

Pragmatic Acts and Functions of Proverbs in Igbo Novels on Conflict

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Abstract

*This paper examines how proverbs drafted from body parts and animals are deployed in literary discourse in a war/conflict context to perform specific acts and functions. Drawing insights from Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts, the paper argues that proverbs used in conflict context are ideological and perform specific pragmatic acts and functions. Using purposively sampled proverbs from Tony Ubesie's two novels which focus on the Nigerian-Biafran war of 1967 – 1970: namely, *JuoObinna* and *Isi Akwu Dara N'ala*, the findings show that the proverbs perform five pragmatic functions of advising, warning, inciting, criticizing and harmonizing for peace. While the animal-based proverbs perform directive acts of warning, criticizing and inciting violence, the body parts-related proverbs perform representational acts of advising and harmonizing for peace. All acts perform two-fold functions of escalating and deescalating the tensed conflict situation. The study concludes that proverbs used in conflicts need to be carefully deployed to aid peaceful resolutions of conflict.*

Key words: *Pragmatic acts, conflict and peace-related proverbs, Igbo novels, Nigerian civil war*

Introduction

Every culture and language have their own proverbs which convey moral lessons, customs, beliefs, values, etc. Proverbs are ever-present in all spheres of life, but are more visible in conflict situations where traditional wisdom inherent in them dictate rules and modes by which social conflict can be peacefully resolved (Agbaje 2002; Egenti and Okoye 2016). According to Olatunji (1984: 175), the use of proverb in conflict is prescriptive as proverbs 'outline a rule of conduct. They state what should or should not be done and lay conditions for certain actions and attitudes. They serve as social charters condemning some practices while recommending others'. Inherent in Olatunji's view is the idea that proverbs perform

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sociolinguistic functions including persuasion. Gebregeorgis, (2015: 228) expands it by stating that proverbs are repositories of indigenous knowledge, communal wisdom and moral used as ‘tools to persuade when settling disputes; teach communal morals; expound lessons of good and evil; give guidance on right actions and explain the need for and benefits of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence’. In this way, proverbs persuade conflicting actors to rethink deeply and critically about their views and positions. To Adegoju (2009: 58), proverbs ‘communicate truths that may be abstract and difficult to grasp, as they usually dramatize and configure the bare truths’. Such truths, in the views of Ademowo and Nuhu, (2017), enhance persuasive and pragmatic effect of proverbs such as warning, encouraging and discouraging certain practices.

Fundamentally, ‘different communities have proverbs which help to resolve conflict; equally, they have proverbs which portray prejudices on different sections of a society (Gebregeorgis, 2015: 227). The Igbo society, southeastern Nigeria, for instance, believes that proverbs are palm oil with which words are eaten (Achebe, 1958). Most of their activities revolve around proverbs which are used in transmitting indigenous customs, knowledge, wisdom, moral, etc. Due to their peculiar rich cultural value, Chinua Achebe and other Igbo writers have consistently used Igbo proverbs to enrich their works, especially in the *development of plot and generation of indigenous story lines (Asika and Emeodi, 2012)*. In particular, Tony Ubesie has constantly and stylistically rendered Igbo proverbs in the indigenous language in his works. His experience in the Nigerian civil war where he fought on the Biafran side influences his thematic choices, as he is preoccupied with the conditions of people in war situations. Ubesie uniquely deploys proverbs to portray how conflict plays out in terms of initiation, escalation and resolution in his war novels. This study therefore examines how proverbs drafted from body parts and animals are deployed to perform pragmatic acts and functions in two of Tony Ubesie’s novels on the Nigeria-Biafran war. It specifically looks at how the proverbs perform specific acts and actions geared towards escalating and deescalating a tensed conflict situation

Studies of(Igbo) Proverbs in Nigeria

Proverbs are universal and have been variously defined by different scholar. While there is no one single comprehensive definition of proverb, Mieder’s (1993: 5) definition that ‘proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, memorable

form which is handed down from generation to generation' seems to contain certain characteristics of proverbs. Mieder's definition implies that proverbs are figurative or metaphorical expressions infused with culture specific semantics. In the Igbo socio-cultural setting, proverbs have become a way of life (Egudu, 1972) as they are used often in different contexts to transmit cultural beliefs, philosophies and values (Isidienu, 2014; Anuonye & Eneremadu, 2016). Their wide use have attracted a lot of scholarship which concentrates on the roles of proverbs in preserving the Igbo language as well as in mitigating its endangerment (Obadan, 2015; *Eme, Mbagwu & Mmadike 2016*), for which reason Ogbulogo (2002) advocates the documentation and annotation of the proverb as a cultural heritage.

Linguistic studies on Igbo proverbs have focused on issues bordering on gender, conflict resolution, good governance and applications of linguistic theories to the study of proverbs. For instance, Ezeifeke (2017) investigates the effects of encodings of gender stereotypes on male-female operational spaces in Igbo proverbs. Analyzing different sets of gender-related Igbo proverbs in the domains of lineage/inheritance rights, domestic sphere, marriage, and socio-leadership privileges, the findings show a dominance of positive male stereotypes and negative female stereotypes in the forms of fixity of gender roles, male as norm, perpetuation of the patriarchal order and naturalized subordination of women. The study advocates for revision and recontextualisation of proverbs as well as jettisoning of sexist expressions in proverbs. In his own study, Onyejekwe (2001) examines how women's roles as 'women', 'young woman', 'wife/co-wife', 'partner', etc., are portrayed in Igbo proverbs. Unlike Ezeifeke's (2017) findings, Onyejekwe's study discovers that women are not entirely portrayed negatively in the Igbo proverbs and that the cynical nature of some Igbo proverbs is not restricted to women alone. Focusing on the role of Igbo proverbs in conflict management and resolution, Egenti and Okoye (2016) analyse the impacts of proverbs in promoting peaceful co-existence in human interpersonal relationships using Searle's speech acts theory. The finding shows that only the representatives (assertives), expressives and directives are used in reconciliations during conflict and not the commissives and declaratives. The results of this study imply that proverbs are neither used by speakers to commit themselves to future actions such as promises or pledges nor used to change the state of affairs in the world, such as 'you are fired, sentenced or jailed'. In the same vein, Ik-Iloanusi (2014) undertakes a pragmatic analysis of Igbo

proverbs to show how they could be harnessed for good governance. The study argues that Igbo proverbs harbour implicit meaning that could be utilized in managing and resolving crises, and encouraging economic and political growth. All these studies emphasise the central role of the socio-cultural context in the interpretation of Igbo proverbs.

Despite the contributions of Tony Ubesie in the growth and development of Igbo language in general and Igbo literature in particular (Emenyonu, 2001; Onyekaonwu, 2001), studies on his novels have been limited to literary-stylistic inquiries (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1997; Nnyigide & Okoye, 2016). Nwachukwu-Agbada (1997) examines how Tony Ubesie made use of tradition and innovation in writing his Igbo Novels. The study explains that Ubesie applies insights from Igbo literary tradition, cultural beliefs, history, folktales and peculiar animal characterization and the Holy Bible to contemporary issues of immediate significance and relevance to the Igbo people. Nnyigide and Okoye (2016) discuss major themes and dominant artistic features in Ubesie's Igbo literary works with the aim of determining their moralistic and didactic nature. Using reader-response literary approach, the study reveals that Ubesie mirrors and satirizes societal ills as well as presents moral lessons in his works. The two studies show how Tony Ubesie weaves different aspects of Igbo socio-cultural life in his artistic work. However, proverbs which are prominently used by Ubesie to develop his plots from crisis to resolution are not paid adequate attention. This study therefore examines how proverbs drafted from body parts and animals are deployed in his literary discourse on a war/conflict context to perform specific acts and functions. This paper argues that the proverbs used by Ubesie in his war/conflict works are ideological and perform specific pragmatic acts and functions.

Theoretical Framework: Insights from Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts

Proverbs are best explicated within their socio-cultural contexts. According to Odebunmi (2008:75), "given that proverbs are strictly context-text, it is essential to explore them in terms of how their meanings emerge in situations of use". In this wise, pragmatic act is a context-based theory that caters for meaning in situations of use. According to Mey (2001), no conversation, including text, can be properly understood unless it is situated within the environment in which it is meant to be understood. The theory of Pragmatic Acts by Jacob Mey came up to cater for the lapses of the speech act theory, which has been criticized by scholars as being 'atomistic' and as

'thought wholly emanating from the individual' (Fairclough 1989: 9). To Mey (2001: 214), speech act lacks 'a theory of action'. Pragmatic acts, therefore, unlike speech acts, cater for not just utterances but 'action' and the situation that influence these utterances. This theory deals with how people use language within their individual limitations, situations and the 'affordances' of the immediate context. The basic assumption of the theory is that all linguistic expressions including proverbs are not just mere language expressions but are instances of linguistic use which perform pragmatic acts and functions in contexts. Contexts of use of proverbs are very important as meaning springs from them. According to Mey (2001: 221), "the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances, such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation, as well as what is actually being said". In his pragmatic act theory, Mey (2001) classifies the pragmatic acts (also known as *pragmeme*) into two major parts: the activity part and the textual part. While the activity part is used by the interactants, the textual part refers to the context of use within which the *pragmeme* operates. In order to communicate effectively within a particular context, interactants utilize the speech act types such as indirect speech acts, conversational ('dialogue') acts, etc. under the activity part. The various acts are engaged in contexts in the textual parts such as inference, relevance, metaphor, and shared situation knowledge. The interaction between activity part and textual part gives rise to the pragmatic acts such as informing, advising/counselling, invoking, assuring, warning/cautioning, rebuking, persuading, praising, pleading, threatening and accusing. Proverbs use especially in conflict situations perform some of these acts. In this paper, their analyses are first situated within the Igbo traditional and communal context of the selected texts and are discussed thematically in line with contextual features such as shared-situational knowledge, socio-cultural knowledge, inference and reference.

Methodology

This research adopts a textual analytical method and the data are sourced from two selected Tony Ubesie's Igbo language novels which centre on the Nigeria-Biafra war, namely *JuoObinna* and *Isi Akwu Dara N'Ala*. It uses qualitative design in interpreting selected proverbs in line with the socio-cultural background and worldview of the Igbo. A total of ninety-five (95) proverbs comprising forty-two (42) in *JuoObinna* and fifty-three (53) in *Isi Akwu Dara N'Ala* are found in the texts. Using a purposive sampling based on the use of body parts

and animal symbols in the proverbs, a total of forty nine, nineteen in *JuoObinna* (JO) and thirty in *Isi Akwu Dara N'ala* (IADA), are selected for the analysis. The proverbs which are labelled JO1 – JO30 (*JuoObinna* 1 – *JuoObinna* 19) and IADA1 – IADA30 (*Isi AkwuDalaN'ala* 1 - *Isi AkwuDalaN'ala* 30) are analysed qualitatively using Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory to determine the kinds of pragmatic acts and functions that are performed. First, the proverbs are categorized according to the acts that they perform and later they are analysed in line with their context of use. The summary of the texts under study is provided below.

JuoObinna is a civil war comedy about a young man named Obinna who tries everything within his power to escape being conscripted into the Biafran army during the Nigeria-Biafra war. He goes to the extent of engaging the services of a magician to prepare invincibility charms for him but this does not work as he is later captured and conscripted into the army. The novel also x-rays all of Obinna's survival and escapist activities during the war. The title of the novel *JuoObinna* (literally translated as 'Ask Obinna') is derived from the comic scene where the magician who prepares the invincibility talisman for Obinna is also caught and conscripted into the army. In a bid to portray and ridicule Obinna as a coward, the magician draws an analogy from a story about two young men, Obinna and Obinwanne who are engaged to fight in a battlefield. Based on their activities, he describes Obinna as a coward and Obinwanne as a brave person. After narrating the story, his audience wants to know who Obinwanne, the fearless is and he replies "*JuoObinna*"; which means "Ask Obinna"

On the other hand, *Isi Akwu Dara N'ala* is a civil war romance novel based on a lived experience of a typical family in the Nigeria-Biafra war. The story focuses on an unfaithful woman named Ada who abandons his once-rich Igbo husband, Chike, and mingles with the military men. It goes on to chronicle all the insults that Chike receives from his wife due to the circumstances of the civil war. Chike is impoverished during the war because he is no longer going out for his business to avoid being conscripted into the army while his wife enjoys the freedom to trade. This actually lures her into flirting with the soldiers for more economic power and consequently leads her to abandon her husband and family. At the end of the war, Ada gets back to her senses and asks Chike for forgiveness. Chike rejects her pleas and categorically tells her that "*Isi*

akwudaran'alaedetulaaja", which is literally translated as "the head of the palm fruit that has fallen to the ground has picked some sand."

Categorization of the Pragmatic Acts Performed by the Proverbs

Pragmatic Acts of Advising

In the novels, proverbs from animals and body parts sources are deployed to advise in the war context. For instance:

JO3

Proverb: Ewuojidimkpaijidemgbe chi ejibeghi
(*JuoObinna*, Chapter 2; Page 27)

Literal Meaning: It is important to catch the black goat while it is not yet dark

The proverb is used by Captain Emeka to advise his fellow Captain on the urgency of the need for this other captain to secure a job for his (Captain Emeka's) friend, as that alone would prevent an unfortunate situation. The Captain refuses to assist Obinna, Captain Emeka's friend in securing a job at the barracks. For this unwillingness to assist, Captain Emeka threatens to conscript the Captain's relatives in the army as well as send them to the war front if eventually Obinna does not get a job. Captain Emeka, therefore, uses this proverb to urge the captain to act fast before his threat becomes a reality. Through the symbolism of "ewuoji" (black goat) and "chi ejibeghi" (not yet dark), the Captain is advised to go the extra mile in assisting Obinna before he and his relatives are affected later. The relationship between "a black goat" and "day time" depicts the inherent dangers that will befall the Captain if he fails to 'tame' the black goat when his chances are still bright. This proverb stems from the Igbo worldview of Emengwangwaemegharaodachi (To act timely is to escape a likely hindrance) which is an equivalence of the English proverb 'A stitch in time saves nine'. In the Igbo context, this proverb always serves as an advice for people to act timely on issues so as to forestall any possible unwanted outcome.

Also, Obinna uses JO8 to counsel self to accept his fate and predicament in the army barracks after his several attempts to avoid enlistment.

JO8

Proverb: ...n'ihinaonweghiheanyahurupummiri o ga-agba, gbawaqbara. (*JuoObinna*, Chapter 7; Page 58)

Literal Meaning:...because there is nothing that the eyes will see that will make them shed blood instead of water (tears)

After Obinna is captured and recruited in the Biafran army, his new recruit group is scheduled for a military training in the camp. On the day of training, he jettisons his earlier plan to escape since his chances of escape are slim. Using this proverb, he counsels and consoles himself that no matter the situation he has to accept and cope with the reality of his new life in the barracks. The symbol of 'the eyes shedding water (tears) instead of blood' underscores the main points of the advice and consolation that he could manage the everyday 'ordeal' of soldiers. Eyes shedding tears (water) portrays 'normal army life and hard trainings' and not extreme difficult practices as seen in 'shedding blood'. The proverb is based on the Igbo ideology of perseverance in difficult times. It therefore serves as advice and consolation to Obinna that he will surmount his present hurdle as other new recruits do.

In the same vein, proverbs are also drafted from both animal and body parts to advise Chiketo forget the move to reconcile with his defiant wife in Isi Akwu Dara N'Ala. For instance:

IADA17

Proverb: ... kamausuga-atagbuonyejidereyasihapuyaka o fepu. (Isi Akwu Dara N'Ala, Chapter 15; Page 150)

Literal Meaning: ...instead of the bat to bite and kill its captor, it is better to leave it to fly away

Chike's mother uses this proverb to advise him on his relationship with his wife. During the war, Ada abandons Chike, her husband, and flirts with the Nigerian soldiers. Chike tries to woo her to quit her adulterous behavior but she continues in her illegal dealings with the soldiers who assist her in trading. The proverb constructs Ada as a prisoner in Chike's house since Chike pries into her affairs with the soldiers. Thus, through this proverb, Chike's mother advises him that instead of dying in an effort to mend his relationship with Ada, that it is better to allow Ada to enjoy her freedom. The image of 'the bat biting its captor to death' describes the ugly situation that Chike is at the time. Ada's immoral life has turned her into a deadly being (considering the fact that she deals with armed soldiers) and for Chike to continue laying claims to his wayward wife makes him vulnerable to the soldier who could forcefully enlist him into the

army to fight at the war front thereby giving them full access to his wife. Also, the symbol of the captured bat, an aggressive bird, portrays Ada, Chike's wife, as a potentially dangerous being who is difficult to be tamed. Through this proverb, Chike is thus, advised to let go of his wife (bat) and be alive. This would lessen the complications of the already created crisis in the conflict situation.

Similarly, Chike uses IADA 18 drafted from animal source to advise his wife to be submissive and accord him some respect.

IADA18

Proverb: ... nwaehibuoelubuo ala, o ga-
egbudoikperen'alanuonneyaara (Isi AkwuDalaN'Ala,
Chapter 15; Page 150)

Literal Meaning: No matter how big the calf grows, it
will still kneel to be breastfed by its mother

Before the war, Chike is rich and caters for his wife and family but the restrictions placed on men during the war affects him negatively. He has to depend on his wife who trades on contraband goods for subsistence and survival. Ada becomes so rich that she starts disrespecting Chike. She goes out at will and engages in illicit affairs with the soldiers who provide protection for her during her trading. Tired of this state of affairs, Chike uses the proverb to advise the wife to remember the past when he was the breadwinner. He uses an analogy of a grown calf kneeling before its mother to be breastfed to advise Ada that no matter how rich she is at the present time, she still needs to be humble and submissive to her husband. She is thus advised to change her life style and give her husband his respect as the head of the family. This proverb is based on Igbo worldview of respect. Every young person, no matter how rich, is expected to accord respect to the elderly. Respect is supposed to be accorded by age and not by material possessions. This extends to the wife who is expected to accord respect to the husband as the head of the family.

IADA 4 is advice on the need for contentment.

IADA4

Proverbs: Anwurunchidindun'akachuwamgbada, nke e
jin'akagaagbanahu (Isi AkwuDalaN'Ala, Chapter 2; Page
26)

Literal Meaning: When a living rabbit is held in the
hand and an antelope is pursued, the one in the hand
will escape

During the military raid in Enugu, eastern Nigeria, Chukwuma, one of Chike's children, gets missing in the midst of the chaotic crowd. At first, several shell bombs are heard and people think it is the Biafran army testing their armories but at a point, it becomes obvious that it is the Nigerian army invading Enugu. People start running helter-skelter and many children and property are lost. Chike goes to look for Chukwuma leaving behind his wife and daughter. Having waited for some time for Chike to come back, his wife and daughter also leave to look for him. All the family members are scattered and lose sight of one another. The proverb above is used by Chike's friend to advise him to secure first what he has left (that is, his wife and daughter) before going to look for his son (Chukwuma). This is because there is the possibility of Chikelo sing all in the process. Thus, through the symbol of a rabbit (nchi) and antelope (mgbada), the inherent advice in the proverb is similar to the English version that 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush'. Thus, Chike is advised to secure what he already has before going for something new, lest he loses all.

Pragmatic Acts of Warning

Proverbs in war context are also used for warning. In this instance, they are used to caution of impending danger. For instance:

IADA14

Proverb: A kaarantị ma ọ nughị, e bereisintịesoweya (Isi AkwuDara N'Ala, Chapter 15; Page 148)

Literal Meaning: If the ear is counseled and it does not listen, when the head is cut off, the ear follows it

Ada continues to flirt with the soldiers despite his husband's pleas and advice. With the backing of the soldiers, she also trades in contraband goods. Chike, her husband, uses IADA 14 to threaten as well as warn her of the impending danger of her illicit affairs and dealings. The consequences include death if her deals are exposed. The symbols of the body parts ('ear' and 'head') bring to the fore likely outcome of her behaviour. First, the ear which is attached to the head is a subordinate that is expected to behave differently from the head. The ear as an organ of hearing, therefore, has to heed to advice otherwise it would be doomed when the head ceases to exist. This is exactly what happens when the war ends and Chike bounces back to his business. Ada whose romance with the soldiers is unavoidably over wishes to come back to the husband but is rejected by him.

Proverbs from body parts symbols are also utilized in proverbs to threaten, as can be seen in JO 2.

JO2

Proverb: Ejighiihe e jiagbananti, agban'anya.
(JuoObinna, Chapter 2; Page 26)

Literal Meaning: One does not use what is used for clearing the ears to clear the eyes

Obinna has been looking for means to avoid enlistment in the army during the war. His friend, Captain Emeka tries to secure a job that will make him not to get recruited in the military. After Captain Emeka approaches another Captain who refuses to offer Obinna a menial job at the barracks. Captain Emeka uses Proverb JO 2 to warn and threaten the other captain that he will also expose his relatives by enlisting them in the army and taking them to the battlefield. The proverb also serves as a caution as well as a threat weapon. By deploying the images of the ear and eye, a comparison is made as well as a contrast drawn between two sensitive body parts. The threat is embedded in the fact that the eyes is a more sensitive organ that could be rendered ineffective (blinded) by sharp objects. Thus, it should be treated with care and not in the same way with the ears, otherwise it would be blinded. That is, the Captain is threatened to thread softly else he would lose his close relative if they are taken to the war front as a result of his reluctance to offer Obinna a job.

More important, among the Igbo, this proverb, just as it occurs here, is mostly used in combat/conflict prone environments. It is usually used to caution an opponent against the likelihood of a violent reaction/response to their action; reaction/response which may have a possible painful outcome for the opponent. The image of an uncomfortable situation and/or excruciating pain resulting from using the supposed hard object meant for clearing the ear to attempt clearing the eye is created to make the message clear to the opponent in a conflict. The unheeding opponent may soon have the uncomfortable and painful experience that may follow the attempt to use what is used to clear the ear to clear the eye. The proverb is well deployed by Captain Emeka to warn the other captain of the likely outcome of his refusal to assist in securing a job for Obinna at the barracks.

Implicit threat and warning are also embedded in JO6.

JO6

Proverb: Onyetaiaiheebulejina·azanwokejiibiugwo
(JuoObinna, Chapter 7; Page 53)

Literal Meaning: One who eats the male sheep's genitals
owes a debt of swelling of the scrotum

In the military camp, Obinna is being given a VIP treatment at the initial stage. He is taken good care of as good food, new Khaki uniform, etc., are provided for him. He thinks that he would be in-charge of the security details of the Captain or have other higher responsibilities. He never thinks that he could go to training in preparation for war. Thus, this proverb is used by another recruit to warn and awaken his consciousness to the after-effects of joining the army and having the goodies he is enjoying at inception. "Eating a male's genitals" entails having additional genital or added responsibility and thus, the person owes a debt which "swelling of the scrotum" is part of. That is, the symbol of eating the genitals of male's sheep amounts to having a very large scrotum which is an abnormal expansion of the scrotum. Through this proverb, Obinna is warned that having joined the army and being given 'free' food entails owing a debt which he would pay by fighting in wars.

Also, in *Isi AkwuDalaN'Ala*, Chike is warned by his mother that his continual visits to his wife could have some grave consequences.

IADA10

Proverb: Okenyereinyootule, o ga-ahuririihena-
adin'otule (*Isi AkwuDalaN'Ala*, Chapter 12; Page 111)

Literal Meaning: An elder who goes in secret peeping of
the woman's private parts will surely see what is
inside the woman's private parts.

Chike's mother has advised him several times to forget his wife and face his life and children. He does not heed to the advice but continues to beg his wife to return to him and leave the soldiers. His mother uses this proverb to warn him of the possible consequence of his adamant actions. That is, the proverb is Chike's mother's reaction to his son's decision to visit his wife after the misfortune the wife suffers towards the end of the war. Ultimately, Chike ignores his mother's advice and visits to commiserate with Ada, his wife. Ada who is in a bad mood vehemently insults him. Thus, just like the proposition of the proverb, Chike receives his deserved treatment. That is, through the symbolism of 'going in secret peeping of the

woman's private parts', one must suffer the consequences. Seeing what is inside the woman's private parts symbolizes the likely unpleasant outcome of a foolhardy action. The proverb as used by Chike's mother is prophetic. Chike meets this unpleasant fate for defying his mother's warning and going to visit his ex-wife.

Pragmatic Acts of Harmonizing for Peace

Aside advising and warning, proverbs are also used to harmonise for peace in war situation. For instance:

IADA13

Proverb:....*osochuwaokukochiumu,* o
naghiagbaosoeleghianyan'azu (Isi Akwu Dara N'Ala,
 Chapter 15; Page 147)

Literal Meaning: ... if the mother hen is pursued, it
 doesnot run without looking at the back

This proverb is used when the Nigerian soldiers invade Enugu (Southeastern Nigeria) and many families lose their loved ones as a result of the stampede. The proverb which is the inner thoughts of Chike as he looks for his son conveys the popular Igbo ideology of collectivity (*Onyeaghananwanneya* – let nobody leave their brother/sister behind) and harmony. Hence, through the imagery of the 'mother hen running and looking at the back' when it is being pursued, Chike presents the need to look out for others (even the bereaved) during wars. It also extends to the opinion of keeping ones family members in view during conflicts. He thus needs to bring all the members together and not to seek for safety alone. His family members include his son who is missing and his wife who always abandons him for her army lovers. The proverb, therefore, advocates collectivity, togetherness and peace.

Teamwork is also an aspect of harmonising for peace as presented in IADA 9.

IADA 9

Proverb: *Aka weta, aka weta o juuonu* (Isi Akwu Dara N'Ala, Chapter 8; Page 69)

Literal Meaning: If this hand brings and the other hand
 brings, the mouth is filled

This proverb is used as the conflict story progresses to where Enugu is invaded by the Nigerian army. As a result of the invasion, Chike

and Ada relocate to Awka and try on different businesses so as to have an additional source of livelihood. Before the war, Ada is just a housewife but later she starts trading. Chike uses the proverb to present to Ada the need for the two of them to contribute collectively for a better living condition for the family. Chike and Ada are symbolically represented as two hands who feed the 'mouth' together. Though they are attached independently, both are expected to contribute their quotas towards their family's success. By the proverb, Ada is reminded to assist her husband from her earnings for sustenance, unity and peace in their family.

The same viewpoint is expressed in IADA 19:

IADA19

Proverb: Akanrikwọo aka ekpe, aka ekpeakwọ aka nri(Isi Akwu Dara N'Ala, Chapter 15; Page 150)

Literal Meaning: The right hand washes the left hand and the left hand washes the right hand.

The proverb also portrays harmony and peace. Chike uses it to remind Ada of the time he was the breadwinner before the war and how he provided for the entire family single-handedly. He also expects such provision from Ada now that she is the one trading. In the proverb, Chike is represented as the 'right hand' that has taken care of Ada (that is, washes the left hand). Ada, on the other hand, is the 'left hand' that is expected to take care of the right hand. Just like IADA 9, this proverb portrays the need for unity to achieve a common goal.

In JuoObinna, the need for peace and harmony is presented in JO 12:

JO 12

Proverb:okeanwalaanwajeweitakaakpadibja ma dibjaejelaikpaokeeze (JuoObinna, Chapter 10; Page 112)

Literal Meaning: ... a rat should never chew the bag of a talisman while the talisman should never try to pull out the teeth of the rat

This proverb is used to advocate for peace. Conflict ensues either when one of the parties disrupts the peace of the other or does not keep to agreement. Thus, if both parties do not interfere in the activities of the other, there will be peace. Obinna uses this proverb to tell the medicine man to keep to his own side of the bargain in order to prevent dispute between them. Obinna consults the Dibja

(medicine man) for charm to blind the soldiers from enlisting him in the army even as he walks around. The charm does not work as Obinna is later caught by the soldiers. When eventually Obinna escapes from the barracks, he goes to the Dibia and insults him. He then uses this proverb to present the view that peace ensues when both parties keep to the terms of the agreement. That is, if the rat does not chew the talisman's bag or the talisman does not pull out the rat's teeth, then there will be peace and harmony. He is disappointed that after paying the medicine man, the charms are ineffective.

Pragmatic Acts of Criticizing

Proverbs are deployed to criticize people and their situations. For instance:

IADA 3

Proverb: Ọ buonye chi ojọkammirifadoron'eze. (Isi AkwuDalaN'Ala, Chapter 1; Page 3)

Literal Meaning: It is an ill-luck person that water got stuck on his/her teeth

At the beginning of the story, Ada finds it difficult to get married when her age-mates and colleagues are getting married. The situation is a kind of insights into the bad character of Ada that dispels a would-be husband. The proverb is used to criticize her bad luck and fate of not having a suitor earlier at her 'ripe' age of marriage despite her supposedly 'good' behaviour. Her colleagues whose behaviours are portrayed worse than hers are married. Through this proverb, Ada whose ill-fate is later revealed at the end of the story (she is rejected by her husband after the war) is criticized. Her situation is captured as unfortunate, that is, "water stuck in the gaps of teeth". This kind of scenario seems rare as water will always penetrate through little gaps in the teeth. Thus, Ada's situation is criticized as abnormal and pitiable.

In the same view, IADA 28 vividly criticizes Ada's behaviour

IADA 28

Proverb: anụọhianiilena-egbuopi ma nkenkakwuna-adjiche. (Isi AkwuDalaN'Ala, Chapter 16; Page 161)

Literal Meaning: ... all the wild animals play the flute but that of the Shrew is unique

Ada's behaviour and infidelity is detestable to many people. There are instances that military men caress her in the presence of her husband. It goes to the extent that her disoriented husband, Chike, summons courage and scolds her before the soldiers. The soldiers who understand the situation are reluctant to intervene. The proverb acknowledges that in extreme difficult war situations that some married and unmarried ladies or women do flirt with military men to make ends meet but when such flirting becomes rampant, it is condemnable. Through the proverb, Ada's unfaithfulness to her husband is differentiated from that of other women's. Her flirting and infidelity are in the extreme and beyond cautioning. Having fearfully endured such acts for a long time, Chike decides to criticize her actions using the proverb. Through the symbol of all animals playing the flute and that of shrew being unique, Ada is criticized for going to the extreme in immorality.

In *JuoObinna*, proverb is also used to criticize Obinna's actions.

JO 14

Proverb:

Ngwereniilemakpuamakpuekweghisimarankeafona-aru
(*JuoObinna*, Chapter 14; Page 137)

Literal Meaning: All the lizards lie prostrate; therefore, it is difficult to know which of them is suffering from stomach upset

Just as in *IADA* 28, Obinna is criticized for not showing similar gallant nature as his age-mates. He has been avoiding enlistment in the Biafran army during the Nigeria-Biafra war. He even goes to the extent of disguising as a lady to escape arrest. After his capture and failed attempt to escape from the army camp, his friend who wants to escape with him uses this proverb to criticize his nervous tension. The criticism is that it is nervousness that betrays his escape as many others in the camp who want to run away are maintaining calmness. Ngwere (lizards) represents all the new recruits in the camp. That all of them lie prostrate without making it obvious the one that has stomach upset entails that they are pretending to be comfortable or relaxed in the camp. This means that they do not make their desire to escape open except Obinna whose actions reveal his.

There is also criticism in *IADA* 5:

IADA 5

Proverb: ahughinke e riri ma yafodunke a ga-
enyenkita (Isi AkwuDalaN'Ala, Chapter 5; Page 52)

Literal Meaning: ...one does not see enough food to eat,
let alone the one to give to the dog

This proverb is used by Ada to criticize his husband, Chike, who comes to beg for food and money during the war. She indirectly describes her once-rich husband as a dog waiting to be fed instead of hustling for food. And as such there is no food to be wasted on him. Chike could not provide for his family during the war as a result of restriction on males. His wife becomes the breadwinner and later rents her own separate apartment. Thus, when her husband decides to go and beg her for food, she insults her by criticizing his actions of turning himself into a beggar. Through the proverb, Chike's action is criticized and he is reminded that during war, food becomes scarce and that men should work harder to make ends meet instead of begging. By indirectly referring to him as a dog, Ada has insulted and reduced Chike's worth and also insisted that food cannot be wasted on him.

Pragmatic Acts of Inciting

Some proverbs are used to incite conflict instead of peace. For instance:

JO 10

Proverb: Ururusikamaisiyaga-akwun'iteofe,
yakwaan'osisi (JuoObinna, Chapter 8; Page 83)

Literal Meaning: The ground squirrel said instead of its
head to be trapped in the pot of soup, let it be held in the
tree

This proverb is used when the dibia (traditional medicine man) prepares invisibility charms for Obinna to escape being captured and forcefully enlisted in the army. During the incantation at their hiding location, the dibia requests a hen for sacrifice from Obinna. Going in search of a hen is very risky as it could expose Obinna to the soldiers. At first Obinna refuses and quarrels with the dibia but later he accepts to take the risk so as to safeguard his life and future. Through this proverb, Obinna is incited to take the risk of going to look for a fowl for the charm so as to escape being enlisted in the army than for him not to have charm and therefore stand the risk of being captured and enlisted in the army. That is, just as the

ground squirrel will prefer to remain on the tree and escape being killed by man for food, Obinna will prefer getting the charms to stay away from the army. The proverb therefore incites and spurs him to take a dangerous action to liberate himself from hiding.

IADA 6 incites violence

IADA 6

Proverb: A na-
ekwunaoketagburunwammadungwereachiri ego
yajeweipieze (Isi AkwuDalaN'Ala, Chapter 7; Page 57)

Literal Meaning: The matter of the rat biting a human being to death is still being deliberated and the lizard is gathering its money to go and sharpen its own teeth.

During the war, there is scarcity of money in circulation as the government does not release enough money to the banks. So, when the news comes that the government has released some money, Chikegoes to the bank in another town to withdraw some money. While standing on the long queue, a thief steals his only money in his pocket. The proverb depicts that while the government (in this case, the rat) through its monetary policy is strangulating people to death, the thief (the lizard) still adds to the ugly situation. This is captured by the lizard taking money to sharpen its teeth in readiness for another 'biting' attack. The proverb incites Chike to take a drastic action to recover his money in the extreme depressed situation.

JO 1

Proverb: Nsi nkitaririejeereweezeewu (JuoObinna, Chapter 1; Page 2)

Literal Meaning: The faeces that the dog ate has caused the decay of the goat's teeth.

This is uttered to portray Obinna's attitude in transferring his deviant character to other innocent people. Obinna is very crafty and wants to do everything within his powers to survive the war including not partaking in the military defence as other youth. Anytime he commits a crime, he cunningly and smartly devices means to transfer the act and blame to another person. Thus, the proverb portrays that Obinna's wrong doings (faeces) have led to others (goat) being caught and blamed. That is, the dog committed a crime but it is affecting the goat. This incites violence as there is a transference of wrong actions.

IADA 10

Proverb:abụzụsịmụya, ha huiheanya ha na-ekwesghiihụ ha were ụkwụ ha gbapụọnwēha afo, lōtawa (Isi AkwuDalaN’Ala, Chapter 9; Page 82)

Literal Meaning: the cricket told its children that when their eyes sees what it should not see that they should use their legs to open their stomach and die

This proverb is used in the context when Ada takes a man to her matrimonial bed and Chike receives the shock of his life. Chike feels that instead of facing the ugly situation that it is better for him to be dead. The situation is that the act is despicable and Chike thinks that it is better to be dead than to be alive to witness the immoral act. Taking his life in this situation is the extreme of violence and this proverb incites and advocates a kind of self-violence to putting an end to the horrifying act. That is, to use its sharp thorny leg to open up its stomach. The proverb is inciting as Chike is pressured to commit suicide, which is the worst of all the decisions in the ugly situation.

IADA 7

Proverb: ...dibiaechena ọ
bịaraigwoyaanyaodoekponyelayaosen’anya (Isi AkwuDalaN’Ala, Chapter 7; Page 58)

Literal Meaning: The traditional medicine man that was thought to have come to cure his bad vision has rather poured pepper into his eyes.

This context is similar to IADA 6 “A na-ekwunaoketagburunwammadungwereachiri ego yajeweipieze.” Chike hopes seriously that the bank will solve his shortage of money problem but going to the bank has worsened his situation. He had a lot of money before the war and thus hopes to withdraw enough money from his account to solve his problems. But due to the restrictions and limit placed on withdrawal by the bank during the conflict he is not able to get enough money. Hence, his crises which he thinks will be resolved are escalated. The symbolism of the dibia (the medicine man) adding pepper to the eyes which he is expected to cure shows that instead of healing, the medicine man has escalated bad sight. This is inciting as the situation is worsened instead of being resolved.

Conclusion

This paper has examined Igbo proverbs used in two popular novels that centred on the Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967 – 1970. It is worth noting here that the word ‘popular’ as used here is in the restricted sense of a work that many people within the study area are familiar with. The study has used Mey’s Pragmatic Act theory to examine how proverbs drafted from body parts and animals are deployed in a war context to perform specific acts in an implicit manner. The findings show that the proverbs perform mainly five pragmatic functions of advising, warning, inciting, criticizing and harmonizing for peace. Specifically, the animal-based proverbs perform mainly directive pragmatic acts geared towards warning, criticizing and inciting violence while the body parts-related proverbs perform representational acts and have pragmatic functions such as advising and harmonizing for peace. All these acts perform two-fold functions of escalating violence and deescalating atensed conflict situation. The study concludes that proverb use in conflict contexts needs to be carefully deployed in order to achieve peaceful resolutions of conflict.

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