

# EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPRECIATION OF *ILU* AS THE ENCRYPTED MATRIX OF EXPRESSION OF WISDOM IN IGBO WORLD VIEW

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## Abstract

Epistemological appreciation of 'Ilu' as the encrypted matrix of expression of wisdom in Igbo world view talks about the indebted knowledge of decoding 'Ilu' (proverbs) as a mark of a wise person in the Igbo traditional society. Every sound gathering of the Igbo people exposes one to the use of proverbs. It is indeed the palm oil with which words are eaten. This paper tries to express a proverb as a stylistic device pregnant with meaning. One's inability to decode this identifies one as a literal man, *Efulefu*, a mediocre and a nonentity. Of course, such question as 'where was he trained' will always arise. The writer, using available personality theories, was able to define a wise man, not as an old man but one who through learning, experience (his and others) and inspiration is able to identify himself as unique. Indeed when a proverb is explained to you, the dowry or bride wealth paid on your mother is vain.

**Keywords:** Epistemology, Ilu, Wisdom, Igbo Worldview

## Introduction

Stylistic devices are essential 'condiments' of every interesting discourse, since no discourse can be effective without them. Literary scholars assert that in every text, they are next in importance to appropriate and clear thesis, sufficient supporting arguments as well as logical and progressive arrangement of ideas. The beauty and effect inherent in rhetorical devices reside in their being potential persuasive tools, especially in argumentative discourses. Etymologically, the word proverb is grafted from the Latin word *proverbium*. Many scholars have different definition for proverbs. Some defined it as the wisdom of many generations through which a person shows or exhibits personal acumens. They say it is a simple and concrete saying, popularly known and repeated, that expresses a truth based on common sense or experience. A proverb is a brief, memorable saying that expresses a truth or belief. Others see it as

the thoughts and wisdom of many years and generations put together in a sentence.

These definitions are rooted on two things: first, that proverbs are constructed figuratively, second, that proverb is a sentence through which wisdom is enounced. Important facts about proverbs are making use of it when and where it is necessary. For example, a proverb has it that with a bended knee, a calf sucks from its mother. This means that, or is used to exhort someone to be humble when seeking for a help from a person.

Language is one of the most beautiful tool that man have. Aesthetic values can be added to this language through stylistic devices according to the Biblical injunction of keeping the garden (i.e. make gaudy that which has been handed over to man). One of the most popular among these is proverbs. Proverbs are alive and new ones are emerging all the time. Proverbs, they say, fits every situation, therefore, they are used contextually to fit particular situations. Proverbs clash regularly, which is all part of their charm. You use a proverb to make a point, to summarise something, to rationalise, to explain and to teach. They express general observations, experiences that gives us a chance to say something in a colourful way and hit the proverbial nail on the head. Proverbs come from a variety of sources, from Classical Antiquity, the Bible, and Medieval Latin. Every language and culture has their own proverbs, that is to say that proverbs are culturally oriented.

Understanding a proverb is of much importance. It is said that when a proverb is used, a wise man understands while a literal person does not. It is also said that when a proverb is used and explained for a person, then the dowry or bride wealth paid on the mother is a waste. This means that one grounded in his tradition ought to understand their proverbs. Suit it to say that before you are termed or recognised as the true son of the soil, you must know the wherewithal of your proverbs. There seem to be two meanings to every proverb: that is the literal meaning and the figurative meaning. A life example will buttress this point. A chieftain arrested during the military rule told his people who came to welcome him that the chameleon cannot leave out his pride and elegant step because fire is burning the lion.

The literal meaning talks about the chameleon and his slowness of movement which is an exhibit of pride. Figuratively, it means that an addict/habit is not easily let go of no matter how difficult the situation may seem, though the context may differ. The chieftain meant that he will go ahead on the politics of ensuring the welfare and progress of his people notwithstanding the change in government and its battling problems and encumbrances.

Aside already mentioned importance of proverbs, the Igbos have it that proverb is the palm oil with which words are eaten. Oil makes for a tasty, sumptuous and balanced meal and this is what proverb does to language. When there is no proverb in a language, it tends to be a cliché lacking lustre, but when proverb is rightly used, it soothes a charged atmosphere and tends to put a smile on an otherwise unfriendly or straight face.

Proverb is the easiest way of advising, chastising, judging and humbling a proud person. A wise man gains respect through his knowledge and use of proverbs. He is the pride of his people. A wise man always escapes from trap while a literal man finds himself entangled in a cobweb of problem. Proverb brings joy, gladness of heart and laughter when there is loss of hope. Proverbs and other figurative language brings out the beauty and richness of a literary piece where they are used. You are likely to be glued to such work at the expense of other jobs till you are done reading.

A man in the Igbo traditional society is termed wise when he is able to decode a proverb and use them actively in his speeches. Elders use strings of proverbs to depict expertise, wisdom and experience. It is only through the use of proverbs that kinsmen can discuss in the midst of foreigners without revealing their thoughts. Our literary giants could not do without it. In traditional meetings, gatherings, discussions and negotiations, proverbs are the in thing.

### **Concept of Epistemology**

The word *epistemology* is derived from the ancient Greek '*epistēmē*' meaning "knowledge" and the suffix *-logy*, meaning "logical

discourse" (derived from the Greek word *logos* meaning "discourse"). J. F. Ferrier coined *epistemology* on the model of 'ontology', to designate that branch of philosophy which aims to discover the meaning of knowledge, and called it the 'true beginning' of philosophy. Epistemology studies the nature of knowledge, justification, and the rationality of belief. Much of the debate in epistemology centres on four areas: (1) the philosophical analysis of the nature of knowledge and how it relates to such concepts as truth, belief, and justification, (2) various problems of scepticism, (3) the sources and scope of knowledge and justified belief, and (4) the criteria for knowledge and justification. Epistemology addresses such questions as "What makes justified beliefs justified?" What does it mean to say that one knows something? And fundamentally, how do we know that we know?

In a philosophical dialogue, King James VI of Scotland penned the character *Epistemon* as the personification of a philosophical concept to debate on arguments of whether the ancient religious perceptions of witchcraft should be punished in a politically fuelled Christian society. The arguments King James poses, through the character *Epistemon*, are based on ideas of theological reasoning regarding society's belief, as his opponent *Philomathes* takes a philosophical stance on society's legal aspects but seeks to obtain greater knowledge from *Epistemon*, whose name is Greek for *scientist*. This philosophical approach signified a Philomath seeking to obtain greater knowledge through *epistemology* with the use of theology. The dialogue was used by King James to educate society on various concepts including the history and etymology of the subjects debated.

### **Concept of Appreciation**

Appreciation is a feeling or expression of admiration, approval, or gratitude. It depicts judgement, evaluation; especially a favourable critical estimate. It also means a sensitive awareness; especially recognition of aesthetic values. Appreciation is an increase in the value of an asset over time. The increase can occur for a number of reasons, including increased demand or weakening supply, or as a

result of changes in inflation or interest rates. This is the opposite of depreciation, which is a decrease over time.

Literary appreciation refers to the evaluation of works of literature as an academic and intellectual exercise. It is the process by which the recipient of a work of literature acquires an understanding of its theme(s) and subject matter, and obtains insights into the ways in which its formal structure helps realise them. Other terms used in place of literary appreciation include “literary criticism,” “literary exegesis” and “textual analysis. In literary studies, a highly-developed capacity for literary appreciation is crucial to an understanding of the texts that are prescribed for the courses. Like any other form of analysis, literary appreciation has its own methodology, technical terms and varieties of approach, and a proper understanding of them is crucial to success.

### **Concept of Encryption**

In cryptography, **encryption** is the process of encoding a message or information in such a way that only authorized parties can access it. Encryption does not itself prevent interference, but denies the intelligible content to a would-be interceptor. In an encryption scheme, the intended information or message, referred to as plaintext, is encrypted using an encryption algorithm, generating cipher-text that can only be read if decrypted. For technical reasons, an encryption scheme usually uses a pseudo-random encryption key generated by an algorithm. It is in principle possible to decrypt the message without possessing the key, but, for a well-designed encryption scheme, considerable computational resources and skills are required. An authorized recipient can easily decrypt the message with the key provided by the originator to recipients but not to unauthorized users.

Encryption has long been used by militaries and governments to facilitate secret communication. It is now commonly used in protecting information within many kinds of civilian systems. Encryption is also used to protect data in transit, for example data being transferred via networks (e.g. the Internet, e-commerce), mobile telephones, wireless microphones, wireless intercom

systems, Bluetooth devices and bank automatic teller machines. There have been numerous reports of data in transit being intercepted in recent years. Data should also be encrypted when transmitted across networks in order to protect against eavesdropping of network traffic by unauthorized users.

Encryption, by itself, can protect the confidentiality of messages, but other techniques are still needed to protect the integrity and authenticity of a message; for example, verification of a Message Authentication Code (MAC) or a digital signature. Standards for cryptographic software and hardware to perform encryption are widely available, but successfully using encryption to ensure security may be a challenging problem. A single error in system design or execution can allow successful attacks. Sometimes an adversary can obtain unencrypted information without directly undoing the encryption. Digital signature and encryption must be applied to the cipher-text when it is created (typically on the same device used to compose the message) to avoid tampering; otherwise any node between the sender and the encryption agent could potentially tamper with it. Encrypting at the time of creation is only secure if the encryption device itself has not been tampered with.

### **Concept of Matrix**

*Matrix*, related to the Latin word for "mother," originally meant "pregnant animal" or "breeding female" and was later generalized to mean "womb." Today, *matrix* includes any nurturing or supportive setting or substance usually within the fields of math and the sciences — except in the cinematic trilogy starring Keanu Reeves, of course. *Matrixes* is an acceptable plural form, but you can use *matrices* if you want to show off your knowledge of Latin noun endings. At an archaeological dig, the *matrix* is the soil surrounding the site. Biologists use the phrase "nuclear *matrix*" to refer to the material left behind after DNA is extracted from a cell's nucleus. A *matrix* is an environment or structure in which something originates or develops. The proverb, by its structure, also provides a moral and a code of conduct. Most folktales either with a proverb or can be associated with one of those wisdom sayings. There is a

lesson to be learnt that is often related to practical daily experiences.

### **Concept of Expression**

Expression is an act, process, or instance of representing in a medium utterance. It can be something that manifests, embodies, or symbolizes something else. It can be describe as a mode, means, or use of significant representation or symbolism; especially felicitous or vivid indication or depiction of mood or sentiment

### **Concept of Wisdom**

Wisdom or sapience is the ability to think and act using knowledge, experience, understanding, common sense, and insight. There appears to be consensus that wisdom is associated with attributes such as compassion, experiential self-knowledge, non-attachment and virtues such as ethics and benevolence.

Wisdom has been defined in many different ways, a variety of measurement scales have been developed, and several subtypes of wisdom have been proposed. Out of these, *phronesis* and *sophia* are two key subtypes of wisdom. *Phronesis* refers to practical knowledge, or the seeking of knowledge to apply to the given circumstance such as an understanding of people, objects, events, situations, and the willingness as well as the ability to apply perception, judgement, and action in keeping with the understanding of what is the optimal course of action. *Sophia* on the other hand refers to “transcendent wisdom” or the “ultimate nature of reality.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Within personality theories, wisdom is usually conceptualized as an advanced stage, if not the final stage, of personality development. Wisdom, in this context, is comparable to “optimal maturity.” Central to Neopiagetian theories of adult thought is the transcendence of the universal truth criterion that characterizes formal logic. This transcendence is common to conceptions such as

dialectical, complementary, and relativistic thinking. Such tolerance of multiple truths (ambiguity), has also been mentioned as a crucial feature of wisdom. Empirical studies in this tradition by Gisela Labouvie-Vief and Deirdre Kramer found that, at least up to middle adulthood, performance increases on such measures of adult thought are observed.

Besides these measures of wisdom as a personality characteristic or as a feature of mature thought, there is also work that attempts to assess wisdom as an expertise concerning the interpretation, conduct, and management of life. This approach is based on lifespan theory, the developmental study of the aging mind and aging personality, research on expert systems, and cultural-historical definitions of wisdom. By integrating these perspectives, wisdom is defined as a system of expert knowledge in the fundamental pragmatics of life. Such knowledge allows for exceptional insight, judgment, and advice involving complex and uncertain matters of the human condition.

The body of knowledge and skills associated with such wisdom entails insights into the quintessential aspects of the human condition, including its biological finitude and cultural conditioning. Wisdom involves a fine-tuned coordination of cognition, motivation, and emotion. More specifically, wisdom-related knowledge and skills can be characterized by a family of five criteria: (1) rich factual knowledge about life, (2) rich procedural knowledge about life, (3) *lifespan contextualism*, the ability to view issues in a lifespan perception, (4) *value relativism*, and (5) awareness and management of uncertainty.

To elicit and measure wisdom-related knowledge and skills in this approach, research participants are presented with difficult life dilemmas. Participants are then asked to “think aloud” about such dilemmas. The five wisdom-related criteria are used to evaluate these protocols. The obtained scores are reliable and provide an approximation of the quantity and quality of wisdom-related knowledge and skills of a given person. When using this wisdom

paradigm to study people who were nominated as wise according to subjective beliefs about wisdom, it was found that wisdom nominees received higher wisdom scores than comparable control samples of various ages and professional backgrounds.

Part of this paradigm also is a general framework outlining the conditions for the development of wisdom as it is reflected in the thoughts and actions of individuals. The empirical work based on this model has produced outcomes consistent with expectations. Specifically, it seems that wisdom-related knowledge and judgment emerge between the age of fourteen and twenty-five. During adulthood, however, growing older is not enough to become wise. When age is combined with wisdom-related experience, such as professional specializations that involve training and experience in matters of life, higher levels of wisdom-related performance were observed. Besides experience, it was found that during adulthood wisdom-related performance was best predicted by openness to experience and measures drawing on both cognition and personality, such as a judicious cognitive style, creativity, and moral reasoning.

### **Significance of Proverbs to the African Society**

From the empirical and theories postulated, wisdom is not assessed by age, even though the experience of age authenticates it, but by prudent reasoning style, inspiration and ethical perception. This is irrespective of whatever profession one chooses as a career. The use of wisdom and expertise abounds in all works of life including the non-civil and spiritual works like divination, soothsaying etc.

When native doctors, soothsayers and diviners want to divine, they start by memorizing some proverbs. These proverbs capture key ideas associated with the gods and help diviners remember the messages. As embodiment of folk wisdom, the proverbs loaned themselves to the gods because they capture universal truths about human experience. The very religious ones require knowledge of the gods for one to use them accordingly. Proverbs open up a dialogue between the diviner and the client, so the client can mirror his/her

situation and realize why the problem exists. One proverb can refer to interconnected problems, especially where human enemies are concerned, to avoid confrontation and the impending tragedy. Proverbs keeps us more to our thoughts and help us avoid what must not be said.

All forms of traditional prayers are said with strings of proverbs. Pouring libations to the gods of fertility, for worship and fruitfulness, is done with proverbs. When the elders are gathered for worship to 'ChukwuAbiama', the supreme God through the deities, they start their prayers with proverbs. It is expected that when the elders are doing this, the young ones learn. While they cannot preside over this, a situation may arise where they are to act as elders, they should do that with expertise as people who got it from the originators.

Although proverbs belong to the familiar and predictable voice of tradition, the multiple ways to interpret them in different new situations bring a lot of unexpected aspects to their use. They represent by no means neutral everyday talk. Proverbs convince, persuade and they give an implicit impression of truth. Still they are not arguments to be verified. Their effects are grounded on unexpected analogies.

More recently, proverbs have been spread by films, music, television and the internet. Proverbs have political power. Prof. Mieder admires the way Martin Luther king Jnr used them to preach non-violence and help Britain and the US unite in the Second World War. Proverbs are also used in the study of Schizophrenia and Alzheimer. People who have some mental issues have difficulty abstracting the metaphor of the proverbs. They take it literally.

It is safe to use proverbs and to lean on authorities and traditional policy, but using proverbs can also be a speech that takes risks. Proverbs can interfere the normal ways of thought or decision. They can be useful tools to strengthen the opinion of a risk taker in the decision-making process when there is no single "right" solution.

The effect of a proverb grounds on generality and the voice of “the third party”. Thus, with a proverb one brings detachment and neutrality into the situations of social interaction. But as the effect on the listener gets stronger the more familiar the proverb is to her or him. The effect depends on how personally the proverb is learned. For example, through proverbs that one hears or uses, it is possible to bring to one’s mind the familiar locution of some important person – mother, grandparent, etc.

The use of proverbs usually supports the maintenance of social hierarchy and control, but in other contexts the same expressions can help to solve problems caused by the questions of authority and power. The use of proverbs can be means to save face in violation of social hierarchy. Explanations are needed especially in situations of retreat or admitting one’s error.

The use of proverbs has an obvious connection to the function of humour as the reliever of tension in different situations. This does not exclude the possibility that proverbs would be used to maintain narrow points of view or to authorize violence. Stereotypes can be kept alive as humoristic proverbial imagery even better than in the serious use of proverbs.

By using proverbs one can emphasize (even quite loudly) feelings of togetherness, but at the same time they may serve as tools of segregation. With a common language people can exclude those who do not belong to the community or those who are not able or willing to share the consensus. In other words, proverbs can strengthen the unity or even narrowness of interpretation. But a proverb can also be a tool for giving a more exact analysis of situations than traditionally expected. They may serve as a way to avoid conventional interpretations of situations. In that case it is not inevitable to conform to the uniform viewpoint of one’s community. With proverbs one can express difference of opinions within the community. They can be used as aphorisms to think differently. As a part of literal culture there are no limits set in advance for their interpretation.

Using proverbs of your own language or dialect has a central function to be a kind of speech that strengthens the identity of the community. This is also true when we consider the ways a subculture or minority uses proverbs. Their specialty is emphasized and compared to the generalizing truths, which are favoured by the dominant culture. On the other hand, the ideas of proverbs are mostly international. Accordingly, the speech using proverbs enables interactivity to bring different people closer to each other and it fades away cultural boundaries. Already the observation that different people can have the same kind of practice to use proverbs in their social interaction will help to decrease the experience of strangeness. The general impression of understanding constructs internationality, even if it would be considered impossible for “outsiders” to understand any single proverb of your own nation or subculture.

There is a widespread opinion that the proverb plays an important role in language teaching as a part of gaining cultural knowledge, metaphorical understanding and communicative competence.

Proverbs are a part of every language as well as every culture. Proverbs have been used to spread knowledge, wisdom and truths about life from ancient times up until now. They have been considered an important part of the fostering of children, as they signal moral values and exhort common behavior. Proverbs belong to the traditional verbal folklore genres and the wisdom of proverbs has been guidance for people worldwide in their social interaction throughout the ages. Proverbs are concise, easy to remember and useful in every situation in life due to their content of everyday experiences.

Here there is the general description of the proverb: “A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and *memorisable* form and which is handed down from generation to generation.”

According to Mieder (2004), proverbs have been used and should be used in teaching as didactic tools because of their content of educational wisdom. When it comes to foreign language learning, proverbs play a role in the teaching as a part of cultural and metaphorical learning. Linguists also claim that the use of proverbs in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language is important for the learners' ability to communicate effectively.

The use of proverbs and its declining in the teaching of modern languages has long been discussed.

Rowland (1926) points that proverbs "stick in the mind", "build up vocabulary", "illustrate admirably the phraseology and idiomatic expressions of the foreign tongue", "and contribute gradually to a surer feeling for the foreign tongue", proverbs "consume very little time".

It was also said that proverbs are not only melodic and witty, possessed with rhythm and imagery; proverbs also reflect "patterns of thought". As proverbs are universal, there are analogous proverbs in different nations that have related cultural patterns. Proverbs are therefore useful in the students' discussions of cultural ideas when they compare the proverbs' equivalents in different languages.

But as experience shows, the incorporation of proverbs in the foreign language classroom is rare. The suitability of proverbs in teaching is due to their form; they are pithy and easy to learn, they often rhyme and contain repetition figures like alliteration and assonance.

Some scholars propose the use of proverbs in a range of areas within language teaching: grammar and syntax, phonetics, vocabulary development, culture, reading, speaking and writing. They state that proverbs, besides being an important part of culture, also are an important tool for effective communication and for the comprehension of different spoken and written discourses.

The person who does not acquire competence in using proverbs will be limited in conversation, will have difficulty comprehending a

wide variety of printed matter, radio, television, songs etc., and will not understand proverb parodies which presuppose a familiarity with a stock proverb.

It is considered that both the structure and the content of proverbs are useful in ESL teaching especially when it comes to teaching and understanding of culture, as proverbs conveys the values and metaphors shared by a culture. Proverbs are also useful in teaching the differences between spoken and written language, something that often confuses language learners; they use conversational style when they write. Proverbs are one way to help the students to clarify the distinction between oral and written English.

One of the scholars compares the content of proverbs, which includes the metaphors contained in them, to “a miniature of what it means to know a second language”. He points out that proverbial competence both requires knowledge of the linguistic structure of a target language (i.e. morphology, syntax, lexicon, pronunciation, and semantics) and of the rules and regulations that are necessary to be able to use a proverb accurately.

His conclusion is that the processing of proverbial language involves all the functions of both the right and the left hemisphere of the brain. The function of the left hemisphere is to interpret the incoming linguistic data, i.e. text, while the right hemisphere supports the understanding of context. Due to the metaphorical content of a proverb, the function of the right hemisphere is to create a literal meaning with the help of the contextual features in which the proverb is used, while the left hemisphere processes the linguistic structure of the proverb. Proverbs therefore serve an important purpose in the second-language classroom.

Proverbs change with time and culture. Some old proverbs are not in use any longer because they reflect a culture that no longer exists. However, new proverbs that reflect the contemporary society are created instead, e.g. *Garbage in, garbage out*, a proverb created due to our computerized time. Old proverbs are also used as so called anti-proverbs today, i.e. “parodied, twisted, or fractured proverbs

that reveal humorous or satirical speech play with traditional proverbial wisdom”.

Work with proverbs and sayings at the lessons not only helps to diversify educational process and to make it brighter and interesting. Moreover it helps to solve a number of very important educational problems: proverbs in the classroom can improve students’ learning experiences, their language skills, and their understanding of themselves and the world. This happens because:

Proverbs provide an opportunity for students to be knowledgeable experts as well as learners.

Proverbs provide an opportunity for students to learn about each other and their shared values.

Proverbs provide an opportunity for students to gain insight as they discuss their experiences and work out their understanding of proverb meanings.

Proverbs provide an opportunity for students to use their home culture as a stepping stone into school culture.

Proverbs provide an opportunity to improve thinking and writing as students both provide and receive information.

### **Conclusion**

While some proverbs are attributable, the majority have mainly spread through words of mouth. It is usually impossible to identify the originator of a proverb or ascertain the exact time of the proverb’s entry into oral tradition. Even in cases where it’s pretty obvious that a proverb comes from a specific work of literature or a popular song or a movie or a political speech or the quip of a notable quipster, we still can’t be sure if the ostensible source was itself repeating an expression already in oral tradition. While many proverbs fall into disuse, a great many do not and new ones are continually being coined and used. Not all proverbs conform to the description of its being used as universal truths. Proverbs are very useful and painless way of dealing with the situations and problems

that life brings. By quoting a proverb, we can take the sting out of anything. We simply cannot live without proverbs and we shouldn't forget it. Proverbs are just like words, they are ready made and almost automatic. They are stored in you like a kind of phrase repertoire. The literary significance of proverbs in Africa is brought out by their close connection with other forms of oral literature. Most proverbs originated from folk stories.

Finally, Thomas Aquinas decreed, "of all the pursuits open to men, the search for wisdom is most perfect, more sublime, more profitable, and full of joy." The word 'wise' is used in everyday language and the intended or perceived meaning may differ somewhat depending on the context. In the Igbo traditional society, the use of 'ILU' (proverb) is an inspiring way to express wisdom. A literal man is termed a foreigner and 'an *aboki*'. He is regarded as one who lacks understanding. He finds it difficult to talk in the midst of his kinsmen. It is blatant folly for a titled Igbo man to speak without wisdom. Proverb is indeed the palm oil with which words are eaten. Knowledge is flour, but wisdom is the bread. Wisdom is the daughter of experience. Wisdom is a treasure, the key whereof is never lost. There is a wisdom of the Head, and there is a wisdom of the Heart. Like water in the desert is wisdom to the soul. Necessity teaches wisdom, while prosperity makes fools and it requires wisdom to understand wisdom.

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