing effort, which “involves the amount of cognitive input required to process particular information”, is regarded as a negative factor of relevance because the greater the processing effort, the lower the relevance” (Ezeifeka, 2018, p.206). According to Sperber and Wilson, the relevance of a phenomenon is achieved by an individual based on two conditions:

Extent condition 1: a phenomenon is relevant to an individual to the extent that the contextual effects, achieved in processing it, are large; and

Extent condition 2: a phenomenon is relevant to an individual to the extent that the (cognitive/mental) effort required to process it is small (1987, p.703; 1995, p.145).

From the foregoing, relevance of an utterance or phenomenon is achieved or satisfied when the processing effort (of an utterance or phenomenon) is less and the contextual effects are large, while relevance is not achieved or is abandoned when there is more cognitive processing efforts and low contextual effects that are applied in the interpretation of an utterance or phenomenon.

Explicatures and Implicatures Differentiated

An explicature is an inferential development of incomplete conceptual representations or logical forms encoded by an utterance (Romandhon, 2021). For Robyn (2002), explicatures, which he says refers to “semantic representation (or logical form)” is “typically not fully propositional, so does not have a determinate truth condition, but consists of an incomplete conceptual representation which functions as a schema or template for the pragmatic construction of propositional forms” (which is implicatures). Grundy (2008) defines explicature as “an enrichment of an original utterance to a fully elaborated propositional form” (p. 135).

Implicature, for Romandhon (2021), is ‘a communicated assumption or proposition that lies in a human’s intention’, which can be understood by “recovery (of) message that is needed by involving both decoding and inferencing. According to Robyn (2002), implicature, a pragmatic system, involves “inferring the intended interpretation (or ‘what has been communicated’); this is a set of propositional conceptual representations, some of which are developments of the linguistically provided and others which are not’ (p. 2). Toews (2019) supports Robyn’s opinion by adding that explicatures and implicatures are arrived at by the processes of semantics and pragmatics; thus,

explicatures involve semantic process while implicatures involve pragmatic process, and that explicatures account for any explicit information, due to the grammar, the semantics and the context. (pp. 18-20). The term refers to the elements of the utterance which are arrived at naturally through both linguistic and pragmatic processes. Explicature is not only derived from the logical form but also from the context of the utterance and implicatures include both premises and conclusions derived from an utterance that are not entailed by the propositional form of the utterance (Toews 2019, p.20).

For Grundy, an implicature is likely to have a propositional form different from that of the original utterance (2008, p.136); while for Toews, implicatures are premises or conclusions which are communicated by the utterance but which are not developments of a logical utterance (2019, p.17). The conceptual content of an implicature is supplied wholly by pragmatic inference while the conceptual content of an explicature is an amalgam of decoded linguistic meaning and pragmatically inferred meaning (Robyn, p. 5). Explicature and implicature are exemplified below through 'premise' and 'conclusion':

Jane: Shall we play volley ball?

Judith: It is raining

Explicature: it is raining at a particular location (where the volley ball court is)

Implicature: Jane and Judith cannot play at the location. By the implicated premise (pragmatic system) that it is raining in a specific location, then the possibility of playing at that location is low; thus, the implicated conclusion of Jane and Judith giving up on playing volley ball.

Principles of Relevance Theory

Sperber and Wilson proposed two principles of relevance theory, which are: cognitive

principles of relevance and communicative principles of relevance.

Cognitive Principle

The human brain has as one of its main functions to break down assumptions or information about the world into comprehensible pieces that relate to our experiences. Cognitive principle in relevance has a function of cognitive effects and processing effects. According to Sperber and Wilson (cited in Teows 2019, p.16), "human cognition tends to be geared towards maximization of relevance". "Maximization" is to be understood in such a way that cognitive processes attempt to achieve adequate cognitive effects for the least processing effort (Toews, 2019). Cognitive effects are changes that occur in an individual's cognition in order to refute or support assumption that is in existence (old information). According to Clark (2013, p.102), cognitive effects are changes in cognition to strengthen an assumption, contradict existing assumption, or derive a new, context-bound implication. "Adequate cognitive effects" is the 'intended' effects that are achieved for the least amount of processing effort (Teows 2019). In cognitive principle of relevance, relevance (to an individual) is viewed in terms of degree. According to Allott (2013) cited in Romandhon (2021) "the degree of relevance of an input to an individual is a balance between cognitive effects and processing effort: the more cognitive effects achieved, the more relevant input is; the more mental effort takes to process (an input), the less relevant an input is."

Communicative Principle

According to Sperber and Wilson (1995), every act of ostensive communication, equally communicates a presupposition for its optimal relevance. They therefore divided communication in communicative principle

into code model and inferential model. The former refers to any form of communication that is established by encoding and decoding messages and this model results in verbal utterances; while the latter, which is based on Gricean theory of intention, has it that communication will be achieved by expressing and recognizing intentions (Romandhon, 2021), even though Sperber and Wilson (1995) have emphasized this model in order to achieve optimal relevance. However, Romandhon (2021) outlines the following points as essential for interpreting meaning and intention of implied and explicit utterances of speakers:

- i. constructing an appropriate hypothesis about explicit content via decoding, disambiguation, reference resolution, and other pragmatic enrichment processes;
- ii. constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual assumptions or implicated premises; and
- iii. constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual implications or implied conclusions.

Textual Analysis and Discussion

The sampled proverbs in this study are from the Igbo language in Nigeria. Proverbs have contexts of use which include the discourse, the society/defined geographic setting and participants who contribute to the extent to which meaning is deduced by the hearer or addressee made by a speaker.

Sample 1: *Ogbu mma anaghi ekwe ka e weli mma gaa ya n'azu*

Translation: A machete wielding person would not want a machete to go behind him.

This proverb's interpretation or relevance could be deduced from the context of use. Proverbs have contexts in which they exist and here, this proverbial expression could be used by a speaker as a way to chide or reprimand an audience/addressee who

literally is aware or has existing presumption of what the speaker intends by using such metaphorically euphemistic and philosophical expressions. When this proverb is used, it serves as a mild way to warn, reprimand, or dissuade a hearer to discontinue being involved in things of bad or negative nature which are harmful to people. "*Mma*" which means "machete" in English is a metaphor which in Igbo philosophy from which the meaning of this proverb is hidden refers to a negative phenomenon or bad that is perpetrated by someone, and such perpetrators would not want such acts to be done to them. Thus, the context of use of this proverb in discourse makes the proverb relevant to the hearer who deduces the meaning and understands that a warning, chiding or reprimand is being done by the speaker to the addressee or him/her

The context of use of this proverb involves a speaker advising an addressee based on an presumption that the person addressed is involved in perpetrating an evil act. Thus, a hearer could arrive at the speaker's meaning based on deducing meaning from the context of use, which would make him/her have little processing effort and large contextual effect in order to achieve relevance. A hearer would achieve the relevance of this proverbial expression "*Ogbu mma anaghi e kwe ka mma gaa ya n'azu*" (an evil person will not want evil to be done to him) if he/she has the assumption. The proverb stresses the fact that a perpetrator of evil would not want the same evil or any kind of evil to be done to him/her. Thus, it is a warning and advice to such individuals to dissuade from such evil act.

Sample 2: *Atuoro o malu o mara, atuoro ofeke o fenyee isi n'ohia.*

Translation: When a proverb is said, the wise would understand, but the foolish get confounded.

This proverbial expression buttresses the importance of an individual's ability in interpreting the meaning of proverbs that are used in discourse. A speaker could use this to compel/propel an audience/ a hearer to improve the mental capacity of comprehending proverbial sayings or to know the appropriate moment to take action. A hearer achieves relevance of the proverb based on the existing assumption/knowledge about "*o malu*", which translates to the wise and "*ofeke*", the fool, which aids him in inferencing process for achieving relevance of the text in discourse specific context.

Sample 3: *Ola agba na-aka adighi eji uogbe e lele ya.*

Translation: A ring that is worn on the hand does not need a mirror to see it.)

In Igbo language, "*ola*" refers to jewelry that is attractive to the eyes and the Igbo use this concept as a metaphor to refer to things/occurrences that are obvious and do not need any sort of facilitator/object to view it. It is usually used to refer to an obvious truth or lie that is easy to comprehend. The hearer easily achieves relevance of this proverbial expression based the existing assumption he/she has which enhances the inferential process of meaning interpretation in the context of use of this discourse.

Sample 4: *Otu aka ruta mmanu, o zuo ora onu.*

Translation: If one finger gets stained with oil, it would equally stain the others.

This proverbial expression could be used in the context where the speaker is giving a warning or advice to an addressee. This

proverb shows the effect of an action or cause of one individual that shows its effect on a whole group or community one belongs to. So when a speaker deploys this metaphorical expression of "one finger", which refers to one person and the aftermath of their actions or inactions, which will affect the society. This is used in contexts of reprimanding someone's actions/inactions, which is viewed in a negative light, and the effect could affect the society as whole. Thus the speaker uses this proverb on the hearer, who interprets the speaker's intentions easily based on the existing assumptions/background knowledge that the hearer knows what the speaker means by his/her use of the proverb.

Sample 5: *Egbe bere, ugo bere, nke si ibe ya ebela, nku kwa ya.*

Translation: Let the kite perch, let the eagle perch, anyone that does not want another to perch, let its wings break.

A speaker deploys this proverbial expression in a specific discourse to emphasize the importance of living peacefully in a community/group/association. This proverb encourages harmony and peace to thrive among people and not preventing others from expressing their ideologies or beliefs. The speaker's intention in the use of this proverb, which is an advice, is easily inferred by the hearer given the mutual cognitive environment shared by the speaker and addressee.

Sample 6: *A tuo ilu ogiriga nkata, onye tara aru amara.*

Translation: When a proverb of hidden fact (basket) is made, the one who bites knows.

This proverbial expression is deployed as a metaphorically euphemistic strategy to point out a guilty person in a midst of people. the speaker uses this proverb emphasize that

when a truthful statement about someone, who may be good or bad is made, the affected persons knows from the existing common background knowledge shared by the speaker and the hearer.

Sample 7: *Ka e'were ututu chuba ewu ojii, tupu ochichi agbaa.*

Translation: Morning/daylight should be used to look for goat.

This proverbial saying used in contexts where there is urgency for an action to be taken before it becomes late. The addressee/hearer achieves relevance of this proverb used in discourse by the hearer given that something which the two interlocutors have background knowledge on (existing assumption). The speaker employs the use of this proverb as a mild way to issue a direction or command to the hearer to take action on something because there is need for such to be done because delay in doing that may be dangerous.

Sample 8: *Anaghi eji mgbagbu ghara ogu.*

Translation: One does not avoid war because of being shot dead.

A speaker employs this proverb to encourage or strengthen an audience/a hearer to pursue a task/project in spite of likely consequences. The hearer achieves relevance and infers the speaker's intention based on shared knowledge that "ogu" which could mean any venture one wants to embark on may have consequences which should not forestall one from venturing into it considering that it may also be laden with good things.

Sample 9: *Awo anaghi agba oso ehihie n'efu.*

Translation: A toad does not run in day time for nothing.

A speaker in a specific discourse, in Igbo context, employs this proverbial expression as a euphemistic way to show that something unusual or a thing of rarity has happened or is happened. It is a proverb that simply shows cause and effect. Usually, a toad is seen as a nocturnal animal and to see it in daytime is rare except something important/threatening made it leave its hiding place. Thus, in the Igbo context, the hearer of such proverbial expression deduces the meaning underlined on this proverb based on existing presumption or common background knowledge (mutual cognitive environment shared by the interactants which enhances realization of relevance.

Sample 10: *Ngwugwu aga-ato ato, o baghi uru itu ya mbo.*

Translation: A wrapped thing which must be unwrapped has no need to cut it out.

This proverb used in discourse is a mild way of halting hastiness on the part of the hearer in getting information about something which would actually be revealed with time, thus making the haste unnecessary. A hearer deduces the meaning in this proverb based on the existing knowledge that "ngwugwu" must be unwrapped, thus the speaker uses the proverbial expression as a calm and mild way of dissuading an audience/a hearer from rushing into something or prying into something/truth that will certainly be made bare.

Sample 11: *Nne ewu na-ata agbala, nwa ya ana-ele ya anya n'onu.*

Translation: If a mother-goat chews the cud, its kid watches her mouth.

This proverb could be interpreted as "one's acts/behaviors, bad or good, are being emulated by children or people around that

person. This proverb could be employed as a way to praise or criticize one's act, especially an elder. It is a eulogy if such person is of good character and therefore is being encouraged by the speaker and it is a mild way to criticize if such a person is of bad character and the speaker is afraid that such could be easily learnt by those around such person.

Sample 12: *Ebe aka ruru nwanyi ka o na-tukwasi di ya.*

Translation: Where a woman's hand reaches; there she holds her husband.

In this proverbial expression, the speaker emphasizes on the fact that no two persons are equal in all dimensions and that one does something based on one's capability/strength. In the context of use of this proverb, the hearer achieves relevance of this proverbial saying made by a speaker given the common knowledge shared by them. The speaker uses this proverb as a way to encourage one on what one does. So, the meaning inferred from this metaphorical expression is that an individual accomplishes a task based on his/her capability or what his/her strength could carry.

Sample 13: *Ihe okuko bu mmiri achu di ya mkpa.*

Translation: What the chicken is chasing under the rain is important to it.

A speaker in a discourse uses this proverb to emphasize the need or importance of the existence of a particular thing. Chickens usually hide during rainfall, but when it is seen chasing something in rain, that thing is very important to it. Based on this existing/background knowledge shared by the speaker and hearer of this concept, the hearer easily interprets the meaning of urgency or importance of something which

the speaker is out to find or discover even when the atmosphere speaks against such.

Sample 14: *Agwo no n' akirika*

Translation: Snake and thatch/woods.

This proverb is deployed by a speaker to express danger or insecurity around or that is happening/in existence. The hearer infers the meaning underlined in this proverb based on the metaphorical meaning of "agwo" and "akirika", which is shared by the speaker and the hearer. The snake dwells in the bush/grass and in Igbo context for it to be seen in "akirika" (thatch/debrise) signifies that there is danger/ unusualness of something.

Sample 15: *Nkwucha aburo ujo.*

Translation: Alertness is not for fear.

This proverbial expression deployed by a speaker in specific discourse is a means of mildly encouraging an audience/a hearer by stressing on the importance of preparedness which does not signify weakness or fear, but is rather a form of strength. The hearer infers the meaning based on the existing assumption he/she possesses about being prepared at all times for any occurrences.

Sample 16: *E gbuwe na-atoro, mmadu agaghi afo.*

Translation: If everyone kills their junior/younger ones or those they are older than, no one will remain alive.

This proverb expresses the Igbo philosophy/ideology that seniority does not translate into intimidating or dominating the junior one. The speaker deploys this proverb in specific discourse to warn or advice an audience/ a hearer to dissuade from using the position occupied to cause harm to another person. The hearer understands the speaker's intention of advising him/her to

take caution and not use positions one is in to enslave, kill, dominate or subjugate another, especially one in unequal position.

Sample 17: *Onye agwo tara na-agba oso ma o hu isi ngwere.*

Translation: The head of a lizard can even scare one who has been bitten by a snake.

A speaker utters this proverbial saying in discourse to state the effect of an experience one had. This proverbial saying emphasizes the fact that an individual who experienced something difficult that affected him/her would be scared of things that resemble it even when there is no need to be scared. Thus, when a speaker utters this proverb in a discourse, it signifies weariness on the aspect of the speaker, and the hearer, given the shared knowledge that is common to the interlocutors achieves meaning of the proverb in use in context, thus, relevance is reached.

Sample 18: *Anu ohia na-adighi ike oso adighi eje ikpa nri n'ehihie.*

Translation: An animal that cannot run fast does not come out in the daytime to look for food.

This proverb is used to buttress the fact that an individual acts according to what his/her strength could carry. And also that one avoids things that could bring him trouble which he/she may not be able to tolerate or handle. When a speaker uses this proverb in a discourse, he/she intends to advice an audience/a hearer to do things one could handle and at the appropriate time so as not to get into trouble or situation that cannot be managed. A hearer achieves relevance of this proverbial expression given the common knowledge shared on the symbolic interpretation of the metaphor of animal used in the proverb which aids in the

inferential process of arriving at the correct meaning.

Sample 19: *O bu naani udele kara aka na-amapuwu ozu afo.*

Translation: It is only a strong vulture that could pierce the stomach of a corpse.

This proverb buttresses on the fact that a task is given to someone who has experience and skill to undertake it successfully or one who know about a thing that is assigned to take charge of it. A hearer's existing knowledge or background knowledge that it is a strong vulture that can pierce a corpse's stomach, which the speaker also assumes that the hearer has, enables him to achieve relevance of the proverb by inferring the meaning of the metaphor and associating it with the speaker's specific content in discourse.

Sample 20: *Mkpi siri na njepu amaka n'ihie na o jere ikwunne ya were muta ka e si asoli imi elu*

Translation: He-goat says that travelling is rewarding because he visited his grandmother's place, and learnt how to jerk up the upper lip.

This proverb is used to emphasize that one gains a lot of experience by travelling or exposure. A speaker employs this proverb in discourse either to support his claim of being an example of having experience through travelling/being exposed or a way to encourage people to engage in travels so as to mix up with others and learn. The Igbo believe that one learns from travelling or being exposed to things and thereby encourage such act to gain experience by travelling. A hearer attains relevance of this proverb given the common knowledge shared by him and the speaker, thus the context of use facilitates the cognitive inferential process of meaning.

Sample 21: *O buru na afo na-agba, usuogu a na-enwewanye imi.*

Translation: Usuogu, the bat, acquires more nostrils as it continues to spend more years.)

In Igbo setting, it is believed that old age or aging comes with lots of wisdom. The metaphor of the bat and how it acquires more nostrils as day, month or year goes by, is likened to how human beings get wisdom with the time they spent in living and advancing in age. Thus, a speaker uses this proverb to buttress that as one adds more years to one's age, one ought to have more experience and wisdom. A hearer infers the meaning based on the context of use which could be the speaker advising/encourage the hearer of the need to gain wisdom as it is paramount and marks an elder.

Sample 22: *O na-abu nta di mma n'ubochi mbu, achuchaa, a chukwa ozo.*

Translation: If the first hunting expedition proved successful that a second one can be undertaken.

A speaker uses this proverbial saying to express the fact that failure in doing a task, once, can create despair and discourage hard work while success in a task serves as a motivation and encouragement to continue. So, a speaker's use of this proverb is to express that if a task he/she wants to embark on could motivate him/her if it is successful while it would be a form of discouragement if he/she fails or loses on the task.

Sample 23: *Ewu mmadu abuo na-enye nri na-anwu n'agu.*

Translation: A goat that is fed by two persons is (often) starved to death.

This proverb is used to emphasize on the fact that a thing generally owned suffers because of lack of care or neglect and inefficiency from those involved. The context of use of this proverb usually is when a particular thing is lacking in the way it should be or that there is deficiency in something because that thing is being handled/taken care of by more than one person and the state of such thing brings the speaker to lament and mildly expresses his disappointment in this proverb. The hearer infers the meaning underlying the proverb used because of shared knowledge of the context and the existing assumption the hearer has helps the in the comprehension of the proverb and relevance of the proverb is attained.

Sample 24: *O bu e lee ka chi nwata ha e were kenye ya oru.*

Translation: The god of a child is first put into consideration before assigning a particular job to him.

The proverbial saying stated above buttresses the fact that before assigning any responsibility, one's capability should be assessed so as to give task one can handle successfully. A speaker deploys the use of this proverb in a discourse-specific context to express the need for thorough scrutiny of an individual's capability and capacity before a task is assigned. Thus, the context of use could be one where tasks are being assigned or reports of jobs are done. A hearer comprehends this proverb by inferring the meaning from the context of use as well as the existing knowledge the hearer possess about assigning task and achieving success or failure in it.

Sample 25: *E were ihe na-adi mmadu mma were kwuo ya ugwo, o di ma o dighi o nara ya.*

Translation: If one is rewarded with what he loves, he readily accepts it whether it is adequate or not.

A speaker uses this proverb in context of specific discourse to emphasize on the need that an individual is eager to acknowledge a thing he/she loves as an offer regardless of whether it is sufficient or not. As a way to encourage an individual, he/she could be rewarded with what he/she most appreciates. An addressee infers the meaning of this proverbial saying with the combined effort of existing knowledge he/she has and the context of use, which contributes in having less cognitive effort in achieving relevance of the proverbial saying used by a speaker.

Conclusion

The study of these proverbs has thrown relative light on the experience and wisdom that were in existence for several years bundled in one expression. They do not only provide us with existential information, but also stimulate our attention to the understanding of the essence of such philosophy or belief. Proverbs are, therefore, words of wisdom that underlies the philosophy, world view and culture of a particular people. They are used as a pedagogic instrument to teach younger generations, and used as tool of directive, counselling, reprimanding, instructing and guidance. In specific discourses, participants use proverbs in their interlocution to bring home their points and to spice up their utterances. Proverb is said to be the palm oil with which words are eaten (*mmanu ndi Igbo ji-eri okwu*). For an understanding of proverbs used in specific discourse situation, the hearer and speaker must have shared knowledge and assumptions which will enable the easy comprehension of utterance and linkage of proverb to the utterance premise.

References

- Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. G. (2012). *A Glossary of literary terms*, 10th edition. Wadsworth.
- Achebe C. (1958). *A Chinua Achebe omnibus: Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God, No Longer at Ease, There was a Country*. Penguin Modern Classics.
- Adeyemi, A. B., & Salawudeen, O. M. (2014). The place of indigenous proverbs in peace education in Nigeria: Implications for social studies curriculum. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 4(2).
- Bashir, A. A., & Halima I. O. A. (2008). Women against women: Hausa proverbs in polygamous context. *Journal of Proverb Studies*, 1(1).
- Chukwuemeka, E. O. E. (2002). *Research methods and thesis writing: A multidisciplinary approach*. HRV Publishers.
- Ehondor, B. (2017). The concept of proverbs as a theoretical category in communication in Africa, *Researchgate*, 2017. pdf.
- Ezeifeke, C. (2018). *Discourse analysis: Concepts and approaches*. Patrobas.
- Grundy, P. (2008). *Doing pragmatics*, 3rd ed. Hodder Education.
- Hyland, K. (2005). *Metadiscourse: exploring interaction in writing*, Continuum.
- (2017). Metadiscourse: what is it and where is it going? *Journal of Pragmatics*, 113, 16-29.
- Hoang, V. V. (2021). Metafunction of language in systemic functional linguistics: A framework for the interpretation of meaning of text in social context. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 37(4), 1-12.
- Maalej, Z. (2008). Cognitive perspective on proverbs and its implications for translation. *Journal of Proverb Studies*, 1(1).

- Metuh, E. M. (1991). African religions in Western conceptual schemes: The problems of interpretation. *Studies in Igbo Religion*
- Zakariayah, M. (2016). A pragmatic analysis of proverbs in selected works of Ola Rotimi. A dissertation presented to the school of postgraduate studies, Amadu Bello University, Zaria
- Mu. C., Zhang L.J, Ehrich. J., & Hong. H. (2015). The use of metadiscourse for knowledge construction in Chinese and English research articles. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 20, 135-145.
- Onu, J. O., & Etefia, P. O. S. (2021). A relevance theory account of proverbs in Ovim dialect of Igbo, Abia state, Nigeria. *Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literary Studies*, 10(3), 81-88.
- Robyn, C. (2002). Relevance theory and the saying/implicating distinction. DOI: 10.1002/9780470756959.ch28.
- Romandhon, A. B. M. (2021). Pragmatic relevance theories in interpreting Indonesian covid-19 memes. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 546, 494-501.
- Sheba, E., & Oyewo, G.A. (2008). Proverbs as symbolic communication drive in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*. *Journal of Proverb Studies*, 1(1).
- Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1987). Précis of relevance: Communication and cognition. *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 10, 697-754.
- (1995). *Relevance: communication and cognition*, 2nd edition. Blackwell.
- Tadi, N. (2008). A conceptual analysis of the pedagogical functions of proverbs in Tangle society. *Journal of Proverb Studies*, 1(1).
- Taguchi, N. (2002). An application of relevance theory to the analysis of I2 interpretation processes: The comprehension of indirect replies. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, IRAL*, 40, 151-176.
- Toews, N. (2019). *Relevance theory and proverbs: exploring context through explicatures and implicatures*, pdf.
- Uba.S. Y. (2020). Metadiscourse in research article genre: A cross-linguistic study of English and Hausa. *English Language Teaching*, 13(2), 57-62.
- Yousefi, M. A., & Rasekh, A. E. (2010). Metadiscourse: Definitions, issues and its implications for English teachers. *English Language Teaching*, 3(4).