

## **The Aesthetic Qualities of Igbo Proverbs: A Focus on Thematic Structure, Artistic and Stylistic Features**

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**Abstract:** The paper examines the aesthetic qualities of Igbo proverbs with a focus on the thematic structure, artistic and stylistic features. This study is aimed at subjecting Igbo proverbs through aesthetic, artistic and stylistic analysis. An unstructured questionnaire and face to face interview was used to collect data. A total of 30 Igbo proverbs were used for the analysis. The data was analyzed using content analysis. The study is premised on stylistic model. The findings of the study were: that rhetorical devices such as alliteration, assonance, personification, metaphor, allusion and analogy feature prominently in Igbo proverbs. These stylistic devices make the proverbs pleasant to listen to as well as enhancing the effectiveness of the message.

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**Key words:** Proverb • Aesthetic quality • Thematic structure • Stylistic feature and rhetorical devices

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Igbo are a people particularly located in southeastern Nigeria, West Africa. They also extends to parts of Midwestern and Delta areas of Nigeria. The Igbo land covers the present Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo, the eastern part of Delta state and the northern part of River state of Nigeria. Igbo land has borders on the east with the Ibibio people and on the west with Bini and Warri people. The Igbo share their northern boundary with the Idoma of Benue state and the southern boundary with the Ijaws and Ogoni of the Rivers state of Nigeria. Linguistically, the Igbo belong to the Kwa group.

Proverb is a social metaphor and the representation of people's philosophy in which the whole range of human experiences, principles, instructive issues, revolutionary visions, great expectations and aspirations to be empowered are brought to mind in allusive language. Proverbs are concise aphoristic statements concerning the behaviour and action of men and are repository of social problems. Like other oral repertoires, proverbs must be viewed as part of cultural evolution and social transformation process. They are always expressing public opinion and the vehicles for providing effective means of social control. The fact that proverbs reflect universal truth about the daily activities of people, make them appear popular in their appeal to people's imagination. The Igbo, like other communities in Africa,

are linguistically sensitive enough to be able to tell what constitutes aphoristic statements to distinguish metaphoric expressions from literary sense and in their use of proverbs.

The narrator and the audience do not usually evaluate all proverbs equally, but are interested in using them on the basis of their levels of social scale [1]. Obviously, some proverbs have more poetic or rhetorical value than others. Some are frequently used both in public and group discourse, whereas others are rarely employed in the day-to-day communication. Igbo proverbs have specific functions in the society and are assigned to different purposes on the basis of their factual content and validity of their messages. The structure of the hierarchy, therefore, needs detailed exploration. The more powerful the image of the proverb, the more widely it is in use. The Igbo oral artists often use selective proverbs in a wide ranging of discussions and public speeches in order to emphasize the theme of their argument and illustrate their subject of discourse in a concise language so that they influence the audience. An eloquent speaker who is involved in politics, public discussion, legal proceedings, lengthy reconciliation process and debates often uses highly valued proverbs just to win the audience appreciation. The expert Igbo proverb user usually selects striking images not merely to embellish his speech and win admiration of his audience, but also to recapitulate the points in a concise poetic statement.

In terms of conflict and its resolution approach, the Igbo employ the proverbs in response to social dislocation, moral unfitness and behavioural incorrectness. The Igbo proverbs show that almost in all cases, many scholars provide us with surface level explanations and translation into English. Moreover, nothing significant has been mentioned about their aesthetic background and the situations in which the aphoristic sayings are performed. [2], avers that:

Proverbs are by far the most popular...and have been widely collected and studied by Foreign and African scholars alike. Unfortunately the value most of the collections has Suffered from the poor understanding...of the cultural and aesthetic backgrounds.

All the events of proverbial texts have cultural implications and are strongly influenced by the present social circumstances. The major role of proverbs is to unfold the value of ancestral wisdom, the philosophical way of thinking and a code of behaviour for the new generation. The literary scholars need to take into consideration the prominence the society attaches to linguistic and literary features of Igbo proverbs such as metaphor, wit, irony, satire, humour, allusion, sarcasm and symbolism of proverbs.

A careful exploration of language in context will reveal that in Igbo society, the primary function of a proverb is aesthetic or poetic, rather than their literal sense of what has been spoken. [3], defines poetry as "the arrangement of words in the best possible order". Inherent in this definition is the element of beauty but that beauty is not in the order of words. It is in the choice of those words (diction), their arrangement (syntax), as well as layers of meaning that accrue from their usage (polysemy, ambiguity) as well as the license with which poets create new words (coinage). The narrator often selects a particular striking figurative language not merely to embellish or elevate his message with a poetic dimension or just to demonstrate his superior sophistication and sensitivity in the use of language, but also to elucidate his statement in a more precise, powerful and eloquent way so as to concretize his utterances. Most importantly, the varied emotional and intellectual reactions shown by the proverb narrator are conditioned more clearly by the quality of the imagery, wit and moral content.

We can possibly present the nature of Igbo proverbs in terms of outlook, together with certain characteristic features such as structure, style and content On the level

of outlook, proverbs depict the deepest philosophical concepts of the very existence of the people by means of careful observation and through examination of human characters and experiences in a given time and space. In their composition, most Igbo proverbs have complex structure wherein the main clauses and subordinate clauses are arranged in parallel form either to express sameness or oppositeness.

At the level of style, Igbo proverbs could be analyzed from wider perspectives. The most glaring stylistic quality is their terseness in which figurative languages are used. In few condensed words, a proverb captures wider universal issues. In support of this assertion [2], states: "the proverb conveys what it would have taken many more words to say in ordinary or plain language". Thus, Igbo proverbs in their style, are framed in brevity in which metaphor, symbolism, satire and irony are concentrated in a single line. Each proverb has its symbolic and metaphorical quality wherein certain images are discussed in few words and the discussed situations or events have deep cultural implications.

In their content, all proverbs are aiming at conveying certain concrete messages concerning the society that created them or the general human condition. By referring to obliquely a variety of similar events, the proverb is able to impart an objective message or lesson to us in one situation or the other. Words in proverb do not only have meaning properties which may be comprehensible or ambiguous, but they also bear various relations to one another on the level of meaning, syntax and phonology. Semantically, the relations of lexical categories can be analyzed on the basis of comparison as well as contrast. In dealing with semantics, we have to distinguish the situation in which it is applied.

**Theoretical Framework:** The analysis of this study is based on the stylistic analytical approach. [4-8] describe stylistics as a linguistic study of different styles. Stylistics is the product of social situation, implying that there is a common relationship between language use and social situations. Furthermore, stylistics could also be described as an academic field which studies aspects of language variation. It is in this regard that [9] stress that:

Stylistics aims at analyzing language habits with a view to identifying from the general mass of linguistic features, common to English and used on every conceivable occasion.

The aim of stylistic analytical approach creates the awareness of the structural pattern of language

permeating a text as to be able to identify the stylistic features of a text. It also enables the analysts to be consciously aware of the kind of social variations which the inherent linguistic features are identified with. Again, stylistics analytical approach enables analysts to know the techniques of putting these features down systematically in order to reveal the internal patterning of various texts. It is this phenomenon that has equally induced [9] to argue that the central requirement of stylistics is to provide a single clear technique of description with which to cope with any piece of language. They opine that:

The central requirement of any linguistically oriented approach to the classification of stylistic effect is that it should provide a single clear technique of description which will allow the student to cope with any piece of language he wants to study.

This technique of description is what [2] and [9] refer to as codes and linguistic levels of analysis respectively.

**Empirical Studies:** A number of studies have been conducted in Igbo proverbs as well as proverbs in other African communities. Some of these include [10-16] to mention but just a few. [17] is a collection of over 1000 proverbs which is said to be recorded for posterity before they vanish in their original form. The others analyze the Igbo proverbs from the poetic, aesthetic, oratorical, contextual and conceptual perspectives. The contextual refers to the use of proverbs in real life situations whereas the conceptual shows how the images used in the proverbs are visualized and interpreted.

The choice of studying the aesthetic, artistic and stylistic features of Igbo proverbs through the lens of stylistic theory is based on the fact that this area of study in Igbo proverbs have not been explored by the previous scholars. It is this scholarly gap that the present study intends to fill.

Oha [18] examines the semantics of female devaluation in Igbo proverbs. The paper focuses on the semantics of female subjugation and derogation in Igbo proverbs. Proverbs as forms of figurative communication with didactic functions in studied conversations were found to possess evidence of male attempt at maintaining control over discourse in the society. The representation of women in Igbo proverbs is mainly negative: women are typically portrayed as being senseless, morally debased, devilish, childish and weak. In fact these proverbs have been encoded in a form of communication usually respected and highly valued in Igbo culture suggests the

degree rhetoric in the society has been masculinized. Studies in oral literature, especially in male dominated cultures, need to pay attention to the role of male-oriented rhetoric in Igbo proverbs that signifies prejudice and hostility toward women in social discourse.

[19], investigates the use of proverbs as a literary device in Achebe's *Things fall apart and Arrow of God*. The paper examines some proverbs used in the literary texts and their interpretations. The finding of the study shows that Achebe uses proverbs as a tool for delineating his characters in the two selected novels.

[20], examines Igbo proverbs as embodiments of Igbo-African philosophy. The paper investigated the relationship between Igbo proverbs and Igbo-African philosophy. The paper also looked at the meaning and the philosophy of Igbo proverbs. The paper adopts expository and critical method of enquiry. The finding of the study shows that Igbo proverbs are cultivated as an art and cherished as an index of good oratory and acquaintance with traditional knowledge and ancestral wisdom. The finding of the study further shows that Igbo proverb embodies within itself Igbo-African philosophy.

[2], examines the representation of women in Suihala and French proverbs. Specifically, the study addressed the questions of how are women represented in proverbs in these two cultures, which aspects of their lives are highlighted and the differences and similarities seen in French and Suihala proverbs. The findings of the study indicated that women and family is a theme found in both Suihala and French proverbs. Moreover, women's role as mother and her love and affection toward the children are discussed and much appreciated especially in Suihala. Certain proverbs look at the relationship between men and women and in these proverbs, the superiority of men over women is noted. The study concluded that despite the cultural differences and geographical distance, proverbs in these two languages create an overwhelming negative impression of women.

[6], investigates the Igbo perception of womanhood: Evidence from sexist proverbs. The proverbs used in this are targeted at the female. The finding of the study shows that Igbo sexist proverbs sustain the notion of male domination over the female. It concluded that it is difficult to change the cultural stereotype ingrained in these proverbs.

[8] examines Igbo proverbs in the context of early communicative competence and social stability. The work basically collected its data which are Igbo proverbs from Igbo of different works of life and from published Igbo proverbs texts. Some Igbo proverbs encouraging hard work, cooperation, hospitality and justice were used. To

achieve this goal, Bandura's social learning theory of human development and Durkheim's functionalism theory were reviewed. The paper observed that the proper mindset if already instilled in the child by proverbs can help to prune conflict and criminal tendencies. The paper suggests early exposure of children to consistent use of proverbs in their indigenous dialects.

[14], conducted a study on "A sociolinguistic analysis of Urhobo proverbs". The aim of the study is to explore and analyze Urhobo proverbs from a sociolinguistic perspective in the context English as a second language in Nigeria. The data for the study was sourced and collected orally from competent Urhobo speakers from the context of use and Urhobo music. The qualitative and analytic research designs were adopted for the analysis. In all, fifty proverbs were analyzed using Dell Hyme's ethnography of communication theory as the major analytical framework with insights from Sapir-whorf hypothesis. The finding of the study reveals that sociolinguistics is a veritable analytical linguistic framework which studies the relations between language, culture and society. The study also reveals that children do not make use of proverbs in speech or at least when talking to elders and women sparingly make use proverbs. The study concludes that Urhobo proverbs are more didactic and rhetorical and epistemological. Urhobo use proverbs more to advice, warn, caution, reprimand and for persuasive purposes thus underscoring the wisdom imbued in most oral forms of African tradition.

A study by [14], examined the cultural values and wisdom that are transmitted through Ekegusii proverbs. Proverbs construct gender besides aligning the gender roles of men and women. Otiso further notes that gender construction and gender roles are inter-wined since a person's sex presents the ground for gendering and assignment of the gender roles. In the study Otiso also established that men and women knew the societal expectations that were laid out for them and worked towards meeting them.

**Summary of Literature Review:** The literature reviewed so far shows that the previous scholars concentrated their studies on cultural values and wisdom, how women are represented in proverbs in different cultures, proverbs as an embodiment of people's philosophy as well as the social and ethno-cultural construction of masculinity and femininity in African proverbs among others. None of these studies investigated the thematic structure, artistic and stylistic features of Igbo proverbs through the lens of stylistic approach. This is the gap the present study sets out to fill [15-17].

**Methodology:** The study was conducted basically through qualitative research. The study used descriptive research design. Data for the study were collected through oral interviews, observation and unstructured questionnaires. The data for the study were sourced from elderly and competent Igbo native speaker in Nsukka Igbo culture area of Enugu state. A total of thirty-two Igbo proverbs collected from fieldwork and from published sources were used for data analysis. The data collected were analyzed using stylistic theory. The analysis of data collected was undertaken through thematic and stylistic analysis of the proverbs to bring out their aesthetic qualities.

**Data Presentation and Analysis:** This section deals with data presentation and analysis under the following headings: thematic structure, artistic and stylistic features of Igbo proverbs.

**Thematic Structure of Igbo Proverbs:** This section analyses the themes tackled in Igbo proverbs. The themes will not only be derived from textual analysis of the proverbs, but also from the context in which the proverbs are used. The theme is the central idea about life which a proverb communicates. It is the central idea that applies in contexts outside the proverb itself. The idea is about life. It revolves around man as he interacts with his fellow men, with plants, animals and objects and indeed with the natural and supernatural world around him. The theme of proverb is informative as well as educative. It may touch on death, power and authority, passage of time and almost any issue which man may stumble on in his day-to-day experiences.

For one to discern the theme of a proverb he or she needs to work at two levels of meanings: the literal and metaphorical meanings. The literal meaning is the one obtained from the added denotations of the words of the proverb. It is informative and fulfils a cardinal function of literature which is to inform. The example below illustrates the literal meaning of a proverb [18].

#### **Theme of Blind Imitation:**

##### **Proverb 1**

Oke soro ngwere maa mmiri, mmiri koo ngwere o gaghi ako oke.

If the rat follows the lizard to get wet in the rain, if the body of the lizard dries up, that of the rat will not

The proverb literally implies that the lizard's can dry more easily than that of rat's if both of them venture out

to be drenched in the rain. The essential utility of this proverb lies in its ability to apply to situations and contexts outside it. The literal meaning carries conditions that can bring the rat to ruin. If the rat mindlessly goes out in the rain to play with the lizard, it will die of cold because it is hairy and the lizard will not die because it has scales.

At the metaphorical level we obtain a meaning by isolating the proverb essence which in this case is the ability to operate under limitations. The oral artist uses the proverb to warn that any member of our society who mindlessly operates outside his or her limitations and capabilities will inevitably come to ruins. In a context where a father cautions his son to be careful of a rich friend of his, the applicability becomes glaring. If the poor son is lured by his rich friend to operate in situations that are above his limitations, he will definitely get into trouble. It is by understanding the proverb at the literal level, identifying its salient elements and transferring it to a world of reality involving man that we find an equivalent metaphorical interpretation. The literal meaning therefore becomes a veil that widens applicability and reveals the aesthetic potentialities of the language [20].

#### Theme of Time and Diminishing of Value:

Proverb 2

Agadi nwaanyi kawa nka o di ka e jighi ego luo ya.

When a woman begins to grow old, it looks as if no bride price was paid on her.

At the literal level, the proverb reveals that beauty and value of a woman wanes with age. Time indeed destroys beauty. Also, there is possibility that people will neglect a once beautiful lady who has grown old. The real meaning of the proverb is that time diminishes values. In real life we may not talk about an old woman but about a house that once beautiful, a car that was once strong or some value that was once desirable which has diminished with time. The meaning at the metaphorical level is generated by transferring the essence obtained from information at the literal level. The meaning of the proverb constitutes the proverb theme, which is actual meaning of the proverb in application.

#### Theme of Bereavement:

Proverb 3

Okukosinayabeweume mere ya, naabubaga-agwuyan'ahu.

The hen said that if she lamented as much and as often as she sustained the loss of a child she would lose all the feathers on her body.

The proverb counsels moderation in sorrowing over a misfortune or series of them. Too much sorrowing may be detrimental to health. Losses must be borne bravely so that life may continue.

#### Theme of True Friendship:

Proverb 4

E meta uka, a mara onye iro.

When one gets into trouble, then one comes to identify real enemy.

The proverb is saying that while one is free from troubles everybody commends himself to him as a friend, but when he gets involved in some trouble then the real friends distinguished themselves by giving him help and aid while virtual enemies leave him to do the best he can by himself. The man in trouble takes note of these two groups of people but has to take special note of the unsympathetic ones in order to guard himself against them in his association with them in future. This Igbo proverb is equivalent to the English proverb: "A friend in need is a friend indeed".

#### Theme of Parental Responsibility:

Proverb 5

Okuko ghara ivo ala, o ji gini azu umu ya.

If a mother hen gives up scratching the earth, with what is she going to feed her brood.

It is the duty of parents to fend for their children until they can fend for themselves. To discharge this responsibility they must work. A person must not only earn his own bread for the sweat of his brows, he must do the same for the bread of his children. To work shy is to fail in one's responsibility to his off-spring. So everyone has right as well as the duty to work.

#### Theme of Sorrow or Lamentation:

Proverb 6

Akwa nwa bere ch boo, o bun ne nwa na-ebe ya.

The wailing of a child that lasts until morning is done by the child's mother.

The proverb means that he who suffers and sorrows longest is he who is personally touched by tragedy. To appreciate the pathos of this proverb and the deep human

feeling it endeavours to expose one should recall the saying in the Bible:

A voice was heard in Rama,  
Wailing and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children,  
She refused to be comforted,  
Because they were no more.

In the loss of a child by death a mother sustains two deep wounding injuries: she loses the staff for her old age and is shamefully humiliated because her hopes for an honourable burial have been dashed, especially if the child is a son. These facts lie behind the proverb: "Nwa lie nne, o buiwe, nne lie nwa, o buonuma". (To bury a mother makes one angry, but to bury a child makes a mother feel sorrowful humiliation).

#### Theme of Futility of Life:

Proverb 7

Onyenwereukwuna-akwanayaenweghiakpukpoukwu  
m a o n y e n w e r e a k p u k p o u k w u n a -  
akwanayaenweghiukwu.

A man with leg cries he has no shoes, a man with shoes cries he has no leg.

This proverb characterizes the complexity and irony of life. One cannot get all that he or she wants in life. While some may get what they want, others may have those things they may not need. This proverb be uttered by two women who are gossiping the child of their neighbor who refused to go to school despite his father's wealth and the fact his father works and lives in a university. The proverb is used to emphasize the irony of life situation and to wish the less privileged and serious ones have the opportunity which the other boy who refused to go to school has.

#### Theme of Polygamous Marriage:

Proverb 8

Onyeluruotutunwaanyin 'okwunaukana-eme.

A polygamous man always lives in quarrels.

In the above proverb, the situation of origin which the proverb refers to is a polygamous man with his wives. Traditionally, was a marital practice common in Igbo land and rivalry among co-wives was part of the game. The proverb may have been uttered as a conclusion by someone who observed how a man having many wives is always involved in the quarrels of co-wives. It may also

have been used by someone who wanted to warn a man who was about to engage in polygamy in order to discourage him, by showing him the consequences that awaits him in case he engages in polygamy. Therefore, proverbs are metaphorical statements since they reflect a general truth by reference to a specific phenomenon or experience. They are ready made figurative forms. Their performance consists in the accurate employment of them in novel contexts.

**Artistic and Literary Features of Igbo Proverbs:** The attention of the literary scholar is mostly on word. The proverb is a short and pithy genre that has heavy content. Proverb is easily memorizable because it admits a number of syntactical changes that ensure its compact nature. Proverbs are presented in forms that contain interesting artistry such as simile, metaphor, paradox, hyperbole, contrast and duplication of words.

#### Simile in Igbo Proverb:

Simile is a figure of speech in which similarity between two objects is directly expressed as could be seen in the examples below:

Proverb 9

Nwa nza kwawa nku, o dika o ga-aka nna ya.

When the young nza is growing wings it looks as if it will be bigger than its father.

Proverb 10

Nwaanyi kaa nka o dika ejighi ego luo ya.

When a woman is old, it looks as if no bride price was paid on her.

Proverb 11

Oko anaghi amu ogbi.

A parrot cannot give birth to a dumb.

This proverb is a double-edged praises, the user may use it to praise his son on hearing of the son's achievement. Apparently, he praises himself more by saying that the son is just his own replica. He is the parrot and his son is like him.

**Metaphorical Proverbs:** A metaphor is defined as an implied analogy which imaginatively identifies one object with another and ascribes to the first, one or more of the qualities of the second or invests the first with emotional or imaginative qualities associated with the second. Metaphor may also be defined as a figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another. Metaphor compares things but, unlike simile,

metaphor does not make use of the word like or as in its comparison. The examples below illustrate metaphorical proverbs in Igbo:

*Proverb 12*

*Ewunwaogbenyebuehiya.*

*The poor man's goat is his cow.*

*Proverb 13*

*Uchebuakpa, onyeobulanyankeya.*

*Wisdom is a goat's skin bag, everybody carries his own.*

*Proverb 14*

*A naghi azota abuba danyere n'oku.*

*You cannot salvage a feather from the fire.*

*The meaning of this proverb is inferred from the words used. It would be futile to try to scoop a feather that has already fallen on the fire because a feather easily catches fire. The term abuba which means feather is a metaphor that is being compared directly to an irreversible situation. The implied meaning is that if you want to do something, do not wait until it is too late to do so. This proverb is often used to provoke someone to do what is required at the appropriate time not when it is too late.*

*Proverb 15*

*Enyimenyi anaghi amu ejima.*

*An elephant though big, does not bear twins.*

*This proverb means that even though someone is seen to be doing well in life or has immense power, there are certain things that he or she might not do or attain. It is often told to people who expect so much of a person just because he or she is seen to have the ability to undertake anything. "Enyimenyi" which means elephant is a metaphor that is used to refer to a powerful person just like the way an elephant is big and is able to bring down a tree or even a house due to its immense strength.*

**Analogy Proverb:**

*Proverb 16*

*Elelia nwa ite, o gbonyuo oku.*

*A small pot in the fire should not be underestimated.*

*This proverb means that we should not judge something using outward appearance. This is an analogy of the process of using a small pot. The proverb is also metaphorical In that the small pot may represent*

*someone or something that is undergoing a process and so the complete form is not yet*

**Humorous Proverb**

*Proverb 17*

*Nkitana-ahughioduyana-asiewudozieoduya.*

*A dog which does not see its own tail, advises the goat to put its tail in order.*

*The dog here points an accusing finger at the goat without correcting his own weakness. This also applies to human situation whereby one who has a log in his eyes is asking someone with a peck in his eye to remove it. This is humorous expression in which the oral artist who has observed the hypocritical notion of people has made the stinging comment. The head constituent or noun phrase, "Nkita (the dog) and ewu (the goat)" and the verbal categories "na-ahughi (does not see) and dozieoduya (put its tail in order)", are all contrasting parallel components. It would be hypocritical of the masquerades to instruct others without keeping their own houses in order. The dog as indirect reference is used by the narrator to correct the erroneous views of those who are interested in finding faults in others without correcting what is ugly in themselves.*

**Alliteration:** *One of the figures of sound employed by Igbo proverb narrators is alliteration. As defined by M.H.Abrams (1980), alliteration is "the repetition of speech sounds in sequence of nearby words..., the term is usually applied only to consonants and only when the recurrent sound occurs in conspicuous position at the beginning of a word or at a stressed syllable within a word. Alliteration therefore is recurrent consonant sound.*

*Proverb 18*

*Anaghiekpuchiafoimeekpuchi.*

*Pregnancy cannot be hidden.*

*The proverb above means that that which is hidden will always come out. It employs the use of analogy, "ekpuchi" which means to hide symbolizes the action of concealing. Another rhetorical device is alliteration as shown in the sounds highlighted below:*

*"ekpuchiekpuchi"*

The consonantal sounds “kp” and “ch” repeated makes the proverb musical. It also makes it emphatic both in form and meaning. The proverb meant to make people to be open and confess whatever wrong they might have done. As this is given as warning people would take heed seriously when it comes as a proverb because are authoritative and are taken to be true.

**Allusive Proverb:**

Proverb 19

Ozu siwe isi enyi ka nwanne alaa.

When the corpse begins to stink, friends take to their heels.

The implied meaning here is that no matter how bad someone is, he or she will never be abandoned by his or her close relatives. This proverb is an allusion of the story of a man who once killed an antelope and covered it with leaves to pretend that he has killed human being to test his brother's love for him. He invited his friends to help him bury the corpse of the supposed human being he killed but they all left him one after the other. When he invited his brother to help him bury the corpse, without any hesitation the brother came to his aid only to discover that it was an antelope that his brother killed. They now carried the dead antelope home and shared the meat. This proverb is often used to evoke a sense of togetherness among close relatives.

**Paradoxical Proverbs:** A paradox is a statement which seems contradictory or absurd on the surface but is actually true or meaningful when seriously considered. Excerpts below illustrate paradoxical proverbs in Igbo:

Proverb 20

Afoanaghiekweukwuzuoike

The stomach does not allow the legs to rest

Proverb 21

Odibo eze bu eze.

The servant of a king is also a king

**Hyperbolic proverbs**

Proverbs can also exist as a hyperbole. This is a conscious exaggeration used to heighten effect or to produce comic affect as shown in the examples below:

Proverb 22

Agwootuonyehurubueke.

The snake seen by one person often becomes a python.

Proverb 23

Ka eletechaa ka mgbojirituonwaenwen'isi.

It is the desire to see everything that made a bullet hit the monkey on the head.

**Direct Statement Proverbs:** There are proverbs which exist in direct statements. Such proverbs include:

Proverb 24

Nkuonyekparan'okochi ka o na-anyon'udummiri.

The firewood which one gathered in the dry season he will dry himself during the rains.

No one is worse than those who care not about their future. The homes of many people have been destroyed by their own making as they open their doors in such a way that they tempt the demon to play the role.

Proverb 25

Ebe aka ruruonyempukpu ka o na-edebekpaya.

The dwarf puts his bag where his hand reaches.

It is up to us to decide where we rightly belong in a society we live in and make up adjustments. In order to secure ones future in a particular social environment, we have to choose between what we can be and what we want to be. A person may aspire to be a great leader, but it is unlikely to achieve such a lofty dream unless he or she is ready for that. This simply means that if people try to capture what is beyond their reach, it is likely that they seriously harm themselves. Thus the proverb “ebe aka ruruonyempukpu ka o na-edebekpaya”. The dwarf puts his bag where his hand reaches.

A man who allows himself to be trapped by the unachievable ambition is like a man who falls into the sea without having the skill of swimming. The oral artist comments on the irrational people who imitate the impossible way of the others and the high price they pay for their irrational act. If people are unable to understand the boundary of their knowledge and if they are driven by emotion than reason, there is a probability of facing trouble.

Proverb 26

Onyenjem ka onyeisiawoihemara.

He who travels is more knowledgeable than the grey haired man.



[12] stated that "if you are going to function successfully in this world, you must be able to communicate with people whose entire background, whose very way of viewing the world and doing things may be completely different from yours". This is the challenge of the twenty-first century". In order to effectively meet the challenges of our time and be able to function as a truly global man, we have to move beyond our territories and communicate with people from diverse cultures, norms, traditions and languages. When we travel from place to place, from countries to countries, we do not only experience life in paradise in which we enjoy garden of roses, but also face tormenting situations which frustrate us. Every time we are exposed to new environment, we must expect the hardships and those trying situations that enable us to acquire knowledge and develop skills which empower us to become successful communicators. He who travels is more knowledgeable than the grey haired man.

The proverb do not merely indicate the benefit someone gains in traveling out of his community, but also enable us to see the necessity of completing the difficult journey of life with success. If we stand in one place, we cannot see the world with open mind. We do not live in a world where success is achieved without painstaking endeavour.

*Proverb 27*

*Nwata kwosia aka, o soro okenye rie nri.*

*If a child washes his hand properly, he eats with the elders.*

*Proverb 28*

*Onye a juruajuanaghiajuonweya.*

*The abandoned does not abandon himself.*

*Proverb 29*

*Nwaanyikwurun'uzoagbaegwunwereonyena-akuruyaegwun'ohia.*

*A young woman who stands on the road to dance has a drummer in the bush.*

This proverb is warning people to be aware of who they deal with. At surface level a woman dances on the road without caring that cars and other road users ply the high way. In other words, she could not care less. At the deeper underlying structural level of meaning the artist indirectly suggests that a woman who says "I can succeed without you" has a secret male friend behind her, so you mind what you do or say to any woman. The aesthetic quality of this proverb lies in the act of

imagining a woman dancing with reckless abandon on a busy road without a visible source of music.

**Proverbs with Duplication of Words**

There is a form of proverb in which duplication of words or syllables add up to a single proposition as shown below:

*Proverb 30*

*Aka ajaajana-ebuteonummanumanu.*

*It is the muddy palm that brings about the oily mouth.*

**Findings of the Study:** The findings of the study reveal that the following themes are discerned from Igbo proverbs: Theme of time and diminishing value, parental responsibility, futility of life, hard work, polygamous marriage, true friendship and theme of bereavement. Also, the study reveals that the following rhetorical devices: alliteration, assonance, simile, metaphor, allusion, personification and analogy feature prominently in Igbo proverbs. The various devices for creating Igbo proverbs contribute to creating memorable well crafted literary entities which can be easily retrieved from the memory. The different artistic elements in a proverb interact with one another to create terseness. The artful and aesthetic quality of proverbs resides in the construction of proverbs in order to communicate for impact. A lot of Igbo proverbs have been artistically built as a reflection of life but have ended up codifying among other things behaviour of men and women and their social obligations. It is the rhythm of these forms that ensures their permanence in the memory of people and therefore the transmission of the tradition by their use in a culture of orality.

**CONCLUSION**

From the analysis made in this paper, it is evident that Igbo proverbs contain sound pattern like alliteration, assonance, personification, allusion, metaphors, paradox and analogy. Generally, all the proverbs have a balanced structure. Each of these features makes the proverb unique and effective as they create a vivid picture and emphatic effect in the mind of the hearer. The issues being dealt with are better understood by the use of these devices as they evoke profound thoughts among the people. Metaphorical proverbs used concepts that are familiar to the people such as dog, goat and names of wild animals such as elephant.

The deep knowledge and insight exhibited in the proverbs was something that was particularly striking. The full impact of a proverb can never be appreciated until it is analyzed. A notable fact is that the sound patterns contained in the proverb disappear once they are translated into English or any other target language. It is a fact that proverbs can only be enjoyed in the original language.

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