**THE PEACE-WEAVING WISDOM OF ENUANI PROVERBS: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC INQUIRY**

**Abstract**

The paper aims to underscore the wisdom of Enuani proverbs and the capability of their application to broker peace in both interpersonal relationships and national life. Proverbs are central to people’s beliefs, customs, norms, values and general worldview. Enuani is one of the major dialects of the Igbo language spoken by the people of the Aniocha/Oshimili of Anioma in Delta State of Nigeria. It is spoken by the communities that are located within this region including the Ndi Onicha-Ado. Although a dialect of the Igbo of the Southeast, it has loaned words from Edo. It is distinguished by accent and mutually intelligible to the group of Anioma people in the state. Like their Igbo counterpart, the Enuani people relish proverbial expressions. The study adopted a qualitative research approach. Purposively selected from the author’s repertoire of Enuani proverbs as a speaker of the dialect and from the stock of proverbs commonly used among the people, 15 proverbs were analyzed from a sociolinguistic standpoint. The study is significant because scholarly works on Enuani are very scanty, especially on its rich proverbial heritage. It found that Enuani proverbs reflect values of cooperation for peaceful co-existence, cordiality and good conduct. It is recommended that the study of Enuani proverbs be introduced into primary and secondary schools curricula to inculcate the moral ideals of the proverbs in young Nigerians and ensure interpersonal and national peace as a result.

**KEY WORDS**: Peace-weaving, Wisdom, Enuani, Dialect, Proverbs.

**INTRODUCTION**

That the continent of world in general and Africa in particular are in dire need of peace and cohesion is not in doubt. The prevalence of wars, terrorism, banditry and political violence require very urgent and diverse approaches to resolve these critical issues. There is the need to deploy all conflict management strategies in order to proffer lasting solutions to these hydra-headed demons threatening our existence (Lawali and Alagbe 2021).

Presently, Nigeria as a nation is bedeviled with countless challenges, namely, insurgency, armed robbery, ritualism, religious extremism, kidnapping and abduction of innocent people, rape thuggery, and many other acts of criminality that occur daily in different geographical zones of the country. More disturbing is the failure of successive governments to successfully confront the problems and bring an end to them. Nigerians across religions and ethnicity are beginning to lose faith in the leadership as the situation is getting more hopeless by the day. Even the economy is not spared as only a secure and united people can grow an economy (Nwabudike & Adedokun, 2018).

Ademowo (2014) opines that scholars have blamed the contemporary African problems, not only on the eroding traditional African values and value system but also on the failure to master language and the consequent obvious misunderstanding, especially the lack of practical wisdom embedded in proverbs to address issues in question. The aim of this paper therefore, is to suggest the deployment of wisdom found in proverbs, especially Enuani proverbs in resolving these crises bedeviling our nation.

Mieder (1993) summarized the meaning of proverb thus:

A phrase, saying sentence or expression of the folk which contains above all, wisdom, truth, morals, experience, lessons and advice concerning life and which has been handed down from generation to generation.

Yusuf and Methangwane (2003), on their part, view proverbs as “relatively short expressions, which are usually associated with wisdom and are used to perform a variety of social functions”. Proverbs perform a wide range of functions depending on the cultural contexts in which they are used. In the African context, and especially in Nigeria, proverbs have been found to perform several different functions, some of which are presented below.

Proverbs are a vehicle for personal communication. Similar to other genres of folklore, proverbs perform the function of an impersonal medium for personal communication. Proverbs are used to guide and direct the behaviour or thought of a child or an individual. Once the proverb is quoted and the message is passed across, the responsibility is then shifted from the speaker to the anonymous coiner of the proverb. The addressee then becomes aware of the fact that the proverb did not originate from the speaker but has come from somewhere, sometime ago.

Proverbs are used for smoothening social frictions.Proverbs are employed for smoothening social conflicts and discontent and calming the individual in his efforts to adjust himself in his new setting and fate. Some scholars underscore the benefits of proverbs to smoothen the rough edges of conversation in a community whose citizens aspire to live together peacefully. Firstly, it prevents both the speaker and the addressee from embarrassment. The significance of the hidden meaning, which usually could be spiteful, is restricted only to those affected or those who can understand. For instance, if the speaker is asking for a favour, the refusal will not lead to embarrassment. If an addressee’s guilt is referred to in proverb, he has an opportunity to accept his fault without losing face.

Proverbs are a vehicle for education.The educative function of proverbs cannot be over-emphasized. There is scarcely any one who does not recognize this very important function of the proverb. In West Africa for example, children are taught proverbs and their educational function cannot be better exemplified than in the Akan proverb, which says “Wise child is talked to in proverbs”. Among East Africans, beginning from age fourteen, when a child flies into a rage, when he lies or steals, when he is recalcitrant or violates the code of etiquette, when he makes an ass out of himself, when he is cowardly, he hears his actions commented upon in the words of a proverb.

Proverbs have moral and religious value*.* That proverbs have had a subtle yet persuasive influence on popular opinions cannot be disputed. As if one recalls how one’s decisions to do this or that, and vice versa, have been guided by proverbs and how one’s normal expression is controlled by some proverbial wisdom, one may conclude that proverb has a subtle and powerful effect on one’s life. In times of trouble and perplexity, people turn to proverbs for resolutions and they find them very useful. It is no gainsaying that the preachers find some aspects of the proverb useful for their work. In fact, many a gospeller uses proverbs as explanatory materials for religious matters connected with the Christian faith.

Proverbs have been used by missionaries to evoke situational responses. A list of proverbs was made by a mission agency, which could be used by evangelists as explanatory material for “doctrinal” matters relating to the Christian faith. Such use of traditional utterances in preaching is now common, and their unexpected usage within a sermon creates an immediate rapport with the audience, especially in the ‘bush’ areas. It will therefore not be out of place to conclude that there is no wisdom under the sky, which is not dealt with in one-way or another by proverbs.

**THE ENUANI DIALECT AND ITS SPEAKERS**

Enuani refers to one of the major dialects of the Igbo language spoken by Aniocha/Oshimili people of the Anioma in Delta North, Delta State of Nigeria. The term is used to describe the communities located within this region, including the Ndi Onicha-Ado (Onitsha). Enuani is one of the major Igbo dialects inherited from the Igbo of the southeast but with loaned words from Edo. It is distinguished by accent or orthography and is mutually intelligible to the Anioma people in Delta State.

Enuani is tonal and is spoken close to Onitsha, Obosi, Atani and Ogbaru in Anambra State and has over time become quite standardized. It is widely accepted and embraces some words from the Edoid language. Words like "Ughele" (Knife), "Ododo" (Red) and "Ugagbe" (Mirror) are examples of Edoid loaned words. These and other loaned words "Okei" (boy/man) "Nwoke" in central Igbo and "Okpoho" (girl/woman) are two of the words amounting to diversions from the central Igbo.

 Enuani is often referred to as "Asusu Enuani". It is rarely written but retains Igbo names, words and idiomatic expressions that ordinarily may be understood by other Igbo speakers except minor variations as a result of loan words from the Edoid language. Enuani has cross-pollinated the Aniocha/Oshimili areas characteristically bringing about communication homogeneity with the adoption of words. Other dialects spoken in the Anioma region are Ika, Aboh, Ebu, Ukwani/Ndokwa, Olukunmi etc. All these are derived from Igbo, Yoruba, Edo, Igala etc.

The word "Enu" means "High" while "Ani" means "Land" which when put together means Highland suggesting "Highland People" or the "People of Highland" (Ndi-Enuani). Geographically, the Aniocha and Oshimili regions are highland and riverine people living west of the River Niger in Delta State, south-south, Nigeria. Archival sources and local histories of the people show that before the fusion of the people that today comprise Delta North which resulted in the birth of "Anioma" probably in 1953, the people referred to themselves as "Enuani".

The people of Ibusa, Asaba, Ogwashi-Uku, Onicha-Olona, Onicha-Ugbo, Onicha-Uku, Onicha-Ukwu, Onicha-Ado (Onitsha) Issele-Uku, Issele-Mkpitime, Issele-Azagba, Idumuje-Unor, Idumuje-Ugboko, Ejeme-Unor, Ejeme-Aniogor, Okpanam, Ezi, Oko, Ashaba, Anwai, Ugbodu, Akwukwu-Ukwu, Ubulu-Uku, Ubulu-Unor etc. trace their origin to the Igbo east of the Niger, from already established settlements within or nearby Enuani region, Benin, Igala, and Yoruba land. Enuani, Ukwani/Ndokwa and Ika are Anioma.

 The Enuani have a homogenous culture; for instance, the Akwa-Ocha (Oto-Ogwu, in some Anioma dialects) fabric is the traditional attire of the Enuani as won by the entire people of Anioma. It is a white fabric woven with designs sometimes inscribing the “Anioma State " tied around the chest or waist by women fashionably supported with a blouse and also won around the waist by men or sometimes made to appear as a very bogus shirt reaching the legs. The Akwa-Ocha) is decorated with beads finely worn around the wrists and hanging loosely around the neck.

 The culture of Enuani regarding the burial of a loved-ones is same. This is generally referred to as "Ini-Ozu" and the first of the two funeral ceremonies is called "Ikposu-Ozu". The Akwa-Ocha is a necessary traditional item required to bury the dead. Dedicated mourners closely related to the deceased are expected to tie the fabric around their bodies while "Itu-Uni" is often conducted with "Akwa-Ocha". A deceased may also be laid to rest wrapped in Akwa-Ocha as a traditional rite and respect. An Anioma indigene that has taken up a chieftaincy/traditional title may also be expected to appear in Akwa-Ocha attire. Such is the relevance of Akwa-Ocha to the people of Enuani and Anioma in entirety.

The aim of this paper is to show how interpersonal, and consequently national peace can be achieved through the use of proverbs, especially Enuani proverbs. Like their Igbo counterpart, the Enuani people relish proverbial expressions. Proverbs are central to their beliefs, customs, norms, values and general worldview. The study is significant because scholarly works on Enuani are very scanty, especially on its rich proverbial heritage.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK (Sociolinguistics)**

Sociolinguistics is the term used generally for the study of the relationship between language and society. It is concerned with such matters as the linguistic identity of social groups, social attitudes to language, forms of language, national language use, varieties and levels of language and multilingualism. Sociolinguistics studies the relationship between language and society; that it is interested in explaining why we speak differently in different social contexts and is concerned with identifying the social function of language and the ways it is used to convey social meaning. It is interested in all aspects of the relationship between language and society. It examines such matters as the linguistic identity of social groups, social attitudes to language, standard and non-standard forms of language, the patterns and needs of national language use, social varieties and levels of language, the social basis of multilingualism and so on ( Yule, 2010; Holmes, 2008; Crystal, 2008).

Sociolinguistics looks at the effects of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and contexts on the way language is used and the effects of language use on society. The primary concern of sociolinguistics scholarship is to study correlations between language use and social structure. It attempts to establish casual links between language and society; asking what language contributes to making community possible and how communities shape their language by using them. Sociolinguistics is different from sociology of language, as the focus of sociolinguistics is the effect of society on language, while the latter’s focus is on the effect of language on society. Sociolinguistics investigates the relationships between language and society with the goal of having a better understanding of the structure of language and of how language functions in communication while sociology of language tries to discover how social structure can be better understood through the study of language.

Anamayi (2014) is of the view that when the way language is used is affected by the society in which it is used, especially in areas relating to cultural norms, expectation and context, it becomes the study of sociolinguistics. According to this view, sociolinguistics embraces the aspects of linguistics that evaluate the connection between language and society, and the way we use it in different social situations. It often shows the humorous relations of human speech and how the dialect of given language describes the age, sex and social class of the speaker. In essence, it codes the social function of language. Sociolinguistics is also interested in the relationship between language and social structure; that is, it seeks to unravel how age, sex, social status or background correlate with language. It also looks at how society influences language.

**METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a descriptive and qualitative approach. 15 proverbs were purposively selected from the author’s repertoire of Enuani proverbs as a speaker of the language and from the stock of proverbs commonly used among the people. The proverbs were then interpreted and explained, using their contextual meanings to draw inferences for the proverbs in the context of peace that results from caution, justice, fairness and wisdom.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

The selected proverbs are thematically grouped as shown below.

**GROUP DATA ONE**

1. **We jiro Ife aji agbananti agbananya**

*Literal interpretation*: Medication for the eye should not be applied to the ear.

*Meaning*: Things should be done correctly.

1. **Uzo suso ma njoadina**

*Literal interpretation*: The route may be long, but let there be no evil.

*Meaning*: Safety is more important than speed.

1. **Ogbu onyebuigwu obuluigwu we gbue**

*Literal interpretation*: The killer of the palm frond bearer will get killed when he carries his.

*Meaning*: The evil doer will soon be visited with evil; you reap what you sow.

1. **Ikwukwu kwuu wafuike okuku**

*Literal interpretation*: When the breeze blows, the fowl’s anus will be exposed.

*Meaning*: The culprit will one day be exposed.

1. **Onyunsi uchi adaelote nachi gefo**

*Literal interpretation*: He who defecates in the night forgets it will be day.

*Meaning*: Actions have their repercussions.

1. **Omeke nmadu ome onwe**

*Literal interpretation*: When you hurt others always, you hurt yourself.

*Meaning*: A habitual cheat will one day cheat himself.

The common string that runs through proverbs 1 to 6 is the virtue- caution in all our inter-personal relationships. While the first proverb cautions on the need to do things correctly, the second one advises that safety of lives be placed above haste. The third proverb warns against wickedness to one’s neighbour to prevent the law of retributive justice from taking its cause. Proverbs 4, 5 and 6 caution that culprits will always be exposed; actions have their repercussions and habitual cheats will one day cheat themselves.

**GROUP DATA TWO**

1. **Efi niwero odudu Chukwu nachua izizi**

*Literal interpretation*: God Himself chases flies from a tailless cow.

*Meaning*: God is the helper of the helpless.

1. **Me onye kawame ibee**

*Literal interpretation*: Do for one as you did for others

*Meaning*: What is sauce for the goose is source for the gander

1. **Nkpulu onyeku kaogawo**

*Literal interpretation*: It is the seed that one sowed that he will reap

*Meaning*: You reap what you sow

The need for justice and fairness in all spheres of life is what resonates in all three proverbs in this

group. Proverb number 7 states that the helpless are dear to God, therefore, they should not be

oppressed. Number 8 preaches that everyone be treated fairly and equally, while proverb number

highlights the law of Sowing and Reaping.

**GROUP DATA THREE**

1. **Ife okei noani fu wata ri enuosisi omafua**

*Literal interpretation*: What an elder sees sitting, a youth cannot see it standing.

*Meaning*: Wisdom is greater than strength.

1. **Ekpe onye ji tete ula bu ututua**

*Literal interpretation*: Whenever one wakes up is his morning.

*Meaning*: It is never late to start something).

1. **Akadozi ofia omeunu**

*Literal interpretation*: When hands work on a forest, it becomes a home.

*Meaning*: It takes effort to have something good.

1. **Uche ka wa ji egbu Okpa ogi agba nmeh**

*Literal interpretation*: It takes wisdom to slaughter a fowl for it to bleed

*Meaning*: Wisdom is necessary for success in all endeavours

1. **Osa nata aku chani, owe odudu tukwasi nke ni charo maka echi**

*Literal interpretation*:As asquirrel feeds on ripe palm nuts, it places its tail on the unripe ones.

*Meaning:* As we feed today, we should have a plan for the future

1. **Otutu kawa ji akpan nku waji alaru na anyasi**

*Literal interpretation*: Woods for night fire are fetched in the morning.

*Meaning*: Plans for the future must be commenced early.

Proverbs 10 to 15, all proclaim the place and importance wisdom in all life’s endeavours.

Wisdom is greater than strength; it is never late to begin something; it takes effort to have

something good; wisdom is necessary for success in life; it is necessary to plan for the future and

the future must be planned for early enough.

5. **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

One of the key findings in this study is the centrality of proverbial expressions in the socio-cultural life of the Enuani people of South-South, Nigeria. Like their Igbo brothers in the South-East and in the words of Achebe of blessed memory, proverbs are the oil with which yam is eaten. Hardly does a conversation take place, especially among elders, and proverbs are not used to embellish it.

Another obvious discovery in this work is the fact that, unlike the Yoruba among whom proverbial expressions are the exclusive preserve of elders, proverbial usage is also employed by young individuals as occasion demands. Through the use of proverbs, discourses are garnished, issues are foregrounded and points emphasized. Greenberg (1971) opines that language is not just a necessary condition for culture but a part of culture itself. This is exactly so of Enuani people as proverbs are ingrained in their culture.

Also, a very important truth about Enuani proverbs is that, as in other cultures, they are used to inculcate the virtues of respect for elders, respect for others, obedience, peaceful co-existence and love for mankind. They condemn vices of all forms and inculcate discipline. In particular, the proverbs analyzed in this study advise caution in all inter-personal relationships, underscore the need for justice and fairness in all dealings with mankind and emphasize the importance wisdom in all endeavours.

1. **CONCLUSION**

The paper set out to examine Enuani proverbs in light of how they can be used to achieve national peace in Nigeria. Fifteen proverbs were randomly selected and analyzed based on their usage in the society (Sociolinguistics). The result showed that proverbial usage plays a pivotal role in the socio-cultural life of the people and are spoken by both youths and adults.

Enuani proverbs reflect values of godliness, respect for others and cooperation for peaceful co-existence. This agrees with Finnegan, 1971 (cited inChristopher E. N. et al, 2019) who observes that proverbs are skillfully introduced into speeches at crucial moments and they influence actual decisions reached among the Anang Ibibio people. She also observes that proverbs are used in the court and elsewhere to resolve disagreement or bring a dispute to a close.

It is recommended that the study of Enuani be introduced into primary and secondary schools curricula to inculcate the moral ideals of its proverbial expressions in young Nigerians and ensure societal justice, fairness, unity and cooperation which will naturally translate to the actualization of peace and cohesion in the Nigerian State.

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