
A Linguistic Ethnography of Ibibio Proverbs and Euphemisms

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Abstract

As it is the case in many African languages, proverbs and euphemisms in Ibibio, a Lower Cross language spoken in Akwa Ibom, Nigeria, are essential sources of linguistic complexity and cultural peculiarity. This study utilizes a Linguistic Ethnography approach in investigating Ibibio proverbs and euphemisms as speech events with distinct structural patterns which serve to unravel meaning potentials and typify a distinct Ibibio cultural milieu. The genres of proverbs and euphemisms transmit norms and belief systems enacted through verbal exchanges within the speech community. As samples of language use, there are rich linguistic and discourse features associated with these genres. The proverbs and euphemisms collected for the study come from oral interviews and archival resources. The study employed the participant observation design to explore the native speaker's opinions on the delineated Ibibio proverbs and euphemisms. The findings show that Ibibio proverbs and euphemisms have a direct link to the people. Proverbs help to reveal the identity, norms, value system and beliefs of the people. Findings also show that euphemistic expressions are gender sensitive.

Key Words: Ibibio proverbs, euphemisms, linguistic ethnography

1.0 Introduction

A language is a veritable tool through which ideas, thoughts, emotions, opinions, messages and information are passed from one person to another or between groups of people to ensure inter-personal relationships. Language is also broadly regarded as a system of communication. Such communication may be by speech, which is essentially affected by the

tongue and the lips, or by movements such as gestures, whose meanings are known to the second party. Language in itself is a symbol to identify and a representation of people's identity, and a means of identifying people's value systems, beliefs, traditions, norms and world views. This is particularly true of proverbs and euphemisms which are discursive strategies in a language, are generally believed to be words of wisdom and correction, usually didactic, pleasant and could be passed down easily from one generation to another. According to Ogunbowale (1970) cited in Abdulraheem (2008), a proverb is "a criticism of life and a product of the mind, which reflects prevalent attitudes with didactic interests". The concept of a particular mind in the above definition is synonymous with a specific context of use. However, the contextual use of proverbs equally depends on several social contexts (Zakariyah, 2013:8). These contexts include, but are not limited to a marriage, family, religion, peer relation, etc. Proverbs and euphemisms serve as avenues for reflecting attitudes, dispositions, worldviews, norms and social values. Both are products of people's experiences and are mostly context-specific.

Contexts and settings contribute to proverbial and euphemistic utterances. Contexts and settings dictate a people's lifestyles; it is what contexts and settings provide the people with, that the people make use of in choosing appropriate proverbs and euphemisms. Therefore, not only are proverbs and euphemisms context-specific but they could also be said to be context and setting sensitive. To understand the context of a proverb and a euphemism, there is a need to consider the social variables which affect the mutual contextual belief, presupposition and intentions of the language users. Furthermore, Omera and Inegbeboh (2013) note that proverbs are influenced, to a large extent by the linguistic and socio-geographical experiences and orientations of the diverse peoples that make up the place. Hence, Jegede (2008) identifies proverbs as a dynamic mode of discourse with a unique identity. He further posits that proverbs form a pool of linguistic and thematic resources from which speakers and writers in rhetoric, politics, economics, philosophy, history technology etc. draw inspiration.

On the other hand, euphemisms are words created to support language that is considered too unpleasant and provocative. Robert Burchfield's (1985) study as cited in Gao (2013:7) observed that a language without euphemisms would be a defective instrument of communication. In Ibibio language, euphemisms are widely used in various contexts and settings to neutralize the taboo words. Euphemistic expressions allow us to talk about unpleasant things while neutralizing the unpleasantness. Euphemistic terms are found in every aspect of society. Euphemisms can be used to avoid embarrassing situations and thus protect individuals' feelings.

Genetically, the Ibibio language belongs to the Benue-Congo sub-family which in turn belongs to the Niger-Congo family, one of the largest families of languages in Africa, according to Greenberg's (1963) classification. Ibibio is coordinate with other Lower Cross group, a group of closely related languages to which Efik and Annang, with which Ibibio forms a cluster of dialects. In a new classification of African languages proposed by Professor Kay Williamson and others working on the Niger-Congo languages, Ibibio will belong to the enlarged New Benue-Congo. This paper explores Ibibio proverbs and euphemisms from a linguistic ethnographic approach, in some settings and contexts to reveal people's identity, worldviews and communicative competencies

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Proverbs

The meaning and nature of proverbs are complex to define and this is why there is no single universally accepted definition of the concept. For Instance, Archer Tailor (1931) cited in Ahmed (2005) attempts to explain the meaning of proverbs in more than two hundred pages, and concludes that it is impossible to give a definite definition of it. Lauhakangas (2004) describes proverbs as multifunctional and flexible instruments of everyday reasoning that maintain and solidify attitudes or traditional modes of thought of a certain culture. Meider (2004) states that proverbs, like riddles, jokes or fairy tales, do not fall out of the sky and neither are the products of a mythical soul of the folk.

Instead, they are always coined by an individual either intentionally or unintentionally. That means proverbs originate from people to teach morals and capture and express the worldviews, values and identities of those who coined them. Similarly, Syzdykov (2013) in his contrastive studies of proverbs pointed out that there is a need for a basic understanding of proverbial sayings to get information about one's nation, culture, and tradition. Also, Lauhakangas (2004) reiterates that the use of proverbs in one's language or dialect has a central function to be a kind of speech that strengthens the identity of the community.

Akinwumi (2006) from a literary point of view, focuses on the use of proverbs as a tool for the restoration of social order. In other recent efforts, Sanusi and Omoloso (2008) examined the use of proverbs in preserving archaic lexical items and expressions.

In Ibibio, the term "proverb" loosely translates as "*Nke*" plays an important role in the language. Proverbs act as a vital means of communication mostly among the elders and also help in expressing the user's expertise in the language. In Ibibio, expressions are considered rich and intelligent when they are duly laced with proverbs. This informs why a traditional Ibibio man and woman would constantly punctuate their speech with appropriate proverbs to drive home their point.

2.2 Euphemisms

Euphemisms are powerful linguistic tools that are embedded so deeply in our language. The need for euphemisms is both social and emotional, as it allows the discussion of touchy, taboo subjects (such as sex, personal appearances or religion) without engaging, outraging, or upsetting other people. Geoffery (1974) in his discussion on semantics describes euphemisms as the linguistic equivalent of disinfectants. Euphemisms act as disinfectants that provide mild expressions that protect the mind of the language user against taboo expressions. According to Rawson (Linfoot Ham, 2005), euphemisms are powerful linguistic tools that are embedded so deeply in our language that we cannot make taboo expressions pleasant or mild without using them. Meihua (2013) notes that euphemism is not only a common strategy in language usage but also a kind of cultural

phenomenon that has a great effect on people's daily agreeable communication while adhering to social-communicative conventions. In other words, euphemisms save the faces of users and enable them to communicate successfully. Scholars have an intensive interest in euphemistic expressions. Much research on euphemism has already been conducted in different fields, such as daily conversations; inter-cultural communications, science, literature, business affairs and even media language like newspapers and advertisements.

Although many of these studies have referred to euphemistic strategies in the English language, few have been carried out with the Ibibio language using the linguistic ethnography approach. It is therefore very important to conduct research on this linguistic tool in the Ibibio language.

2.3 Theoretical framework

2.3.1 Linguistic ethnography

Linguistic ethnography is an umbrella term that comprises two interdisciplinary concepts; - linguistics and ethnography. The combination helps in understanding how social and communicative processes operate in a range of settings and contexts. It is a theoretical and methodological development orientating towards particular, established traditions but defining itself in a new intellectual climate of late modernity and post structuralism (Cresse 2008). Today, linguistic ethnography has been described as an umbrella term; an area of shared interests where established research traditions interact (Tusting & Maybin, 2007). Tusting and Maybin, (2007) note that linguistic ethnography is in its infancy. It is very much similar to the anthropological traditions to the study of language, such as the ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1968) and interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1972). It claims distinctiveness by keeping the door open to wider interpretive approaches from within anthropology, applied linguistics and sociology. Linguistic ethnography typically takes a post-structuralist orientation by critiquing essentialist accounts of social life. In conjoining the two terms linguistic and ethnography, it aligns with a particular epistemological view of language

in the social context. Linguistic ethnography generally holds that language and social life are mutually shaping, and that close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity (Rampton et al, 2004).

Mohlig's (1995:85) asserts that African folk narratives are "structured verbal texts and not just the product of associative accident" even though "what has been missing is a measure of agreement among oralists on a comprehensive method by which these structures can be exposed". Without any ambition to solve the problem of disagreement in method, this work on Ibibio proverbs and euphemisms draws insight from Linguistic Ethnography (LE) as a suitable model for analysis. The epistemological bases of the LE model is in constraining the speech events in ethnography by the analytic framework provided in linguistics while at the same time enriching the linguistic analysis with variability of structures that only data based on the uses of language in society afford (Rampton, 2007; Rampton et al, 2004; and Creese 2008). Rampton, Maybin and Roberts (2014:20) provide a basis for LE research in the statement that "good research should be careful, logical, accountable, explicit, skeptical, well-informed, comparative and original, leading to the production of interesting claims that people (in some determinate discourse community) can trust." In this wise therefore, the present work leans on an adaptation of LE for the elicitation of knowledge available to the cultural insiders/made available to the analyst without allegiance to the length and breadth of LE research. The leaning of the present work finds some expression in Frame Semantics and U-Semantics.

Fillmore's (1982:111) Frame Semantics sets out the agenda for the possibility of "a research programme in empirical semantics and a descriptive framework for presenting the results of such research". He explicates his view as follows:

"Frame semantics comes out of traditions of empirical rather than formal semantics. It is most akin to ethnographic semantics, the work of the anthropologist who moves into an alien culture and asks such questions as, 'What categories of experience are

encoded by the members of this speech community through the linguistic choices that they make when they talk?’ A frame semantics outlook is not (or is not necessarily) incompatible with work and results in formal semantics; but it differs importantly from formal semantics in emphasizing the continuities, rather than the discontinuities, between language and experience” (Fillmore 1982:111)

Fillmore’s emphasis here is that meanings of words are determined by the frame of reference in which they are used and the frames are, importantly, based on recurring experience (encyclopaedic knowledge) which is usually domiciled in culture rather than the surrounding linguistic items. As Petruck (1996:3) additionally points out on the basis of Fillmore’s work that the notion of frame underlies ‘semantics of understanding (U-semantics)’ with the goal of determining “what it takes for a hearer to provide an interpretation of a sentence, in other words, to determine what situation a sentence fits”. She elaborates on this as follows: “U-semantics is compositional in that its operation relies on knowledge of words, phrases, and grammatical constructions for an interpretation to be constructed. However, it is non-compositional in that the interpretation of a sentence is not constructed by purely symbolic operations.” Petruck (1996:3) thus states that “the frame is also considered a useful tool in text semantics and semantics of grammar. The interpreter of a text [sharing the requisite cultural background] invokes a frame when assigning an interpretation to a piece of text by placing its contents in a pattern known independently of the text.” De Stefani (2016:53) pins down the main points of both Frame Semantics and U-Semantics in other words by focusing on the ‘emic perspective’ of the anthropological approach, “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world”. By this phrase, De Stefani (2016) elucidates the consequence of the need to describe text in a contextualized way which encompasses the linguistic as well as the broader social environment in which texts occur. The linguistic ethnography of Ibibio proverbs and euphemisms in the present analysis, in plain words, takes over from the anthropological approach its standpoint on the necessity of the linguistic and social context

in describing proverbs and euphemisms as a clear exemplification of linguistic ethnography.

For empirical instance of the LE approach to analysis, the present work focuses on Musere's (1999:1) introduction to African proverbs and proverbial names, in which he notes concerning the Baganda people of Uganda that they are "renowned for their generous array of proverbs and proverbial names which they have for centuries involved in their day-to-day conversations. Musere further notes the following as characteristic of Luganda (Bantu language of Uganda) proverbial personal names, which buttress the delineated descriptive perspective:

"Proverbial personal names have served as historical reminders for events at the time of birth of the named, and through them social rules and lessons are communicated to descendants. Proverbial names, like many types of African names, also indirectly communicate opinions of the name giver towards others. The study of proverbial names is important since language is intimately linked to culture. Types of tensions, emphases and phenomena vary from society to society. African language communication, when compared to the western mode of communication, is highly metaphorical in content. There is a salient element of discreteness, circuitousness, allusion and secrecy in African language that is exemplified in proverbs. Many African proverbs and proverbial names recall words of wisdom with respect to such issues as intelligence, friendship, cooperation, trust and mistrust, thankfulness and unappreciation, humility, giving, ignorance, showiness, boastfulness, jealousy, allegiance, alertness, warning, defense, laziness, speed, hastiness, bravery, cowardice, and patience. A wealth of priceless oral literature is revealed."

Muser's (1999:2) data presentation and analysis is of interest: rather than provide a mere list of names and their meanings in isolation, he presents the names as part of proverbial texts noting that this "would enlighten many readers on the ordering of the text, and on relationships between the names and the proverbs". This ties the linguistic interpretations to the

perceptions, dispositions, expectations and beliefs of the society, in other words the ethnography, rather than the linguistic forms themselves, as in the following instances:

Luganda Data (Bantu, Uganda)

1. Omugenyi akusuula ku bbanja ‘A visitor puts you in debt’

With the arrival of the visitor, one often goes to borrow from a neighbour so as to be able to give the visitor a proper welcoming treat and cater for the visitor’s other needs.

Mugenyi (m) Guest; a stranger; a visitor.

Banja/Bbanja (f/m) Debt.

A newborn given the name Mugenyi or Bbanja by the parents, could have been born during a period of famine and poverty that compelled the newborn’s parents to borrow money and food from neighbours. Or the child may have been born around the time the household had many visitors, some of whom proved to be expensive to cater for.

2. Omwana omuto akaabira ekitali kikye ‘A young child cries for that which is not his’

Children are known to easily cry for things that they so much desire, that is including things that are not theirs. Coveting is not to be encouraged since it can lead to problems like stealing, focusing on things that are not of much importance, unduly guiding one’s life according to what the crowd likes and does, and living above one’s standard.

Mwana (f/m) [*mwaah-nah*] Child; kid; youngster; son; daughter.

Muto (f/m) [*muh-toh*] Younger brother or sister; a young one.

Mwana (f/m) [*tch-ih-tah-lih*] That is not

Musere shows the proverb, the names derived from this as well as information on the pronunciation and the gender of persons named thereby, the semantic interpretation of the names, as well as ethnographic commentary, as in (1) and (2). Musere’s insight for textual analysis of names is instrumental generally in organizing and analysing data in the present paper.

Wardhaugh (1998:237) notes the importance of ethnography when he states that an important function of language is social maintenance, therefore “we must try to understand how different groups of people use their language if we are to achieve a comprehensive understanding of how that language is related to the society that uses it.” Whereas Hymes (1974) proposes an ethnographic model that caters for the description of communicative event, the objective of such communicative event and its achievement using the SPEAKING acronym for relevant factors (setting and scene, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms of interaction and interpretation and genre); the present work finds relevant for an ethnographic analysis the act sequence (the actual text generated in the communicative event of proverbs and euphemisms), proceeding with a heuristic investigation on this basis in understanding the correlation of the linguistic elements with social reality (Halliday 1973).

Lambek (2006) studied the difference in the importance of a spirit’s name to its identity drawing on the ethnography of spirit possession among Malagasy speakers of Mayotte and Northwest Madagascar taking a pragmatic view that gives attention to speech acts involved in the social procedures of the bestowal of names on spirits that instantiates the entities themselves as being. He observes from the perspective of pragmatics that “the bestowal of a name is factive insofar as it brings into being the state of affairs with which it is concerned” and thus generalizes that in modern states birth and marriage certificates, our so-called identity papers, confirm or validate not only our name but also our person; they constrain movement and agency and in their absence our very existence is illegitimate.” He further states based on observation of the Mayotte mystification rituals, that a world is in bestowing a name, quoting Rappaport (1999:27) as confirming this position: “the performance [of ritual] ... logically entails the establishment of convention, the sealing of social contract, the construction of...integrated conventional orders...the investment of whatever it encodes with morality, the construction of time and eternity; the representation of a paradigm of creation, the generation of the concept of the sacred and the sanctification of conventional order...”

Lambek thus combines insight from naming itself as an instance of speech acts and discourse on the power of naming with meaning potentials within the context of Mayotte culture. Lambek's work may be considered a successful one for its purpose of establishing the power relationship in naming and its ethnographic content meets the demand of the present work.

Lambek's work and observations are in tandem with Dauda (2016:284) who notes that “*Òwe* [proverb] is a virtual memory bank for all of the Yorùbá way of life and living, including philosophy, values, beliefs, ethics, and political economy.” He also notes that “as codes of ethics and civic responsibilities, *òwe* exist for all aspects of public and private affairs.” These roles of proverbs are widespread in African societies and are relevant for a descriptively adequate depiction of Ibibio proverbs and euphemisms, which constitute the subject of the present study.

3.0 Methodology

The qualitative design approach was adopted in this study. Data for this study were gathered in Uyo metropolis. A large population of Ibibio speakers resides here. The researcher's native speaker competence was also helpful in identifying and extracting the proverbs and euphemisms in the speeches recorded. Brief interviews were conducted to ascertain the meaning of some of the proverbs which were not known. The analysis of data is based on ethnographic model proposed by Hymes in 1974. An ethnographic model caters for the description of communicative event, the objective of such communicative event and its achievement using the SPEAKING acronym for relevant factors (setting and scene, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms of interaction and interpretation and genre); the present work finds relevant for an ethnographic analysis the act sequence (the actual text generated in the communicative event of proverbs and euphemisms), proceeding with a heuristic investigation on this basis in understanding the correlation of the linguistic elements with social reality (Halliday 1973).

4.0 Data Presentation and analysis

4.1 Contextual analysis of Ibibio proverbs

Proverb 1

ókpók èkè ébí ídò áyará ótò k'úyèn ádát ìsìn

Gloss: The lizard that will be male grows a red tail from infancy.

Interpretation: Whoever wants to be great or achieve something spectacular must start early in life to work and plan towards the goal.

Context: This proverb can be used within the family or larger societal context. Within the family context, it means that it is from the traits exhibited in a child that the parents know which child would turn out which way. Within the larger society also, it may mean that people who become big, start early in life to work towards it. At the individual level, this proverb may also play the role of motivation and inspiration; suggesting to the individual that, if one desires to be great, he/she must begin small and start early.

Cultural connotation: The time of youth is the best time to prepare for life's goals.

Analysis: The proverb explores the logical sequence of things/phenomena: that a general analysis can be made from specific traits. In the real world from the initial stage, through countenance and appearance, one can identify the good, the bad and the ugly. The reference to the lizard in our psyche is illustrative in Ibibio mythology, red is the colour of strength for maleness and achievement. No lizard no matter how strong its desire to become male will be able to grow a red tail after a certain age. Youth is the time to prepare for life's goals. Certain actions at particular times are indices of our youthful age.

Proverb 2

Tèèp tèèp óyòhó àbàñ

Gloss: Drop by drop, the water fills the pot.

Interpretation: The cure or solution to all problems lies in exercising patience.

Context: This proverb is applicable in situations where an individual or group of individuals seem impatient about certain conditions, which need time, and which with time would take care of themselves.

Cultural connotation:

It is not how fast but how careful and how a thing is done.
Patience is needed in life.

Analysis: The crux of the proverb is the message of patience. The idea of slowly dropping water is referenced. The English equivalent could be “slow and steady wins the race” with patience. The water drops slowly yet fill the water pot. The moral lesson of patience is preached indirectly. The reference to the water further elucidates the meaning and distils the sense deeper. This proverb reveals why an Ibibio person (note that “Ibibio” itself loosely translates to “short-short”) would like to do one thing at a time with the mindset that “slow and steady wins the race”.

Proverb 3

Ówó ánâm sé ídèm ónô Ábàsi àyák úbók

Gloss: When a person does what nature endows him with, God prospers him/her.

Interpretation: One should always take a firm decision about himself in life’s endeavour and God will prosper him/her.

Context: This can be used in contexts where a person is advised to make ends meet with the available resources while waiting on God to prosper him/her rather than sit idle and wait for what he/she is not sure will eventually come.

Cultural connotation:

It shows that the Ibibio are religious people who believe in God and know that He provides for their needs and prospers them.

Analysis: The proverb aptly sums up the essence of determination and a strong will to work hard in life. It may go for the English equivalent of when the desirable is not available, the available becomes desirable. Reference to ídèm (benevolent spirit) and Ábàsi (supreme deity of the Ibibio) of Ibibio traditional belief is of connotative import.

The message interpreted is that when man shuns idleness and engages himself in hard work with the available jobs or occupations; God lends his/her hands by blessing and prospering them.

Proverbs 4

íkúw` ɔ d ísítámáké úwéémé, ódó ákpétámmá ódó ényé ábínè ñkpó ébínè ényé

Gloss: A toad does not run in the daytime for anything. It is either pursuing something or being pursued by something.

Interpretation: There is a cause for anything abnormal that happens.

Context: It is used in situations where people express regrettable actions they had to take to accommodate or contain unhappy events.

Cultural Connotation: Situations/ strange and abnormal occurrences change people or make people do what they do not intend to do.

Analysis: The proverb tasks our mental conception or general knowledge of the toad as a nocturnal animal. If such an animal, therefore, does “run” (a lexical item preferred by the researcher for metaphorical or stylistic effect, against the normal collective word, “jump”) in the day, there must be something amiss.

The proverb senses that there is a cause for anything abnormal that happens; there must be a reason, at least there is “no smoke without a fire”. A toad running in the daytime is probably pursuing or being pursued. The proverb alludes to the “cause- and effect” philosophy.

Proverb 5

Ètèk éyìn áamá áyie ùbòk asana, àdíá ñkpó yé mmè mb` ɔ η

Gloss: A Child that washes his hands clean, and eats with kings.

Interpretation: If a person does the right thing at the right time, good fortune, honour, esteem and credit will be his/hers.

Context: It is expressed in a context where somebody beneath the age-grade or class is honoured based on some accomplishments; when someone who may naturally be undeserving of some credit earns it because of hard work.

Cultural connotation: The proverb portrays that the Ibibio are people who love cleanliness. It also instantiates that careful/clear planning takes one to a greater height.

Analysis: The proverb portrays honour and dignity attributed to cleanliness and responsibility. It thematizes hand washing, good character training and a hygienic way of eating as a sine qua non to honour. We infer that if a person does the right thing at the right time, as the proverb entails, good fortune, honour, reverence, esteem and credit will be his/hers, just like eating together with kings. The pragmatic understanding of how high the Ibibio rated their traditional ruler provides further insight into the semantic import of the proverb.

Proverb 6

Ñnàn-èyin átie òtè édim, ádèp kè áfid k`  m

Gloss: Problems are like the rain, it falls on every roof.

Interpretation: Tragedy that befalls one, at some point has also befallen or will befall another.

Context: Where a person is lamenting about a particular misfortune and gets to know along the line that another person suffers a greater misfortune than his. He may use this proverb as a consolation to himself. Also, the proverb may be used in the context that problems and challenges are not unique or peculiar to one individual alone.

Cultural Connotation: The proverb shows that problem is universal.

Analysis: The proverb emphasizes the universality of problems or misfortunes. It suggests that problems, challenges or misfortunes are among the phenomena that go around. At the denotative level, it is further interpreted to mean that rainfall spares no roof wherever it drops; it falls on everyone's roof. In essence, as rain does not discriminate, misfortunes, problems and challenges, visit all people. The tragedy that befalls one group, we infer, may at some point befall the other group. Thus, no people should exult because of other people's misfortunes.

Proverb 7

Ñtè ídóhó uñàná ífíók ásìn ékpú áká áñwàn mmè áñwà?

Gloss: Is it not ignorance that makes the rat attack the cat?

Interpretation: It is ignorance that would make a person attack a more formidable enemy, for such will be tantamount to his liquidation.

Cultural Connotation:

Wisdom and common sense are necessary attributes in an Ibibio person's life. One should avoid what one needs to avoid.

Analysis: Concerning our understanding of the two animals, rat and cat, our knowledge of the world make us agree with the force of the rhetorical proverb. It is ignorance that would make a person attack a more formidable enemy for such will be tantamount to his imminent execution or punishment. The inference made is that a wise person will always avoid having a direct encounter with his more powerful adversary, so that the latter does not liquidate him. The reference to, and the stylo-collective import of "cat and rat" strengthens the sense of the proverb.

Proverb 8

` nkò ésiò àbìàrà édéé ké ` mbánj, ínúa átà ñkpò ke ñdik

Gloss: Until the rotten tooth is pulled out, the mouth chews with caution.

Interpretation: As long as the cause of a problem or bad influence persists, there will remain a hindrance to the smooth progress of society.

Context: Where the action of one causes the others to suffer.

Cultural Connotation: One bad person can destroy the community.

Since evil is not condoned within the Ibibio society, such a person should be fished out.

Analysis: This proverb presents a general knowledge in a philosophical grab. With collocates like "rotten tooth", and "mouth/chew", the proverb evokes the sense that as long as bad influences or people remain, as few as they may be, they would constitute a hindrance to the healthy growth or development of the society.

With the rotten tooth in place, the whole mouth is rendered handicapped and whenever it eats, it must be with extreme caution. In the real world, it is a practicable truism.

Interpretation: A child struggles to live and become a (successful) man/woman till he/she dies, with every day posing its challenges.

Context: It is used when considering life’s struggles that struggles never end till death occurs.

Cultural connotation:

The Ibibio people have this philosophy that life is never a bed of roses. The struggle continues.

Analysis: This is an epigram, implicating the centrality of struggle in life. Right from his first breath at birth, the proverb entails, a child struggles to live and become successful till he dies, with every day posing its challenges. The connotative sense derives from its being metaphorical. It is in the realm of philosophy (i.e. Realist Theory) that it would be appropriately understood that not only do adults struggle, but a day old baby also battles to survive.

Table 1

Taboo words	Gloss	Euphemistic Expression								
Àkpá	‘die’	ákpón ìsòng, ádáka ìsàn, ámòd, ábóyò fèb, ádòp ìwèh								
Úrân	‘faeces’	ìfũɔ, ìkód								
àkpàrà	‘prostitute’	àsáng essien, ówó éfèbè, mma ìnò								
ìtìd (female) mfet (male)	‘vagina’ ‘penis’	<table style="display: inline-table; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;"> <table style="border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;">m̀kpò ówó úwàn</td> <td style="border: none;">}</td> <td style="border: none;">m̀kpò ùtòk ìkìm</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;">m̀kpò ówó dèṅ</td> <td style="border: none;">}</td> <td style="border: none;"></td> </tr> </table> </td> <td style="border: none;"></td> </tr> </table>	<table style="border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;">m̀kpò ówó úwàn</td> <td style="border: none;">}</td> <td style="border: none;">m̀kpò ùtòk ìkìm</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;">m̀kpò ówó dèṅ</td> <td style="border: none;">}</td> <td style="border: none;"></td> </tr> </table>	m̀kpò ówó úwàn	}	m̀kpò ùtòk ìkìm	m̀kpò ówó dèṅ	}		
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m̀kpò ówó úwàn	}	m̀kpò ùtòk ìkìm								
m̀kpò ówó dèṅ	}									
Ákùn	‘intercourse’	áñà, áyípe ádíá, átòk ìkim								

Taboo word 1: “die” ákpá

Euphemistic expressions

ákpón ìsòng = ákpón (leave) ìsòng (earth) = “leave the earth”, ádáka ìsàn = ádáka (He/She has moved) isang (journey) = “He/she has taken a journey”, “été/mma ádáka ìsàn o” (the man/ woman has taken a journey),

ámòd, “ákpón ìsòng”, ádòp ìwèh = ádòp (stop) ìwèh (breath) = s/he has stopped breathing

Taboo word 2 : “faeces” “úrân”

Euphemistic expressions

ìfũᵛ, ìkód

Taboo word 3: prostitute “akpàrà”

Euphemistic expressions

àsáng essien= àsáng (walking) essien (outside) àsáng essien= one that is walking/staying outside.

ówó éfèbè = A person that is doing abominable acts. Prostitution is one of the abominable acts in Ibibio. ówó éfèbè is use in religious setting, especially when giving sermon.

m̩ma ìnò (woman that steals).

Taboo word 4

ìtìd (female)	‘vagina’	ńkpò ówó úwàn	} m̩kpò ùtòk ìkìm
m̩fet (male)	‘penis’	m̩kpo owo deᵛ	

Euphemistic expressions

ńkpò ówó úwàn (something that belongs to a woman). M̩kpo owo deᵛ (something that belongs to a man).

ńkpò ùtòk ìkìm (something used for urinating). This euphemistic expression is used for both male and female. It can be used for any context.

Taboo word 4 “ákùn” ‘intercourse’

Euphemistic expressions

áñà (sleep) he/she sleeps. When a man or woman has an affair, “áná” is a euphemistic expression for ákùn. It can be used in any context.

áyípe ádíá (He has pinch and eat)

átòk ìkìm (He has urinated that is to say he has ejaculated). Used by young men when referring to intercourse. It is mostly use in social discourse.

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper investigates Ibibio proverbs and euphemisms using linguistic ethnography approach to study different contexts and how these linguistic tools reveal the people's identity, value system, and worldview. Proverbs and euphemisms which are generally believed to be words of wisdom and correction are usually used to instruct, rebuke, teach morals and make offensive expressions less offensive. In Ibibio, proverb is known as “*Nke*” while euphemism does not have vocabulary except it is explain with a phrase “*nkara iko*” depending on the sense the user of such expressions intends them to be. Proverbs and euphemisms affect us all. Proverbs are seen as witty statements that are capable of revealing one's identity and value system, at the same time teach, instruct and rebuke bad attitudes. Ibibio proverbs are often prosodical in realization, that is, they are realized with a poetic finesse to give the proverbs rhythmic intonation. At the same time, we all probably have a few things we refuse to talk about and still others we do not talk about directly. Euphemisms are mild expressions that make derogatory expressions less offensive. In Ibibio, euphemisms are gender and age sensitive.

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