

SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CULTURE AND GENDER ISSUES: THE IGBO CULTURE IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper examines contemporary African culture and gender issues, with specific reference to the sociolinguistic study of the Igbo culture of southeast Nigeria. Since gender issues are one of the most significant aspects of contemporary African culture, the study aims to discover whether Igbo gender issues are properly balanced between male and female genders or skewed in favour of or against a gender. Igbo cultural gender issues examined include defined gender roles, where men are typically the protector of their families and breadwinner while women are caregivers and home keepers; gender issues as embodied in proverbs; gender based cultural practices during marriage, child-upbringing, burial and mourning; and some aspects of language use. The major data for this study were collected through distant and participant observations, and seeking audience with specific actors in cultural issues. Few data materials were sourced from the literature. Analysis of data was by description. One major finding of the research is that although gender issues in contemporary Igbo society cut across both genders, the negative issues are discovered to be skewed against women, especially in language use, proverbs and cultural practices during burial and mourning. Also discovered is that some issues are being affected by modernity, either positively or negatively. The paper, therefore, concludes that gender issues in contemporary African culture, nay Igbo culture, are part of the true definition of our Africanness. While the positive gender issues should be sustained, the negative ones should be allowed to be reformed or swallowed up by modernity.

Keywords: African culture, Proverbs, Gender-based proverbs, Igbo culture, Gender roles

Introduction

When we talk about language, we refer to the communicative element at different level. Language being specifically the attribute of humans for communication and interaction cannot be extricated from the society. Language enhances effective communication and interaction and this in turn results in a cohesion and integration among a given speech community. Knowledge of a language can be the same as being acquainted with the pattern of principles that govern the language. Hence, one can correctly present the true nature of any well-formed sentence of the particular language (Recanati, 2002). Language serves various functions in a

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society. The aspect of linguistics that takes cognizance of this is sociolinguistics. People normally use utterances with implied meaning in their day-to-day communication. To guess that implied meaning, they should know where or when the utterance is stated based on the context, in order to achieve the set objective of the utterance itself. This determines how the addressee's interpretation of what the speaker really wants to address is synchronized. The context of the expression or utterance stimulates the addressee to interpret the meaning of the utterance.

Communication is an important thing and language helps in the daily communication practice by the community. In linguistics, language is an agreed vocal symbol system in the sense that it is used by groups of people in collaboration, communication, and self-identifying. Language is used to convey the ideas of the speaker. Language does not only represent ideas but also represents social identity (Agbedo, 2015).

Sociolinguistics can be described as the study of language in relation to the society. Hence, proverbs are words or statements with deep meaning in language specific. In Igbo language, proverbs play various roles such as; cautioning, directions, counsel, even ironic insults, etc. at this end, this paper tends to view the sociolinguistic study of contemporary African culture and gender issues, from the Igbo culture in perspective. In clear term, it aims as ascertaining the way by which language use, and proverbs are used across both genders in discovering some issues that are being affected by modernity, either positively or negatively. Hence, this paper adopts a descriptive approach in its analysis.

Literature Review

Language

Specifically, language is a medium of communication. According to Sanusi (1996), "Language is a medium of thought". It is a means of expressing of intentions and emotion, reacting to human beings at different times and situation, influence people at different circumstances and so on through the mass media. This shows that communication is an important thing and language helps in the daily communication practice by the community. As Agbedo (2015) states it, "In linguistics, language is an agreed vocal symbol system. It is used by groups of people in collaboration, communication, and self-identifying". Beyond conveying or representing one's ideas, language also represents social identity. Even the songs as used in this paper are elements of language which means that language can be expressed in different ways by various medium. In the words of Hymes (1972), he argues that the study of language must concern itself with describing and analyzing the ability of the native speakers to use language for communication in real situations (communicative competence) rather than limiting itself to describing the potential ability of the ideal speaker/listener to produce grammatically correct sentences (linguistic competence), Speakers of a language in particular communities are able to communicate with each other in a manner which is not only correct but also appropriate to the socio-cultural context. This ability involves a shared knowledge of the linguistic code as well as of the socio-cultural rules, norms and values which guide the conduct and interpretation of speech and other channels of communication in a community. Even though we take the concept of language for granted, it is of extreme importance. It is not

gainsaying that language developed as an oral phenomenon before it becomes written and standardized after which it becomes a tool through which we organize our thoughts into meaningful symbols. Practically, language is the most important form of human communication to many, which has served as the most efficient and versatile means of everyday activity. It is important to note that language is mainly a human activity. When language is used in the society for communication, it points to sociolinguistics which will be discussed in this paper.

Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics as the name implies is the combination of society and linguistics which means the relationship of language and society. Hence, (Wardhaugh, 1986:12) opines that sociolinguistics is the study that is concerned with investigating the relationship between language and society with the goal of a better understanding of the structure of language and of how language functions in communication.

Sociolinguistics by Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2011) is the study of the correlation between linguistic variables and non-linguistic variables that reflect ideologies in communication power among those speaking a language.

According to Matthew (2007), sociolinguistics is generally conceived as the sociology of language, on one hand, and the study of how language is used or evolved in a society on the other hand. Furthermore, Nwala (2008), states that language is an exclusive and unique property of human beings as members of the society, which structures the system to conventionally meet with the daily communication needs of the society and the occupants. This means that language is an indispensable tool for communication among humans in any given society. Subsequently, Trudgill (1974: 32) defines Sociolinguistics as "that part of linguistics which is concerned with language as a social and cultural phenomenon. It investigates the field of language and society and has close connections with the social sciences, especially social psychology, anthropology, human geography and sociology." Furthermore, he states that language can be viewed as a socio-cultural entity and the realization of social competence in connection with the social variables and the manifestation of linguistic variations.

Furthermore, Wardhaugh (2010) opines that sociolinguistics directly studies how language varieties are identified and their uniqueness among groups and classes, distinguishable by identifiable social variables, ethnic allegiance, religious affiliation, social status, gender, age, education, and how adherence to these variables prompt the categorization of communicative varieties. In addition to other scholars, Yule (2010:254), states that sociolinguistics focuses on language which deals with social and cultural phenomenon in the society. It usually explores the field of language and society which are related to social sciences, especially psychology, anthropology, and sociology. As this paper looks out for the proverbs that are used for gender differentiations, it is expedient that the concept of proverb is discussed.

Proverbs

A proverb (from Latin: *proverbium*) is a simple and insightful, traditional saying that expresses a perceived truth based on common sense or experience. Proverbs are based on symbolic or metaphorical language. Metaphors used as an aspect of a teaching method could be effective because they could enhance the conceptualization of abstract ideas. Entwistle (2000) is of the view that metaphors reveal only part of the answers and learners could be actively involved in completing and understanding the meaning of metaphors. It is seen that proverbs encourage curiosity about their meanings. They also exert pressure or, at the least, suggest that ideas should be related to prior knowledge and experience. Explicitly, proverbs communicate in a symbolic way, which is not direct or literal.

In African languages, proverbs are used consciously to educate and to manipulate and persuade. McKenna (1974) describes proverbs as a way in which society warns its members of the dangers of life. Lewis (2011), states that African proverbs are the foundation of social and cultural wisdom and therefore serve as the basis for formulation of concepts that govern the social relations. According to Daniel, Smitherman-Donaldson and Jeremiah (1987), proverbs are central to abstract thinking and reasoning. Nnadi (2009) in his conceptualization of proverbs, sees it as embodiment of wisdom, and beauty on the aggregate, proverb expresses wit, philosophy, vision and wisdom that strike with its beauty which result from its sense, its shortness and the literary devices with which it is embellished. In the words of Boateng (1983:332), a proverb conveys a message in a way in which a child also learns to reflect on the possible meanings of the proverb. It is an indirect way of teaching through which a child does not feel bombarded by rules. Furthermore, Boateng (1983:332) states that ancestors play an important role in giving the proverb strength, in that a phrase such as “It is the ancestors that said...” is sometimes used before a proverb. Boateng (1983:331) also points that proverbs are “validators of traditional procedures and beliefs” and warns that the rejection of black African heritage will leave the black African with a feeling of lost identity.

Oha (1997) studies the semantics of female devaluation in Igbo proverbs. He identifies Igbo proverbs that are face-threatening to women as against those that are in affinity with their face wants and noted the preponderance of the face threatening proverbs over the face preserving ones in relation to women. Using the politeness principle, Oha argues that the expression of the anti-woman bias in Igbo culture suggests patriarchal inferiorization of womanhood. He perceives a stronger masculine presence in Igbo proverbs which imposes the interpretation of proverbs in Igbo discourse. One thing about proverbs is that proverbs conceal and reveal information and often leave one with a question that one has to answer oneself. Proverbs function metaphorically in the same way that visual communication design does.

Contemporary African Culture and Gender Issues

The African culture is in varieties and variables which are enshrined in tangible and intangible aspects. When we talk about tangible aspect, we refer to the physical items of a culture such as food, dressing, etc. but intangible is the unseen but experienced aspect of the culture like language. The word ‘*gender*’ is the state of being male or female. In African society and Igbo in particular, the gender peculiarities and patriarchal construct remain the bane across virtually

all spheres of life in the society because the Igbo society is a ‘*child sensitive*’ one. Patriarchy in the words of Walby (1990) is a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. Ojukwu (2015) simply put patriarchy to mean the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family; extension of male dominance over women in society in general. This implies that males hold power in all the vital institutions of the society, making the women suffer some constraints in the society. Ojukwu (2015: 12) further explaining the greater level of gender sensitivity extents that boys are brought up to see themselves as superior sex to girls and as such, boys feel stronger, more important and indispensable, while the females are trained to see themselves as weaker sex or even as appendages to the men folk. This is as a result of what Ibekwe (2018: 204) calls “natural factor” where she submits that this natural factor of being born a man or a woman places women in a subservient position in society and thus situates them mostly for indoor activities. Williams (1988) and Mahawonku (1988) in Obienusi and Chikwendu (2020) both emphasize these indoor activities of women when they say that ‘*women are the nutritional bedrock of human society, who feed, nurture mankind and manage the home*’.

In the words of Ozumba (2005: 1527), this silent but rigorous school of thought about the patriarchal and matriarchal stereotype was injected into the traditional institution of ndi Igbo which has caused menace over the years. As a result of this, Madunagu (2010: 48) states that female gender encounters various forms of discrimination, physical and emotional torture that pervades all aspects of their life, from childhood till death. This problem of Igbo women is similar to the situation of the women of Zimbabwe. Tsitsi Dangaremba (1988) recognizes the suffering of women in Zimbabwe and uses Tambu’s mother to speak their minds- ‘This business of womanhood is a burden. How could it not be? Aren’t we ones that bear children? When it is like that you can’t Just decide today, I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, When there are sacrifices to be made...’ (p. 16)

Here, womanhood is referred to as ‘business’ because it is seen as an enterprise a woman engages in and gives full time to for life just like a business one does for a living. Womanhood is also described as being a burden and full of sacrifices to the extent that a woman cannot fully decide what to do or have a plan of her own and carry it out the way she wants without being interrupted by responsibilities of the members of her household. Such business like bearing and rearing children, cooking, doing domestic chores (which sometimes not recognized or appreciated), farming, making handicraft, baskets, calabash in farming season; making earthen wares, ornaments like beads, anklets, necklaces and bangles during non-farming and non-harvesting seasons.

To this end, women are being discriminated against in various ways whereby their subordination has actually exposed them to difficult obnoxious practices meted out to them in the name of culture and tradition. However, this happens because the patriarchal institution is given prominence in the scheme of things (like most of their laws or traditions are gender discriminatory), hence, giving no room for equity and freedom. Several cases of the gender issues in Igbo culture are expressed in the use of proverbs which this paper looks out for.

However, due to civilization and modernization, some aspects of the culture have kept evolving including language use, gender issues, etc.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data would be presented according to the classification of context which are; gender-based proverbs during marriage, child-upbringing, burial and mourning, and some aspects of language use.

Burial and Mourning

When it comes to burial and mourning of a man, the woman always face several levels of humiliation from the people especially the husband's brothers (brothers-in-law). In the olden days, the woman will be forced to shave her hair which is a sign of last respect for her husband during the burial; she will be restricted of movement for a long time, and other activities which are not palatable. But when it comes to the burial and mourning of a woman, the man does not face any level of humiliation, rather he gets consolation irrespective on how his wife died. A man's movement is not restricted. He can bury his wife on a Friday, accepts condolences on that same day and on Saturday. Then, goes for outing service on Sunday, stays extra one day being Monday, and goes back to his base on Tuesday if such a man is not home based. It would not look strange to people unlike in the case of a woman who buries her husband. There are proverbs that are used in such situations, such as;

Anya mmiri bu n'obi ka o na-agba nwoke (a man sheds tears in his heart).

Whereas the woman who refuses to shed tears will be seen as hard-hearted, or heartless, or difficult, etc, with suspense as the killer of the husband. So, in the time of mourning, the woman will be forced to shed tears as a proof of brokenness. The man will be seen as normal for not shedding tears in the sense that men are seen as being strong and emotionally stoic. By this stereotypical conception about men, they are expected to suppress their feelings in the time of mourning which can create pressure on them where they are trying to conform to traditional masculine ideals. However, in the contemporary society, this act is being challenged but not as such especially in remote areas of Igbo land.

Nwaanyi di ya nwuru ma buru ukpa jewe ahia, maara ihe gburu di ya (a woman whose husband dies and she takes basket to the market, knows what killed her husband).

When a man dies, it is expected that the woman stays indoor (without going to market) to mourn her husband. But when a woman dies, the man does not stay in-door to mourn his wife. This act has been challenged in the contemporary society which has led to the fair treatment given to a widow but not in all parts of Igbo society.

Ajadu nwaanyi idi ime bu aru (a widow being pregnant is an abomination)

Nwoke gara ira nwanyi no na mkpe na-aku aka n'uzo, o siri na di ya no ebe ahu? (A man that goes in to have sex with a widow and knocks, did he say her husband is there?) These proverbs, however, do not provide counters of the widowers who eventually impregnate women or the

woman who goes in to have sex with a widower. This proves the one-sidedness or biasness in the gender difference in Igbo society. These proverbs also show that in Igbo land, it is only women (widows) that are blamed when it comes to sex matters during mourning period.

Gender Roles

There are times the worth of a man and a woman, including their roles, marriage-family related responsibilities, and personalities, are expressed in both positive and negative perspective using certain proverbs such as;

Agbala galasịa, ọ laa n'useekwu (when a woman is done moving around, she will return to the kitchen). This proverb has likened the end point of a woman's journey in the kitchen. In the olden days, the women have their permanent place and authority in the kitchen, as the men get to the field to fend for the household. However, in today's world, the narrative has changed due to civilization as women like Late Prof. Dora Akunyili (Former Director-General of National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control of Nigeria (NAFDAC), 2001-2008); Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (Nigeria Former Minister for Finance, Budget and National Planning, 2011-2015) and currently the 7th Director-General of World Trade Organisation (WTO); Prof. Kate Omenugha (the current Vice Chancellor of Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State) and others are breaking barriers into leadership and making great impact in the economic world.

Nwata mee nke oma ọ buru ome ka nna ya, mana o mee nke ojoo, ọ buru o yiri nne ya (when a child behaves well, he will be likened to the father, but when he behaves badly, he will be likened to the mother). It is believed that bearing and raising children are mother's roles. As the children grow, they are expected to turn out positive, but if peradventure they do otherwise, the woman will be blamed for it. So, in blaming the woman, the negative attitude of the child will be attributed to the woman. However, if the child turns out positive, the man claims the glory. This proverb creates biasness in the homes against the women/mothers. In today's contemporary society, raising of children has been attributed to both the father and mother, which will give them equal share of whether the blame or glory of the child.

Ewu nwaanyi nwe zuru onwe ya (a goat own by a woman, fends for itself). In Igbo land, it is primarily believed that raising children is the sole duty of a woman whereas the man provides for the family. But by this proverb, the masculine gender does not believe in the efficacy of the training given by a feminine gender. It is assumed that a woman cannot give a holistic and effective training to children. This proverb is being challenged in today's world as the reign of single mothers and feminists is taking the stage irrespective of the negative impacts on the society. Moreover, as the world keeps evolving, some of these defined responsibilities have been shifted, as some women now provide for the family and men take care of the children.

Ma amughị nwoke, agburu echie (if there is no male child, the lineage closes). Here, the male children play the role of continuity of lineage (posterity) and that is why Igbo people place much value on the masculine gender than the feminine gender. The feminine gender was never

accorded any importance in the olden days in Igbo land while without women; there would be no male children in the first place. This singular act made some people to antagonize the need to send a woman to school as it was tagged a waste. Also, this is the reason women are not captured as part of their father's will. They are not given any inheritance in their father's house. But in today's Igbo society, the feminine gender is now more in number in schools than the masculine gender; and many families are beginning to extend father's inheritance to females. This is to say that the feminine gender has proven its vital role in the society which has lowered the perspective of this proverb.

Ego bu mma nwoke (money is the beauty of a man). In Igbo society, the major role a man plays is being the breadwinner who caters for the family. And in doing that, money is involved. Whenever a man is financially bouyant, he tends to be on top of the game as he will be worshipped by all asundry. Nobody cares about his behaviour, origin, or sources, but praise and accord him all the necessary respect. The character of a man (unlike a woman, as seen in Proverb 10) most times is not in check because of the maaner of prevalent stereotypical description he assumes in Igbo society, which should be considered in the modern world.

Ezigbo àgwà bu mma nwaanyi (good character is the beauty of a woman). In the contrast of the male's '*ego bu mma nwoke*' (as in Proverb 9), the measure of a woman's worth is basically her character. No man considers a woman beautiful if not through the lens of her character. However, in today's world, physcial beauty, financial strenght, etc are also considered when measuring the worth of a woman. Meanwhile, good character is a role every man and every woman should play in order to build strong relationship and contribute positively to society, not just women as the above proverb depicts. But unfortunately, men are seen as flawless in Igbo society which is depicted in one of her addages, *nwoke adi njo* 'no man is bad'. This is one of such sayigs which shouldbe allowed be reforming or swallowing up by modernity.

Nwoke lusia ogu, nwaanyi enwere akuko (when a man is done fighting, a woman tells the story).

Through this proverb men are stereoptically seen as champions and fighters, whereas women are regarded storytellers. Women are seen as weak people who are less busy and have enough time to gossip and tell stories which is not true in most cases. This religates the women to the background as those who are not achievers. However, in the contemporaray Igbo society, the women have matched to the forefront of high achievers in the society, some in their homes are breadwinners thereby changing the narratives.

Marriage

Onye kwuru ugwo isi nwaanyi nwe ya (he who pays a woman's bride price, owns her).

There is a superiority complex which has possessed some men over women. This set of men sees paying bride price of a woman as a tool of enslaving the woman. Many Igbo men still use this in intimidating their wives. Because they assume that they own women and everything they have, some men demand for the salaries of their wives from them, expect the women to bow and beg them for their needs. Here, some women have no say but to accept the patriarch nature tradition has placed on men over them. Due to modernization, such narrative is being

challenged as women are now seen as partners in the marriage and not a mere slave. Though in some homes, women still struggle for equity which at times result to domestic violence in return.

Nwata nwaanyi zachaa onye muru, o zawa onye na- alu (a lady after answering whose child, will later answers whose wife).

In the olden days, it is believed that a woman has two names to answer in lifetime- the father's and husband's names. This made marriage the priority of the women in the olden days. It caused some women then to marry out of their will and choice as they were getting older. This is because they know the kind of insult and humiliation they would face if they eventually remain in their father's house without change of name as a result of marriage. However, in the contemporary society, feminine gender has fought for prestige and relevance beyond marriage which has birthed feminist movement and more. In other words, without marriage, a woman can still be relevant in the society, and accomplish her God-given purpose in life without husband-children's distractions even.

Ugwu nwaanyi bu di ya (the prestige of a woman is her husband).

In those days, it is believed that a woman does not have any prestige or respect except when she marries. So, a woman is only accorded respect when she marries. In the contemporary society, feminine gender has fought for prestige beyond marriage.

Nwa agboghọ nọkarịa na be nne ya, o ghorọ amosu (a lady who stays too long in her parent's home without getting married, turns to a witch).

In the olden days in Igbo land, the relevance of a feminine gender is so much attached to marriage. This put much pressure on the feminine to marry and leave their *fathers' houses*. However, this proverb refers to the abode of a lady to be that pertaining to her mother- *be nne ya* 'her mother's house' (feminine gender) instead of *be nna ya* 'her father's house' (masculine gender). What does this imply? Could it be that her overstay is the fault of her mother? No. It is just that women are being relegated in Igbo society and taken as cause of misfortune when the situation of a child is a negative one (cf. Proverb 6). In today's world, due to civilization and modernization, the feminine gender is brutally fighting the much relevance attached to them at the point of marriage.

16. *Onye nwe nwaanyi nwe ihe ya* (he who owns a woman, owns her possessions).

This proverb is used by the masculine gender to denounce the right of ownership to a feminine gender. In marriage setting, the woman has no property accorded to her irrespective of her contribution to the growth or acquisition of them. At such, the man can decide to put the woman away without any property which has broken many women. This proverb has been challenged in the contemporary society whereby through the aid of the court (judicial system), the woman secures the ownership of properties even in marriage.

Other Language Use

Here, we consider how spoken variations of language are routinely employed by its native speakers; it refers to the collective habits of a language's native speakers. In Igbo cultural setting, women are restricted on how they use certain words unlike men. Such words like

private body parts- penis, vagina, and so on. For instance, men in their course of discussion freely use these words even in open places and public gatherings. But women would not call those private parts the actual names they bear; rather, they use more pleasant names to refer to them.

Okọ kọwa nwaanyi n'otu ya, e were amu kọọ ya (if a woman's vagina begins to scratch her, the penis is used to scratch it)

Igbo men say it this way without anyone around feeling or being offended. But when an Igbo woman says it, people around would see it as taboo or that such a woman has no respect. This makes Igbo women to find alternate names for such words and would render the above proverb as-

Okọ kọwa nwaanyi n'ihu ukwu ya, e were odogwu kọọ ya (if a woman's vagina begins to scratch her, the penis is used to scratch it). The vagina rendered as 'ihu ukwu' (front part of a woman's leg); and penis as 'odogwu'.

Nwoke na-ara nwanyi ajadu a naghị atụ ujo ebe o maara ebe di ya nọ (a man that is having sex with a widow does not fear because he knows where her husband is [in grave])

Here, there is nothing wrong when it is a man that goes in to have sex with a woman that lost her husband. He even does that without fear. The Igbo society sees that as normal but when it is a woman that lost her husband that goes to have sex with any man at all, it becomes a heavy crime. This still exists in the contemporary Igbo society and needs to be addressed. Anything called or seen as crime or taboo should be a taboo for everyone, both for male and female.

Ma nwoke erighi ariri, ya na nwaanyi agaghị ebi (if a man cannot condone wrath, he can't live with a woman).

This proverb poses a woman as an agent of wrath, pain, and hardship to a man, as if men are perfect and cannot cause wrath. This has birthed a negative mindset even unto the up-growing men as some are skeptical about getting married as a result of what they have heard about women from some of the married man through the channel of this proverb. But in contemporary times, men are mostly the agents of domestic violence; meaning that any woman who cannot condone wrath, she cannot live with a man.

From the above presented and analyzed data, it can be seen that some of the proverbs are being challenged by modernization and civilization in the contemporary Igbo society. More of the proverbs support the ego and positivity of the masculine gender such as; (examples 8, 11, 12), whereas many of feminine gender-based proverbs point towards humiliation, intimidation, etc such as (examples 11, 16, 20). This has brought about revolts in several quarters of life endeavor both negatively and positively. Positively, in the sense that women work harder to add more values to themselves, and to the society beyond the residency of kitchen as stated in (example 5). Negatively, this is seen as certain moves have brought distortion in the society especially in the family settings.

Summary and Conclusion

In Igbo culture, one of the areas of study is gender issues as there have been issues emanating from the gender differences which are becoming study of concern. In this paper, a sociolinguistic study of contemporary African culture and gender issues from the Igbo culture in perspective, proverbs and some other language uses are used across both genders (male and female) in examining some issues related to gender in Igbo. Since gender issues are one of the most significant aspects of contemporary African culture, the study has x-rayed whether Igbo gender issues are properly balanced between male and female genders or skewed in favour of or against a gender. Igbo cultural gender issues examined include defined gender roles, where men are typically the protector and breadwinner of families while women are caregivers and home keepers; gender issues as embodied in proverbs; gender based cultural practices during marriage, child-upbringing, burial and mourning.

Proverbs are majorly used in this paper to mirror these gender related issues because they are words of deep understanding whose meaning have several expressive roles, and in Igbo each situation has proverbs suitable for it showing how significant proverbs are in the language. Through this paper, we see how proverbs are used across both genders in discovering some issues that are being affected by modernity, either positively or negatively. Findings reveal that majority of the proverbs give notice of positive aspect of the masculine gender while certain proverbs despise and give negative impressions of the feminine gender.

In conclusion, beyond very many aspects of proverbs in Igbo land, this paper has thrown more light on this dimension on how proverbs and other language use can be used to point to gender issues in highlighting the positive and negative sides of the both genders. It is observed that although gender issues in contemporary Igbo society cut across both genders, the negative issues are discovered to be skewed mostly against women. The paper, therefore, recommends while the positive gender issues should be sustained, the negative ones should be allowed to be reformed or swallowed up by modernity.

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