

## Semantic Implication of Imagery in Igbo Proverbs

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates the role and functions of imagery in the proverbs of the Igbo. The Place of imagery in Igbo proverbs was examined in the light of the Theory-based views of concepts which claim that they are identified or intimately associated with miniature theories of how things in their target domain tend to function. The study reveals that it is not many readers that have the ability to read, flow with and have clear ability to digest, store, remember and retell stories, if these stories are not embellished with whatever has the ability to improve their reader experience. The study also reveals that in order to continue to keep our cultural practices alive, our people must continue to make use of imageries in our proverbs and in all forms of communication, oral and written. The study recommends that a further research could still be done to find out more of what can be done to make sure that our children learn and understand the place of igbo proverbs and how to continue to apply imagery so that we will not lose this aspect of our culture.*

**Keywords:** *digest, functions, imagery, proverbs, Igbo*

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### 1.1 Background to the Study

Describing sensory experiences through the medium of writing and text can be difficult. By enlisting the use of imagery, writers are able to vividly describe experiences, actions, characters, and places through written language. Although there are several types of imagery, they all generally serve a similar function. Imagery in proverbs are one of the means through which the Igbo society impart morals, wisdom, ethics, knowledge and ideologies to the members of the Igbo society. Through imageries, the society is also mirrored.

The use of imagery in Igbo proverbs is a way of cultural enrichment in Igbo conversation being studded with these nuggets of wisdom, hence, this work delves into this area of study, to contribute towards its further enhancement and encourage its usage. Imagery is a literary device used in poetry, novels, and other writings that use vivid description that appeals to readers' senses to create an image or idea in their head. Through language, imagery does not only paint a picture, but aims to portray the sensational and emotional experience within text.

Imagery is visual symbolism, or use of figurative language to represent objects, actions and ideas in such a way that it appeals to our physical senses. It evokes a mental image or other kinds of sense impressions, especially in a literary work, but also in other activities such as psychotherapy. Imagery in literature can also be instrumental in conveying tone.

Imagery is simply the use of vivid descriptions in order to explain a situation to a reader or listener. It is a way of building a picture or “image” in the mind so that the audience can gain a greater understanding of the situation which is being talked about. Imagery includes figurative and metaphorical language to improve the reader’s experience through their senses.

It refers to language that stimulates the reader's senses. By evoking those senses through touch, taste, sound, smell, and sight, the writer imparts a deeper understanding of the human experience, connecting with the reader through a shared sensory experience.

It is a literary device that uses all five senses to describe what is happening in a story. It is descriptive language that appeals to the five senses, movement, the emotions and feelings. It is the essence of literature, an art of illuminating “the dull and dry writings”, like a full moon. Imagery can improve a reader’s experience of the text by immersing them more deeply by appealing to their senses. Imagery can be created using other literary devices like similes, metaphors or onomatopoeia. (<https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/what-is-imagery-definition-examples/>)

### **What is Imagery used for?**

Imagery is used by a writer as both a literary device and figurative or descriptive language to appeal to:

- i. The reader’s senses
- ii. Help the reader create a picture in their mind
- iii. Add depth to their work
- iv. Help the reader feel present in the movement
- v. Communicate the world or setting of the text to the reader
- vi. it is a great way for a speaker to express in a more colourful way what he is trying to communicate.
- vii. Creating empathy for a character’s experience
- viii. Immersing a character into a situation.

### **Types of imagery**

1. Auditory – Describes what we hear: Music, Noise, Silence
2. Tactile – Describes what we touch or feel - Texture, movement, temperature
3. Olfactory - Describes what we smell – Nice fragrances, bad odours
4. Visual – Describes what we see - Colours, patterns, shapes, size. Example: The night was black as ever, but bright stars lit up the sky in beautiful and varied constellations which were sprinkled across the astronomical landscape
5. Gustatory - Describes what we taste – Sour, sweet, bitter, acidic, salty. ([https://literarydevices.net/imagery/#google\\_vignette](https://literarydevices.net/imagery/#google_vignette))

Here is an example of how adding imagery enhances your writing.

- Original sentence: She drank water on a hot day.
- Added imagery: The cool, refreshing water quenched her thirst as the scorching sun radiated on her.

### **What are proverbs?**

Proverbs (Ilu - in Igbo): Proverbs may be defined as short, apt and pithy saying which have a deeper meaning than is obvious at the surface level. Proverbs are generally used by elders. A proverb is a short sentence that people often quote, which gives advice or tells you something about life. For example, 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.' An old proverb says, 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend'. A proverb is a simple, traditional saying that expresses a perceived truth based on common sense or experience. Proverbs are often metaphorical and use formulaic language. A proverbial phrase or a proverbial expression is a type of a conventional saying similar to proverbs and transmitted by oral tradition. The classifications of proverbs are sorted according to figuration of their use. It has about five different distinguished figurative terms: Synecdoche, metaphor, metonymy, hyperbola and paradox. It should be noted that, according to Norrick(1985), meaningful proverbs also have their own figurative meanings. **Proverbs are complex experiences summarised in a few words to capture their essential meaning. Proverbs are also words of wisdom of a people.**

Why do we use proverbs?

Speakers can use proverbs to impart knowledge, offer advice, teach or reinforce morals, make an argument, relieve interpersonal tensions, aid in understanding, or to console or inspire others

[. \(https://www.google.com/search?q=Norrick+on+proverbs&oq=Norrick+on+proverbs&aqs=chrome..69i57j33i160l5.6844j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8\)](https://www.google.com/search?q=Norrick+on+proverbs&oq=Norrick+on+proverbs&aqs=chrome..69i57j33i160l5.6844j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

### **What is the purpose of using proverbs and idioms in language?**

They provide cultural insight and help learners understand the attitudes, beliefs, and values of native speakers. Idioms and proverbs can be useful in speaking and writing as they are often used in everyday conversation and add depth to expressions.

### **The use of proverbs among the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria**

Proverbs though used more often by elders, are also used by people of all ages and statures to tell others about the importance of something. People in the Igbo tribe of South East, Nigeria use proverbs everyday as they are an important part of their culture and traditions, and the art of conversation is regarded very highly throughout the clan. Proverbs have an important impact on a storyline. All proverbs have some kind of deeper meaning behind them.

A proverb represents a wise saying commonly understood by people in a given culture. It is a short sentence bordering on issues usually known or experienced by the people. Proverbs may be defined as popular short sayings involving advice or warning (Oxford 1995:3).

In his very first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe defines proverbs as *the palm oil with which words are eaten*. They may be called feathery ornaments with which a speech is decorated (Amadiume 1995). The comparison between proverbs and oil shows that proverbs enliven speeches. Oil is used to eat yam to make it more appetizing and in the same manner, proverbs add color to speech and emphasize important points. Proverbs may also be used by people of the same ethnic group in the midst of foreigners as a means of disguising their meaning.

Proverbs are rooted deeply into culture, that is the totality of human behavior and its products embodied in thoughts, speech or actions acquired through training, education and social experience (Webster 2000). Culture may also be considered as the moral or intellectual behavior of a community.

Proverbs and by extension literary works, are generally associated with the aesthetic component carried by such texts. This means that they not only represent aspects of beauty and style of the author but also carry lexical and specific grammatical charges that enrich such works. Therefore, the translation of proverbs requires, besides the usual language capacity, specific cultural and artistic skills by the translator, since the translator is not only required to move from one linguistic code to another but to represent adequately the communal wisdom inherent in proverbs. Since proverbs are an embodiment of community wisdom expressed in a few words, the translator should be equipped with exceptional sensitivity as to their origin, connotations and situational or contextual reality. This involves recreating the voice, the rhythm and contextual relevance of proverbs, and the local flavour or color in the target language. It is the ability of the translator to bridge the emotional and psychological divide involved in this task that will constitute his strength. He/she will not only be sharing in the creativity of the author, but will in addition, transport the knowledge of the collective wisdom of a given linguistic community into another.

In bringing together literature, proverbs, and translation serious consideration should be given to the place they occupy in the lives of both the departure and target audiences. Effective rendering of the message of African literary works should also be mindful of oral literature as a source. (<https://www.unn.edu.ng/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Awa-Samuel-and-Ngele-Chimuanya-Absence-of-Local-Flavour-PI.pdf>)

## **1.2 Statement of problem**

Not many readers have the ability to read, flow with and have clear ability to digest, store, remember and retell stories if these stories are not embellished with whatever has the ability to improve their reader experiences. In the search for that ingredient that can create and generate this mix, imageries come into play. Imagery can improve a reader's experience of the text by immersing them more deeply by appealing to their senses. Imagery in writing can aim at a reader's sense of taste, smell, touch, hearing, or sight through vivid descriptions. Imagery as a tool of literature enriches language with its assimilative tendencies. As regards the Igbo speaking community, with so much migration of our people, our language and the use of proverbs have been grossly negatively affected.

This paper therefore, sets out to analyse how the use of Imagery affects Igbo communication especially as it has to do with Igbo proverbs which are used more by Igbo elders.

## **1.3 Objective/Purpose of the study**

This study intends to show the role and functions of imagery in the proverbs of the Igbo people of South Eastern Nigeria by looking at some selected Igbo Proverbs and their literal meanings.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

1. How does the use of Imagery enrich Igbo proverbs?
2. How does the use of Imagery in Igbo proverbs affect communication in Igbo language?

## **1.5 Scope of Study**

We shall concern ourselves with selected twenty (20) Igbo proverbs.

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

The study will help Igbo speakers understand the effects of their usage of Imagery in discussing Igbo proverbs.

It will also help Igbo speakers understand why they must continue to use imagery in their communication of proverbs in order to preserve a heritage and legacy for their children. This study will in addition, form part of the needed information by other scholars working on the subject of imagery in Igbo proverbs specifically.

## **2.1 Literature review**

According to Holman, C.H., Imagery in its literary sense means the collection of images within a work or a unit of literary works. In a broader sense, it is used synonymous with trope or figure of speech. Another definition is given by C. Day Lewis. He tells us that “an image is a picture made out of words. David White also tells us that “it is by words that things come into being”. Ezra Pound asserts that “poetry is a dance among words and picks his images. Poetic image may be described as all methods of making the kind of statement by which one thing is perceived as resembling another. We shall also like to examine R.N. Egudu’s definition of the image. According to him, an image is a mental picture created by a writer by means of words he uses. Imagery therefore are collection of images to create a mental picture through the use of words.

Imagery in proverbs are one of the means through which various Nigerian societies impart morals, wisdom, ethics, knowledge and ideologies to the members of the society. Through imageries, the society is also mirrored. The proverbs aid in understanding the Igbo past and also serve as atlas for the Igbo future. The proverbs address various issues relating to human life ranging from family, children, marriage, women, hard work and any other thing of importance to human existence. Following Adejumo (1985: 446) an African writer in French while commenting on Malinke proverbs wrote, ‘The short stories, maxims and proverbs, ritual chantings, all the rhythms reflect this wisdom which the groits, to a large extent, are qualified as well as vigilant preservers.’

Many scholars have looked at proverbs as they relate to the different Nigerian societies. Ojoade (1985) probes the issue of African traditional ethical education and national discipline through the use of evidences from African proverbial. The study reveals that proverbs are the unwritten ethical laws of Africans who do not only make use of them but seriously believe them, follow them and propagate them with demur. It concludes that proverbs constitute a vehicle for teaching discipline.

Emenanjo (2008) in his study uses examples from Igbo proverb to express proverbs as picturesque speech. His study reveals that proverbs are used in re-creating and re-enacting total Igbo worldview or experience in allusive phraseology and powerful images built on morphemes’, words, phrases and sentences and all their accompanying sounds and phonological features. The study concludes that it is the use of above mentioned features, among others, that make Igbo proverbs, like proverbs elsewhere, such picturesque artifacts and mentifacts of human language.

Ohwovoriolè’s (2008) study is on the animal imagery in selected Urhobo proverbs and their educative functions. The study reveals that proverbs, beyond their literary aspects have always served the purpose of teaching and education. And that more generally, they have served as media of expression of commonly held views and wisdoms. The study concludes that the totemic proverbs make up part of the stock of Urhobo proverbial wisdom. Hence Urhobo people use such proverbs as sources of instruction and as mirror of their philosophy of life.

Okoli’s (2012) study is on the use of Igbo proverbs in conflict resolution. The analysis of the study reveals that proverbs, as a form of figurative communication, are found to possess potentiality of resolving conflicts among individuals in the society.

## **2.2 Summary of Literature**

While Imagery is simply the use of vivid descriptions in order to explain a situation to a reader or listener. It could be in the form of Auditory, Visual, Tactile, Olfactory, and or Gustatory; a proverb is a short sentence that people often quote, which gives advice or tells you something about life figuratively.

Imagery in proverbs are one of the means through which the Igbo society impart morals, wisdom, ethics, knowledge and ideologies to the members of the Igbo society. Through imageries, the society is also mirrored.

## **2.3 Research Methodology**

Research designs are plans and the procedures for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detail methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009). However, the selection of a research design is actually based on the nature of the research problem or issue being addressed.

This work follows Stephen M. Kosslyn's method of using: a Theory-Based approach of individual Differences in mental imagery in its study of Imagery in Igbo proverbs. This is a methodology that uses an explicit theory of change to draw conclusions about whether and how an intervention contributed to observed results. Theory-based approaches are a "logic of enquiry," which complement and can be used in combination with most of the evaluation designs and data collection techniques outlined in program evaluation methods: Measurements and attribution of program results.

Theory based evaluation is an approach to evaluation (i.e., a conceptual analytical model) and not a specific method or technique. It is a way of structuring and undertaking analysis in an evaluation.

The Place of imagery in Igbo proverbs has been examined in the light of the Theory-based views of concepts. The Theory-based views of concepts claim that they are identified or intimately associated with miniature theories of how things in their target domain tend to function. These theories take the form of general causal-explanatory principles describing how the properties, objects, and events in the category hang together and how deeper or hidden properties produce and sustain observable ones. Such theories often focus on describing essential properties for category membership such as having the right internal organization or composition. These theories differ from full-blown scientific theories in being sketchy, limited in their explanatory and predictive scope, and potentially mistaken in certain details.

## **3.Semantic implication of imagery in Igbo proverbs**

### **Selected Igbo Proverbs, the imagery they showcase and their semantic implication**

1. Hapuihe e derena moto banye moto

**Translation:** Forget what is written on the vehicle's body and enter the vehicle

#### **Semantic implication**

Taking action is a priority over having details or previous knowledge.

2. Onye m ga-egbuli m gariochinekeka o nyere m aka?

**Translation:** Regarding the person that I can defeat easily, do I still need to beg God for assistance?

#### **Semantic implication:**

The battles that can be easily overcome do not require additional effort or some things can be achieved faster even without external assistance.

3. Agbachaoso a guo mile

**Translation:** After the race, the miles or distance covered is calculated

**Semantic implication**

After a difficult task, we reflect

4. Ogaracha must come back

**Translation:** He who wanders away must come back

**Semantic implication**

You cannot totally shy away from your responsibilities.

5. Ejiiroututuamanjoafia

**Translation:** You can't judge that a market would be bad in the morning

**Semantic implication**

Ones future can't be determined by a bad start.

6. Nnibundu

**Translation:** Food is life

**Semantic implication**

An empty stomach can lead to early grave.

7. Ha na-asinaokugbara Father I na-aju ma o gbakwara ma afuonuya

**Translation:** It's being rumored that a Reverend Father got burnt and you are there asking if his beards also got burnt

**Semantic implication**

Talking about the important and you are there talking something stupid or of less importance or why ask a silly question when you know the obvious.

8. Kaanaachujaja, kaikpe n' amandimmuo

**Translation:** let's keep sacrificing, let the god's take the blame

**Semantic implication**

Do your part to avoid the blame.

9. Egwuadiroatuafo, oburuuzo

**Translation:** Fear does not affect the stomach, that's why it is always in front

**Semantic implication**

Irrespective of the risk involved, an attempt must be made.

10. Okroanaghietokarionyekuruya

**Translation:** The okro cannot grow taller than the planter

**Semantic implication**

No matter how elevated you get in life, you can't surpass the hand that groomed you.

11. Gini ozoka a nachonasiga ma obughianwuru-oku?

**Translation:** What else is expected of cigarette if not smoke?

**Semantic implication**

Purpose are always defined / there is a reason for everything.

12. Mmanuakara di uto; Onyeratu, ibeya a ratu

**Translation:** Bean cake oil is sweet; one who tastes should allow others have a taste

**Semantic implication**

Be good to the people on your way up the ladder.

13. O jingajierichetakwandiji aka

**Translation:** He who eats with spoon should remember those who uses hand to eat

**Semantic implication**

While enjoying yourself, always have the destitute at heart.

14. I tiela aka natipabuaja

**Translation:** You have placed your hand on tipper with load of sand

**Semantic implication**

You are in a big mess/trouble.

15. Ogologoabughinanwametola

**Translation:** Tallness is not a yardstick to define maturity

**Semantic implication**

Maturity in Life is not determined by the physical appearance (athletic build) of an individual.

16. Aragagbandiara

**Translation:** Lunatics shall soon run mad

**Semantic implication**

Unbelievable/surprising things will happen.

17. Ukwunagawara; anyanagawaranahuya

**Translation:** A leg moving in a shady motion; an eye also moving in a shady motion will see it

**Semantic implication**

You can't outsmart everyone.

18. "I no ebeinaawakwuogodondin'agbamgba wee gbaachaamgba ma lawa" **Translation:** You kept tying and adjusting your wrestling wrapper (or gear) till other wrestlers finished wrestling and left.

**Semantic implication**

You took too long contemplating and preparing till it was needless to take action.

19. Ewereututchoewuojjiotupuabalieruo

**Translation:** look for a black goat during the day before the night comes

**Semantic implication**

Make your decision as quick as possible to avoid setbacks.

20. Uto mmii wuetebele

**Translation:** The sweetness of wine is more when you dance

**Semantic implication**

Wine is best enjoyed while dancing.

#### **4.1 Summary of findings**

The study reveals that Imagery stimulates the reader's senses by evoking those senses through touch, taste, sound, smell, and sight, by using imagery in Igbo proverbs, you communicate even figuratively to drive home your points.

The study also reveals that Imagery in proverbs are one of the means through which the Igbo society imparts morals, wisdom, ethics, knowledge and ideologies to the members of the Igbo society, and that the usage of imagery make Igbo proverbs unique and grows the society as the generations that follow each other maintain these proverbs in our language communication.

#### **4.2 Conclusions**

Igbo people make use of a lot of proverbs in their discussions. Infact, if certain people do not want you to understand their discussion, though you may be an Igbo person, they may use proverbs that you may not easily understand. From the proverbs selected in this work, the study reveals that the use of imagery makes communication thick and the information being passed

across stick. In order to continue to keep our cultural practices alive, our people must continue to make use of imagery in our proverbs and in all forms of communication, oral and written.

The study recommends further research could still be done to find out more of what can be done to make sure that our children learn and understand the place of igbo proverbs and how to continue to apply imagery so that we will not lose this aspect of our culture.

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