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Explication of Ogba Proverbs as a Tool for Conflict Resolution

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Abstract: ***Proverbs originated orally based on the oral literature history of storytelling passed down from generation to generation through stories and sayings. However, some believed that they originated from written scripts. Proverbs are words of wisdom used to impart knowledge to people. In Ogba, proverbs are used predominantly by the elders to warn, advice, instruct and educate on issues of paramount importance to the society. Proverbs elu are epigrammatic in nature and usually misunderstood as idiom olu-eknurnu. Proverbs elu often use figures of speech, such as metaphors, similes or allusions to make a point. In the literary parlance, renowned African writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and others adopt the use of proverbs in their works. This paper analyses the Ogba proverbs as a tool for conflict resolution in Ogba land of Rivers State, Nigeria. It is discovered that proverbs are used in major types of discourse involving the elders as evidenced in their use in palaces of chiefs to settle issues of marriage, land, chieftaincy, accusations of witchcraft and wizardry and other cases that are settled locally according to Ogba tradition and custom. This paper adopts the qualitative approach propounded by Isidore Okpewho. It concludes that proverbs are a veritable tool used by the elders to settle disputes in their homes, families and kindred.***

Keywords: Explication, Ogba, Proverbs, Conflict, Resolution.

1. INTRODUCTION

The origins of proverbs are often long and complex history as they have been in existence for centuries. In Ogba, they predate the western civilization. The origin of proverbs varies depending on the people culture, language and history. The origin of proverbs traced to writing scripts is validated on the Egyptian record that proverbs existed on papyrus scrolls at about 3000BC and have been translated into modern languages. Twian (1894) defines proverbs as "the wisdom of many and the wit of one" (p.103). By this definition of Twain, it

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means that proverbs contain insights and experiences of many people expressed in a witty way. Similarly, renowned novelist, Chinua Achebe believes that proverbs are a vital part of communication in many African cultures as he states that "proverb is the palm oil with which words are eaten" (p.61).

The Ogba people of old commonly practised the non-formal form of education which was completely oral; hence Ogba proverbs are orally transmitted. The oral means of transmission of Ogba proverbs has hampered the development of Ogba proverbs and has reduced the impact from being felt in the function as a tool for conflict resolution. The fluid nature of the proverbs in the absence of a written record had denied the younger generation the education and benefit derivable from the use of the proverbs. Not losing sight of the fact, a proverb is an expression which owing its birth to the people, testifies to its origin in form and phrase. In this vein, the younger generations lose focus of the sociolinguistics and the structure of the proverbs. On a high note of relevance, Ohia (2023) avers on sociolinguistics and the structure of Ogba proverbs thus: "structurally Ogba proverbs display inter-language similarities with their reliance on vivid images, domestic allusions and word play" (p.35). Young people in Ogba sometimes find it difficult it understand a proverb since the meaning is not easily decided from the surface. As long as human beings interact, there is bound to contradiction of interests.

2. RELATED WORKS

This paper establishes that Ogba proverbs are relevant in the settlement of disputes as proudly exploited in Ogba people's interpersonal relation through conversations. Similarly, Ohia (2023) demonstrates the sociolinguistic aspects of Ogba proverbs. He posits that "Ogba proverbs are relevant to both oral and written communications within and outside the Ogba environment" (p.28). In a similar vein, Onukawa (2018) "…that Igbo proverbs are implored in forestalling and resolving conflict in Igbo culture. Igbo proverbs, an aspect of Igbo language should be embraced for smooth communication among individuals. (p.14)

Agi-Otto (2021) posits on Ogba proverbs thus: "…these proverbs extend the frontiers of knowledge generation, as they pass on knowledge from one generation to another. They are also used to convey feelings or thought that cannot be expressed ordinarily". (p.39)

It is hoped that this study and other related works would be of immense assistance to impart knowledge about the use of proverbs that subsequent researcher will clean on to explicate and expound the frontiers of proverbs in the local communities and beyond. In this regard, Tew (2023) explains proverbs of Ogba as "a short well known saying stating a general truth of piece of advice to a profession or group" (p.16). To this end, she further explains that Ogba proverbs increase the chances of security stability in Ogba land, with people using the proverbs to resolve their conflicts instead of resorting to violence.

Similar Achebe (1958) employs various specific instances and techniques to seemlessly integrate oral traditions into his storytelling. These techniques not only enrich the narrative but also serve to immerse the reader in the cultural milieu of the characters. He incorporates proverbs in his narratives. This, to a large extent underscores the importance of proverbs in the African tradition. Achebe frequently integrates descriptions. Proverbs are a fundamental aspect of African oral traditions, and Achebe uses them to convey cultural wisdom,

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emphasise moral lessons, and underscore the values of the society depicted in his novels. For instances, in Things Fall Apart, "the lizard that jumped from the high Iroko tree to the ground said he would praise himself if no one else did". This proverb carries cultural significance and illuminates the characters' perspectives.

Achebe's works are profoundly marked by the significance of oral traditions, which serves as a narrative and cultural cornerstone in his novels. The incorporation of oral tradition (proverbs) in Achebe's works is not merely a stylistic choice but a deliberate effort to capture the essence of the African storytelling and to bridge the gap between the oral and written forms of expression. He preserves the rich heritage of Nigerian societies, particularly the Igbo culture through the use of proverbs, folktales and myths as vehicles for passing down cultural norms, values and historical experiences from one generation to the next.

3. METHODOLOGY

the paper adopts the qualitative and descriptive design method for the analysis of the proverbs explicated. Dell Hyme's Ethnopoetics is used as the theory to explain the cultural relevance of the proverbs in Ogba setting and beyond.
This paper employs the method of collecting information through interviews by the use of electronic devices as tape-recorders, camera, phones and others. It uses the descriptive survey and qualitative design in order to help the researcher access information about the use of Ogba proverbs as a tool for conflict resolution. The interviews involve one on one interaction between the interviewer and interviewee in order to communicate and interact first hand with the respondents. The research method is textual in nature that is qualitative as earlier mentioned. This paper also sources it resources from a content-based analysis, which would be library based work in addition to field work. Aside the field work, it relies heavily on materials such as articles and essays in scholarly journals, books from library and online sources.

Sequel to this research methodology in which both primary and secondary data were used, the data were sourced through library and other traditional means of research engagement as interviews, participating in live performance of the proverbs by parents and grandparents. However, the main data came from the primary sources which are used as a parameter to draw conclusion in this paper.

The primary sources comprise the information obtained through careful observations, participation in the performance of proverbs and oral interviews of the population in their natural environments as well as the views and opinions received as feedback. In other words, the secondary sources are drawn from researchers from books, journal-articles, unpublished projects/theses/dissertation, online resources material and other relevant materials. The questionnaire administrated bordering on the use of proverbs of Ogba in Rivers State and beyond as an instrument for conflict resolution. Using the descriptive research involves gathering and describing data collected. So it is the appropriate design for this paper as it effectively analyses the data collected.

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4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is apt to state here that proverbs are a means of clear identification or identity of any Ogba indigene anywhere in the globe as his/her ability to express the Ogba language in proverbs places him/her at an advantage. Conversations in Ogba are fluent and clear with the use of Ogba proverbs in expression. The application of Ogba proverbs in relevant and specific contexts and occasion speaks volumes of the importance of this medium of communication. Its proper usage is a mark of oratory and competence of an individual in the Ogba language. Ogba proverbs are didactic and create avenue for human interactions and communications. They are used to educate the younger generation to embellish and beautify speeches especially by elders.

It is an important aspect of a society's culture. Ogba proverbs extend the frontiers of knowledge from one generation to another; they are also used to convey feelings or thought and to draw analogies of past, present and future happenings that had existed in the past with deep meaning. The paper in its findings discovers that proverbs are used during ceremonies such as marriage, funeral, chieftaincy coronation, festival, birth and other ceremonies in Ogba land. Ogba speakers can use proverbs to impart knowledge, offer advice, teach or reinforce morals, make an argument, relieve interpersonal tensions, aid in understanding, console or inspire others.

Ogba Proverbs for Conflict Resolution

Conflict is found in every human society-Africa, Europe, Middle East, United State of America, Asia and others. It is inevitable in any society of the world. As long as humans communicate as individuals or in groups, conflict is bound to emerge. Coser (1967) states that conflict is "the pursuit of divergent interests, goals, and aspirations by individuals or groups in defining social and physical environments" (p.19). In other words, conflict is the disagreement over social issues, beliefs and ideologies between two or more individuals in a group in an attempt to gain acceptance for their vision or goal over others. In a similar vein, Galtang (1985) explains conflict as "a condition in the society: an action-system with two or more complex-incompatible goals" (p.35). Based on the explanations above, proverbs in the Ogba society play pivotal roles towards the settlements of individual intra and inter village conflicts in a bid to settle the conflicts to allow individuals live a harmonious life. Krisek (2004) sees conflict as "the manifestation of inconsistent goals or values within an organization" (p.12). He argues that conflict can have both positive and negative effects on an organization, depending on how it is managed. It is an inevitable aspect of human existence and interaction.

Conflict resolution denotes a change in the situation which removes the underlying source of conflict. Burton (1990) terms conflict resolution as "a political philosophy, an outcome as well as peaceful means by which such an outcome is obtained. Conflict resolution revolves around using tools and skills to address or handle the causes of conflict" (p.63). Conflict resolution makes sure that the parties involved in a conflict understand each other and resolve their differences, in order to achieve solutions that are favourable for both parties. Conflict resolution takes different forms, like, negotiation, mediation and problem solving. Conflict resolution aims at identifying the main causes of a conflict so as to put an end to the conflict

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to ensure sustainable peace. Conflict resolution seeks to design solutions through a joint problem-solving approach. When a conflict is successfully resolved, the conflict is transformed and becomes a catalyst for deep-rooted enduring positive change in individuals, relationships and structures (development).

Thus, successful resolution of a conflict will ensure sustainable peace which would lead to improved security and good relations among people which could lead to human well-being and general development. "Generally, the various methods of conflict resolution are usually a process in that each requires a certain procedure and time and not just a one way approach" (Best 2012, p.126).

The concept of Ogba proverbs is to allow people in Ogba to embrace their culture and build morals. Ogba proverbs are a communication tool used to impart wisdom from the elders to the younger generation. They are used to communicate the idea of peace and conflict resolution; they have the persuasive power to advice, guide and influence conflicting parties to settle their issues peacefully. Ogba proverbs that give advice help both parties to calmly assess the situation, and discover a way to meet at a mutual agreement. Ogba proverbs tell the truth about conflict resolutions and devise a resolution and management approach through metaphorical and symbolic representation. This paper highlights the contribution of Ogba proverbs in conflict resolution in the Ogba society of Rivers State, Nigeria, as it revolves around the translations, analysis, definition and meaningful resolution. Elders use Ogba proverbs to impart knowledge, offer advice, teach or reinforce morals, make an argument, relieve interpersonal tensions, aid understanding or to console/inspire those involved in a conflict.

The use of proverbs is an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism. Indigenous conflict resolution mechanism comprises social, economic, cultural and religious-spiritual dimensions in accordance with the entirety of traditions, customs and worldviews of a society within the different spheres of social life. The methods involve negotiations, mediations, and reconciliations based on knowledge, custom and history of the community. These methods are transmitted by the elders through the use of adequate proverbs fit for any specific occasion. "In traditional African societies, conflict is often resolved using laid down traditions" (Nwolise 2005, p.214). Boege (2006) describes the indigenous conflict resolution as "restrictive and reconciliation" (p.130). Thus, indigenous approaches to conflict resolution aim at restorative justice, restoration of order, harmony and the maintenance of relationships within the community through reintegrating feuding parties for true reconciliation.

In conflict resolution, there are skills, tools and strategies applied to ease the tension or solve the issue; leaving both parties satisfied. It is a concept of intervention in order to resolve dispute. As both conflicting parties yearn for control of the situation, through conflict resolution, an outside party has the actual ability to control the situation and resolve it. It is worthy to note that, in order to solve a conflict, one must have a calm mind to assess the situation and use neutral methods to solve the problem because using destructive methods can only lead to bigger conflict. The third party that mediates in a conflict is the mediator and he/she must be unbiased and a neutral person. The mediator uses other skills like setting limits, speaking in proverbs, and advice to resolve the conflicts thereby helping both conflicting parties to come to a truce or agreement.

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Proverbs are short metaphorical saying that convey a message or lesson. They are mostly figurative and not literal. They are used to transmit wisdom, advice, warning, entertainment, and mourning. They resolve disputes and much more proverbs are commonly connected to cultural heritage, and vary according to culture and language. They are an important part of a language and should be treasured and preserved. They are a key part of communication and a means of understanding Ogba culture. They are often based on common sense and experience and are used to teach a lesson or provide guidance in life. In terms of entertainment, they are used for humour or satire. Ogba proverbs have a profound impact on people's lives, in both positive and negative ways. On the positive side, proverbs are a source of wisdom, guidance and inspiration. They help people to learn important life lessons and to make better decisions in life. On the negative side, they are used to perpetuate harmful stereotypes or to make sweeping generalisations about groups of people. There are many types of proverbs in Ogba, but some common categories include:

Moral Proverbs: These proverbs often advice or give a lesson about how to live a good life. For example: Agadi adiga la ulo ma ewu amnu nwna la eri – An adult cannot be in the house to watch a she-goat give birth while tittered.
This proverb advises that there are certain things an elder or a grown-up person or the head of a family should not allow to happen in the family in his/her presence.

Riddle Proverbs: These proverbs are posed as a puzzle or riddle, and they are meant to be solved. For example:
Kini la eme gba oso ma ya eme jije ijne, wno onu ma akpari uka, wno isi ma eche uchay, wno akwna ujniyna ma eznu urna? Osa ka bu ozimini – what can run but can never walk, has a mouth but never talks, has a head but never thinks, and has a bed but never sleeps? The answer of course is a river. In this proverb, people are thought to ascribe a strait-jacket meaning to the riddle and this shows the idea of applying intelligence.

Aphoristic Proverbs: These proverbs are short pithy sayings that contain a general truth or observation. For example:
Mberegide la yniri dikne, mberegide ka wo mrari dikne – A stitch in time saves nine.
This proverbs shows that it is better to take care of a problem early, before it gets worse.

Allegorical Proverbs: They tell a story or make a comparison to teach a lesson. For example:
Agadi nwnayna dirna edna la whno la ekwu-ru wo o whnu wo abo ka eyna – it is the old woman who fell on the road in the desert who gave passers-by the opportunity to see the inside of her basket as to know the contents. This proverb teaches a lesson that man is the author of his own misfortune; that man helps to make his own secret open to people; that man is the cause of the insolence that has come to him.

Proverbial Sayings: These are short, memorable sayings that express a moral or practical truth. For example:

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Agadi nwnayna ka nka, ya di ka ego egbu-wo a – when a woman becomes old; it would seem as if she was never once a young bride with value for money.
This proverbial saying upholds the principle of depreciation. Certain things depreciate in value over time; the physical beauty and strength of a human being and some other things. A good number of things depreciate in value over time including our human activities. Therefore, it is used in settling disputes regarding depreciation and loss of value. When this proverb is used adequately, it solves an impending dispute on depreciation. There are Ogba proverbs that resolve disputes on death/murder, lack of respect/honour, time, help/assistance and other issues.

Proverbs in Death/Murder: They speak volumes of the value of life and the inevitability of death. Agadi nwnayna kwuru la kpeni eje akwnani aya ownu, ekwu wo aya wo osi o bia adna gbu a la ime ohia – the old who is very well prepared for death, says that she is not wishing that she should be crushed by a falling tree inside the forest. This is saying that, although death is inevitable, tragic death is forbidden. It is also stating that murder of any kind is highly prohibited in the land.

Proverbs of Respect and Honour: These proverbs extol dignity, respect and honour among humans and condemn all kinds of vices, dishonor and disrespect in the Ogba society. So, disputes that arose out of these are settled using the appropriate proverbs. For example:
Agbogo so la ogo, ya buru ogo la di – a maid who grows up with dignity/respect, gets married with respect and honour.
This proverb explains that anyone with self respect, honour and dignity, also attracts respect, honour and dignity to himself/herself.

Proverbs of Good Behaviours: These proverbs explain good behaviours and dress codes that are expected of persons in accordance with the customs and tradition of the society. For example:
Agboso li ijne, ya ynali nkekire – when snail moves, it always moves with its shell. This proverb means that every person is an ambassador of his/her community and the behaviour/character exhibited explains who the person is and what his/her community is like.

Proverbs of Time and Success: These proverbs explicate the importance of time, success and failure. If one does not succeed at one attempt, there is the likelihood of success in subsequent attempts. For example:
Ahia azu – wo la ogo, oru la ogo o me zu azu – if a trader does not sell enough today, there is yet another market day to sell.
The proverb expatiates that failure in one attempt does not portend failure in future genuine attempts. It calls for courage, determination and concerted effort!

Proverbs of God's Protection and Providence: These proverbs explain the power of God's protection and providence to human beings He has created in His image and likeness. For example:

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Anu ewno wo okpasi, chuku la achu niga a agboji – God drives away flies for any animal that has no tail or that has deformed tail.
The proverb shows that God always finds a way to provide help for anyone who seems to have no helper. God is the helper of the helpless.
Proverbs are found in cultures all over the world and they play an important role in communication, expression and cultural identity. They offer insights into the values and beliefs of a culture, and even influence the way people think and behave. As a form of communication, they are a valuable source of wisdom and guidance.

Ogba proverbs are used in many ways to help resolve conflicts. One of the ways is by providing a common ground for understanding and discussion. Proverbs hack into people's identity, reminding them who they are, where they are from, who they represent, by instilling long years of values and wisdom. They are part of the cultural heritage in Ogba land and are vital tool for conflict resolution. "Proverbs reflect the beliefs, hopes and aspiration of the people; hence, the proverbs of the Ogba people reveal their values, beliefs, hopes and culture" (Ohia 2023, p.56). Applying such proverbs helps the conflicting parties to connect to their roots and values, putting them at ease to think rationally. Ogba proverbs can be applied in different ways to solve conflict; they include combining the language, values and the proverbs with the methods and skills of conflict resolution to resolve the conflicts within Ogba people.

However, there are challenges in using Ogba proverbs to educate the younger generation in present times; proverbs can be difficult at times and pose challenges due to factors like: cultural transformation, applicability, limited exposure, digital and technology gap, western academic dominance and cultural detachment.
The younger generation may not have the same level of command of the Ogba language or understanding of cultural qualities of the proverbs unlike their elders. There is also a loss of cultural identity among the younger generation and future generations. Many young ones are more inclined to engage in digital media and Ogba traditional forms are not made available in those platforms, and this leads to a reduced interest or lack of exposure to traditional forms of communication. This also leads to a loss of cultural connection and their inability to value their cultural heritage and appreciate the importance of proverbs in their lives, and the wisdom and knowledge they can provide.

Another potential solution is to incorporate in a curriculum in a way that is engaging and relevant for younger generations. This could involve using modern forms of media and technology, such as social media and video games, to make the proverbs more accessible and appealing. While the western education system provides important skills and knowledge, it should not come at the expense of a people's own cultural traditions. These challenges dismantled, there are a few ways the social and cultural context of Ogba community affect the use and meaning of proverbs. First, the proverbs often reflect the community's values and beliefs, for instance, the proverbs may emphasise on respect for elders, the value of family and relationships, etc. Second, the proverbs may be used to navigate social hierarchies and relationship, within the community, for instance, proverbs may be used to show or to assert

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one's social status in the community. Tidjani (2012) explores the role of proverbs in traditional African conflict resolution practices, how proverbs are used to communicate ideas, resolve conflicts and maintain social harmony.

Similarly, Mano (2008) argues that proverbs are an important tool for conflict resolution in African communities. His exploration covers different types of proverbs that are used in African cultures and how they are applied in different conflict situations; the role of proverbs in maintaining social order and preventing violence. To Awe (1977) Yoruba people have a long tradition of using proverbs to express ideas and resolve disputes. He provides examples of specific proverbs that are used to resolve conflicts, such as "if you give food to a dog, he will not bite you". It is pertinent to note that a wise person uses proverbs to avoid conflict. The concept of proverbs is often defined as short, pithy sayings that convey a moral, social, or cultural message. In the case of Ogba community, proverbs are used to resolve conflict by providing moral guidance and wisdom. However, the main challenge of using Ogba proverbs to educate the young is that the younger generation may not be familiar with or appreciate the cultural significance of the proverbs. The younger generation is increasingly exposed to other cultures and languages through technology and globalisation; this makes it difficult for them to relate to and understand the meaning of Ogba proverbs. Against all odds, Ogba proverbs perform roles in promoting peace and unity as mentioned; Ogba proverbs often contain moral and social messages that help to promote peace and harmony within the community. For instance, in Ogba, there are proverbs that emphasise the importance of forgiveness, tolerance, and understanding. The proverbs also help to create a shared sense of identity and purpose among members of the community.

5. CONCLUSION

The concept of conflict is complex, but can be broadly defined as a disagreement between two or more parties. Conflict no matter the complex nature is resolved with the use of proverbs in Ogba. Ogba proverbs as they are in other African communities refer to short, wise sayings that contain cultural and social messages. The use of Ogba proverbs in conflict resolution can be challenging due to changing values and interests among the younger generation, but they play important roles in promoting peace and unity. Above all, the use of Ogba proverbs is an important aspect of the culture and has the potential to be a powerful tool for conflict resolution. This process of conflict resolution has been very effective and completely efficacious.

Recommendations

This paper recommends the rendition of proverbs by parents to their children to enable them be abreast with the traditional culture of the community. The children should make themselves available by creating the enabling environment that will necessitate the quick learning of the Ogba proverbs and that will engender wisdom.

This wisdom acquired through the use of proverbs will enhance a harmonious relationship among the people. If these recommendations are followed, conflicts will be aptly resolved in the communities.

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