PROVERBS IN SOCIETAL DISCOURSES: A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF CHUKWUEMEKA GODSWILL'S *OFO*

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ABSTRACT
This study examines the pragmatic import of proverbs in socio-cultural discourses in Igbo setting as depicted in Chukwuemeka Godswill's Ofo. Proverbs are very integral part of social communication and so this study also assesses the relevance of proverbs as advocacy instrument and motive driven language use in societal discourses. It assesses proverbs as part of communicative principle of relevance and other roles of proverbs in various contexts of usage. Thirty-two proverbs extracted through stratified random sampling technique serve as data for examining the variables identified. This study is hinged on the Relevance theory, a framework for understanding the interpretation of utterances, propounded by Sperber and Wilson (1995) which holds that human communication is intention and relevance driven. From the investigation, it is discovered that proverbs hold marked pragmatic imports in societal discourses. The artistic wealth of the Igbo culture situates proverbs as motive or relevance driven in any serious societal discourse as they serve advocacy/caution or restraint and even selfish functions. Since language is a principal element of cultural value, the art of incorporating proverbs in language use should be consciously taught by language teachers since proverbs help in developing human language and fostering children since they are part of every language and culture and signal moral values. It is discovered that an interlocutor attracts greater audience attention and accords relevance to speech when proverbs are used. It sharpens listeners' intellect as greater attention is needed to get both the semantic and pragmatic imports conveyed by proverbs in discourses. It concludes that proverbs are intention-driven and context dependent as they perform various functions based on the language users' motives. The language of societal discourse has texture and proverbs help to enrich the value-laden texture of societal discourses as no serous traditional discourse can be conducted without proverbs.

Keywords: Proverbs, Language, Cultural Values, Relevance Theory.

Introduction

Language is usually skillfully manipulated in societal discourses to suit the requirements of sociolinguistic milleu and produce the desired effect. it is a potential tool of cohesion when appropriated positively, and a potential instrument of disunity when inappropriately manipulated. Onyenweaku (2021 p.95)corroborating this view asserts that "the role of language in human relationship is fundamentally expedient in that it has the capacity to serve as a significant instrument of understanding, cohesion and peaceful coexistence, and also a potent instrument of disunity and alienation, capable of truncating existing peace among a people". Niazi and Gautam, (2019 p.109) posit "the evocative power of words as determined by the particular connection between diction and imagery, and context of usage. Consequently, any function of language either in political or sociolinguistic situations and environments is significantly dependent on how interlocutors manipulate that language use to address or tackle issues of personal, communal or even national as well as international concerns. Proverbs are essential ingredients of societal discourse. It is against this backdrop that proverbs in Chukwuemeka Godswill's *Ofo* are studied to examine their effect and relevance on interlocutor partners in societal discourse.

Objectives

This study aims to:
- examine proverbs as part of the communicative principle of relevance
- highlight proverbs as motive driven language usage.

- assess proverbs as caution/advocacy instruments or measure.

Conceptual clarification

Proverbs are very old, so old that their origin cannot really be traced. Achebe popularized Igbo proverbs saying that "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten". Societal discourses are parts of existence in Igbo society. The seriousness of any discourse in Igbo setting is measured by the wealth of proverbs used. Consequently, the artistic wealth of the Igbo culture is enhanced by proverbs used in discourses.

Mieder (1989, cited in Paczolay 2004, p.3) posits that proverbs are "short, generally known sentences of the folk that contain wisdom, truth, moral; traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and that are handed down orally from generation to generation".

The Oxford Dictionary of proverb, (2004, p.ix) offers that "proverbs are simple and concrete sayings popularly known and repeated, which express a truth, based on common sense or the practical experience of humanity. They are traditional sayings which offer advice or present a moral in a short and pithy manner".

"Proverbs are also held to be metaphorical and those that describe basic rule of conduct may also be realized as maxims. The process of coming, remembering and sharing proverbs results in transferring 'accumulated human experience which is an advantage of developing human language'. (Hernadi & Steen, 1999, p.2).

The difficulty of pinning proverb to a pin fall definition constrained Paczolay, (2004, p.2) to define proverb as "an expression we recognize as proverbial". Proverbs are short, eloquent and wise forms of expressions. They are important structures in all languages of the world and they play an important role in cultural as well as linguistic studies. Proverbs are found in almost all cultures and they are often derived from other cultures. The origin of proverbs is often unknown or missed with time. Proverbs reflect the cultural aspects of language users. They derive from the actual observation and use of everyday life and they can express different topics. Some proverbs are universal and are found in almost all languages. Some are often culture-bound and language specific. The comprehension of proverbs depends on the linguistic as well as the non-linguistic context in which they are used in (Fair, 2000). In all, proverbs are essential ingredients of traditional discourses and they embellish language use.

The four principal elements of culture include language, values, norms and beliefs. "Cultural values are commonly held standard of what is acceptable or unacceptable, important or unimportant, right or wrong, workable or unworkable, etc. in a community or society. They connote all the customs that the people have passed down from generations. These constitute the cherished heritage of the people passed from generation to generation through the vehicle of communication and education. These include greetings, music festivals, arts and craft, language, foods and so on (Egbule, Emuebie & Egwu; 2016).

Language among other things is the most essential means of information and communication for human beings who manipulate it for various other purposes. Osa (2010) posits that "language as a means of communication and expression is an element of culture which in many ways determines and unarguably defines dimensions of a nation's identity in less organized society". Culture on the other hand is the totality of a people's way of life and proverbs constitute part of the culture of the Igbo's discourses and speeches. No conversation among the elders can be done without proverbs. Proverbs add to the sophistication of language. Egeonu and Nzejiogu (2016 p.276) highlight language as "the most powerful, Sophisticated medium of communications, being an integral part of the essence and existence for communication".

Theoretical Framework
Relevance Theory

Relevance theory, a framework for understanding the interpretation of utterances was propounded by Sperber and Wilson (1995). The theory assumes its root and name from the principle that "every utterance conveys the information that it is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee's effort to process It", that is if I say something to you, you can safely assume that I believe that the conveyed information is worthwhile your effort to listen to and comprehend it, and also that it is "the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences'. Peirce (1998) advances that "relevance theory offers a new approach to the study of human communication which is firmly grounded in a general view of human cognitive design and states that with H.P Grice, relevance theorists assume that human communication is

characteristically intention-based and so they see verbal comprehension as just involving not just the decoding of speech signals, but also the recognition of the speaker's communicative intentions".

Sperber and Wilson (2004) sum up the properties of verbal communication by calling it ostensive- inferential communication which is majorly characterized by two layers of intention on part of the communication.

 a) The information-intention which gears to inform an audience of something (i.e to communicate a certain content) and

 b) The communicative-intention which targets to inform the audience of one's informative intention (to draw the audience attention to one's informative intentions). Relevance theory asserts that "linguistic communication as well as all human communication is relevance-driven.

Sperber and Wilson (1995) also advance two principles of relevance embodying two central claims about human cognition and communication;

 1) A first or cognitive principle of relevance and,

 2) A second or communicative principle of relevance.

The first (human cognitive principle) states that: human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance (1995, p.260)

The second (communicative principle) is the statement that every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance (1995, p, 260). The communicative principle of relevance does not have the same status as Grice's cooperative principle and conversational maxims, for it is simply a generalization about ostensive-inferential communication. All human communications remain relevance-driven.

Two Principles of Relevance

Two principles of relevance are;

 a) Cognitive principle of relevance and

 b) Communicative principle of relevance.

The cognitive principle of relevance according to Wilson and Sperber (2002) concludes that "every utterance conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance". Every utterance in effect made by any interlocutor is expected to be consistent with the communicative principle of relevance. Consequently, a relevant utterance portends to the one "from which many conclusions can be drawn at a low processing cost for addressee. The interlocutor partner or listener employs the information in the utterance as well as his expectation of the utterances' relevance together with his real-world knowledge, and "sensory input to infer conclusions about what the communicator wanted to convey". "Typically, more conclusions can be drawn if the utterance contains information that is related to what the addressee already knows or believes. In this inference process, the literal meaning of the utterance is just one piece of evidence among others" (Sperber and Wilson, 2004). The conclusion is that "every utterance is interpretative of a thought of the speakers; this makes interpretations of other people's thoughts interpretative to the second-degree path (a)".

Also central to the relevance framework is the claim "that the explicit side of communication should also fall under the scope of a theory of pragmatics (Bach 1994', Carston 2002, 2004b' Sperber and Wilson 1993, 1995). Consequently, to relevance theory, there are two types of communicated "assumptions" (Conceptual representation of the actual world; explicitly communicated assumptions, or explicatures and implicitly communicated ones (implicatures)." Implicatures are things suggested by the utterance rather than explicitly said". Sperber and Wilson (1995) recognize degrees of strength of implicatures with respect to speaker's intention. The implicatures which are clearly intended by speaker's are called strong implicatures. They are those that the "hearer is strongly encouraged to draw the interpretation which are convinced to be optimally relevant". (Downes (2008p.408).

The distinction between implicatures is important as it recognizes that there are valid interpretations that do not involve intentional communication. (Downes 2008). Weak implicatures are those for which hearers take responsibility."Scalar implicature or quantity implicature is an implicature that attributes an implicit meaning beyond the explicit or literal meaning of an utterance and which suggests that the utterer has a reason for using a more informative or stronger term on the same scale".

"Conventional   implicature share similarity with truth-condition meaning because they don't really seem like implicatures" owing to the fact that they do not really require reasoning "about speakers' intentions and co-operative principle" But for Grice, "Meaning is divided into" What it is said" which comes from

semantics and is truth-conditional) and everything else-everything that doesn't come from semantics and is not truth-conditional is an implicature".

Conversational implicature are the real implicatures that emanate from interpreting what a speaker must have intended. Conversational implicature is divided into;

- Generalized and
- Particularized implicatures

Generalized conversational implicatures do not actually depend on context; uttering certain things will (supposedly) always trigger these implicatures.

Particularized conversational implicatures are much more straightforward. They depend on the context and on reasoning about the speaker. So, they only arise in certain contexts. "Many pragmatists argue that all conversational implicatures are particularized and are derived via the same mechanisms"(Katsos & Cummins, 2010)".

Major or key ingredients of relevance theory are that utterances are "Ostensive" (i.e. they draw the addressee's attention to the fact that the communicator wants to convey some information and (2) inferential (the addressee has to infer what the communicator wanted to convey based on the utterance's "literal meaning" along with the addressee's real-world knowledge, sensory input, and other information.

Inferences intended by the communication are:

a) explicatures and
b) implicatures.

While explicatures are what are explicitly stated or said 'often supplemented with contextual, implicatures are conveyed without actually stating them.

Sperber and Wilson conclude that if a figurative expression needs less processing effort than the literal expression, or has more contextual effects, the principle of relevance mandates its use over literalness. This is the relationship between proverbs and relevance theory.

Pierce (1998) sums relevance theory stating that relevant items are those that are context-effective or context-dependent and inferred by the interpreter who is giving evidence concerning the intended meaning by the utterer. The hearer has to infer the intended meaning, and the speaker has to effectuate the intended meaning".

Context

Chukwuemeka Godswill's*ofor* is about the maiden of Umuako village who are frustrated because of the custom of their land that stipulates that the marriage traditional rites of even those born again should be performed with alcohol. Old men see it as an opportunity to marry young girls because church has made it easy for young men to marry in less expensive terms. They decide to deal with the church people and drive them out of their town. The young ladies in their frustration try to take away the symbol of authority of their town, the *Ofo*. The act creates chaos and de-stabilizes the community. The discourses center around the topic in the societal discourse. Many proverbs are used which justify this strongly.

Data Analysis
Communicative Principle Of Relevance/ Scalar Implicatures.
The communicative principle of relevance states that every utterance conveys its own optimal relevance. Every utterance in effect made by any interlocutor is expected to be consistent with the communicative principle of relevance. A relevant utterance portends the one "from which many conclusions can be drawn at a low processing cost for addressee.
Text 1: Onyinba Okoro: An elder doesn't stay at home and watches a goat deliver while its still tethered
Text 2: King: A child that pinches his father's scrotum owes the loss of his own eyes to a kick that comes from his father's knee. P.27

The proverbs in text 1 and 2 convey optimal relevance with the communicative principles as warnings that are context dependent. They are pre-suppositions that convey the Igbo world views and values. They are scalar implicatures in attributing implicit meaning beyond the explicit and interlocutor possesses a raison deˆtre for deploying a stronger term on the scale. These proverbs contain deeper scale of pragmatic import. The texts are culture reflexive.

Text 3: Onyiba Okoro: When you see a word, you see its response p.13

Text 3 possesses the same pragmatic components as texts 1 and 2. But in addition, it has the context-dependent indices of a transliteration. The lexeme "word" does not reflect the literal meaning of a "lexical item" as it portends in that utterance. It goes beyond that 'word' as reflected in that proverb as it has the pragmatic import of;

- Issue
- Case

- Discourse
- Situation e.t.c.

Text 4: Onyiba Okoro: But how could the antelope climb trees the day I go hunting? Chai p.4

Text 4 still portends scalar implicature in portraying the occurrence of the unusual. The proverb is also cast as an interrogative portraying a regret or disappointment.

Other examples include:

Text 5: King: A child is never punished on the day he spilled palm oil, but on the day he spills *oguru*. P.51

This too is context dependent and the code switch involves the application of pre-supposition and real world knowledge to infer the import or conclusions on what the interlocutor wants to convey- that at times, great offence does not attract punishment but trivial ones will provoke great punishment.

The use of *oguru* is a presupposition, 'an implicit assumption about the world or background belief relating to the discourse which the interlocutor partner shares.

Other proverbs of same import and relevance include:

Text 6: Nneoma: The night, they say, has ears p,61

Text 7: King: An eagle with a broken wing cannot soar. P.64

Text 8: Chief Abani: The goat follows only he who holds the palm leaves. P.65

Text 9: King: We have invited her and her fellow maidens to know what has given *Nwanza* that has barely strong feet to stand on the ground the courage to challenge her *Chi* to a duel. P.66

Text 10 King: The vulture never hovers over a roof in vain p.70

Each of the proverbs communicates optimal relevance and conclusions can be drawn at a very low processing scale and cost by interlocutor partner.

Cognitive Principle of Relevance.

Human cognition is geared to the maximization of relevance. "Many conclusions can be drawn at a low processing cost for addressee" as seen below;

Text 11, Chief Ozo: So, while the ewe mourns her slaughtered son, the vulture thanks God for providing his daily bread p.40

Text 12: King: May the visitor not kill his host so that as he leaves, he would not develop a hunch back. (p.46.)

Text 13: Chief Abani: Okra plant never grows taller than its planter p.47

Text 14 Chief Abani: You cannot beat a child and expect him not to cry p.49

Text 15, Nneoma…. To seize the *Ofo* is our only hope of freedom. It is no sacrilege. For if the elders, or even the king should bite us at the head, not minding hair, we should as well bite them at the buttocks, not minding faeces p.61.

Text 16, Onyiba Ude: If the egg breaks palm nuts, the stone should be ashamed of itself p.70

Text 17, Onyiba Ude: if the vulture's feather adorns the cap of a titled man, let the eagle lose its pride and beauty. P.70

Text 18, Onyiba Ude: The head that carries a hot sacrifice becomes bald like the vulture's. p.71
Text 19 Onyiba Ude: The neck that carries the corpse of an elephant never stands erect to narrate its expenses.
In text 11, while the church people are forbidden from marrying the daughters of the land because of the obnoxious tradition, the owls (men) can now come to marry the young girls they had been hoping to marry. The proverbs are implicatures. All the traditional views in the above texts are metaphorical. Proverbs enrich societal discourses and give them the optimal relevance required in traditional context. They also reflect the seriousness as well as the intended motive desired to be accomplished at the end of any discourse.
Proverbs As Caution/Advocacy
The following samples of data portray proverbs as tools for caution/advocacy
Text 20, Onyiba Okoro: Their tongues will not kill you, Nne m. The rain can only beat the eagle but it cannot wash away its beauty p.3
Text 21, Second-in-law: When a child is beaten with the right hand, he is consoled with the left p.8
Text 22, Chef Uzo: If a snake doesn't act like a snake, it will be mistaken for a rope and used to tie a bundle of firewood. So, let us put these church people where they belong. P .27.
The proverb in text 20 is advisory. Onyiba Okoro uses that proverb to advise Nneoma, whose husband jilted on her wedding day, not to take her life as 'people's "tongues will not kill her", reinstating that the rain can only beat the eagle but it cannot wash away it's beauty" The advisory texture of the proverb is meant to restore Nneoma's pride and dignity and save her from depression.
The next is also advisory "when a child is beaten with the right hand, he is consoled with the left". It moralizes on corrective measures. An earring person should be brought back. Other samples of proverbs as caution or advisory tool are:
Text 23, King: it's our culture and we can't change it…May the visitor not kill his host so that as he leaves, he would not develop a hunch back p.46.
Text 24 King Ubani: The okra plant never grows taller than its planter p.47
Text 25, King : is it right to spit into the bowl that is used to feed you? P.51
Text 26 Nneoma: The night, they say, has ears.
Text 27 Chief Ubani: I think it's best to avoid a fight with a fowl that attacks us early in the morning, for we don't know if it had grown teeth in the night. (p.63).
Text 28, King : No human dances *surugede* and lives. It is the dance of the spirits. You are playing with the tail of the tiger. P.67
Text 29, Nneoma: Even okra plant is sometimes bent to the level where it's owner can pluck its seeds, if it grows taller than the owner p.67.
Text 30 King: The chick which despises the advice of mother hen, will beg for it in the talons of the hawk. P.68
Text 31 Onyiba Ude: It's only a fool who chases after rats while his house is on fire p.70
Text 32 Onyiba Ude: An unwise grasshopper rests in the belly of a bird: that a stubborn fly follows the corpse to the grave. pp 70-71.
Texts 27 and 28 convey great caution to prevent humiliation. Text 28 is context dependent and still carries warning and restrain. *Surugede* is the dance of the spirit. The proverb warns against embarking on dangerous adventures that may cost life. "No human dances *surugede* and lives" p.67.
Some of the proverbs need less processing effort and have contextual effects. The inferences communicated are predominantly implicatures.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation
This research has attempted an examination of proverbs in societal discourses using Chukwuemeka Goodswill's *Ofo*as a case study. The objectives of the investigation have been to examine proverbs as part of the communicative principles of relevance and motive-driven language usage. Finally, it assesses proverbs as caution/advocacy measure or instrument.
The study is hinged on Sperbal and Wilson (1995) and (2004) relevance theory to account for maximization of optimal relevance of proverbs as communicative principles/scalar implicatures, cognitive principles and caution/ advocacy tool.

Using the stratified random sampling technique, thirty samples of proverbs that constitute data for analyzing the variables identified are selected from the study text.

Ten proverbs constituting 31.25 of data used for the study reflect the maximization of proverbs as communicative principles of relevance or scalar implicature. While nine proverbs constituting 28.12reflect the cognitive principle of relevance. Thirteen proverbs marking 40.63 reflect proverbs as caution/advocacy tool.

Proverbs	Frequency	Percentage
Proverbs as communicative principles of relevance/ scalar implicature	10	31.25
Proverbs reflect cognitive principle of relevance	9	28.12
Proverbs as caution/advocacy tool	13	40.63

Context helps in realizing the appropriateness of any language use as it reveals the raison de^tre for the linguistic choices that characterize the interlocutor's choice of a particular proverb in a given situation.

Conclusion

From the pragmatic investigation conducted, it is concluded that there are highly marked use of proverbs in societal discourses. The language of societal discourse has texture. Proverbs help to enrich the value-laden texture of societal discourses as no serious traditional discourse can be carried out without proverbs. Their imports rest on implicatures that is why the Igbos have it that if the pragmatic/semantic imports of proverbs are explained to anyone, that the mother's dowry is a waste of money. Proverbs are motive driven language use. Proverbs are deployed as communicative principle of relevance/scalar implicatures, cognitive principle as well as for caution and advocacy in Chukwuemeka Godswill's *Ofo* for societal discourses. It is concluded that proverbs in societal discourses are predominantly caution/advocacy tools. They are also intention driven as well as context dependent and are relevant in any societal discourse.

Recommendation

It is recommended that since language is a principal element of cultural value, that proverbs should constitute an aspect of core topics to be consciously taught by language teachers to enhance the values of indigenous languages. Moreover, proverbs help in developing human language and fostering children in the art of traditional style of discourses as well as public speaking being an aspect of culture. Creative texts rich in the use of proverbs should be introduced in early classes to help children master the art of value laden speech making and expression which will help define and shape their personality for adulthood. Proverbs help improve the art of oratory.

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