

## Stylistic analyses of Igbo proverbs and riddles

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### **Abstract**

*Igbo proverbs and riddles are replete with stylistic features: tonal and lexical contrasts, repetitions, sound symbolisms, tonal rhymes, assonance, and consonance. This stylistic analysis of selected Igbo proverbs and riddles investigates these features. The main objective is to illustrate the aesthetic sound, tonal and lexical combinations characterizing these sub-genres. The data were collected from diverse sources over a period of three months (December, 2017 - February, 2018). The proverbs were got mainly during village meetings and traditional ceremonies like marriage and title taking. The riddles and some proverbs were provided by the researchers who are Igbo native speakers, as these sub-genres are within the public domain, while some were from published collections of these Igbo sub-genres. We found that tones play a crucial role as there are tonal contrasts in the data - aji HH 'hair', aji HL 'woolly garment'. For lexical contrasts, we see elu HS 'up', ala LL 'down'; tonal rhyming example as in omume LHH 'doing', obube LHH 'crying'. The repetition of the sound [a] in aka aja aja HH HH SS 'soiled hands' accounts for assonance while the repetition of the sound [ɲw] 'nw' in nwune nwune HH HH, nwune nwune LL LL exemplifies consonance. Furthermore, these rich traditional sub-genres are fast eroding from Igbo social discourses because 'modern' Igbo people scarcely use nor transmit them to their children since the advent of technology, like television and*

*handset phones. Renewed and elaborate social use of these sub-genres is necessary to develop and preserve them for posterity.*

## **1. Introduction**

Proverbs and riddles are very important in the language of any society. Whereas riddles are often employed by the young for learning wisdom, especially through the observation of natural phenomena, proverbs are mainly for the use and consumption of the adult population. Proverbs and riddles are sub-genres of oral literature which are passed on from one generation to another. Nobody can claim their origins or authorships. They are, therefore, said to belong to the public domain. What Olusegun (2017:1) says about the proverb in the Yoruba language can be generalized to most languages, including the Igbo language:

One of the oldest genres of oral literature held so dear by the Yoruba people is the proverb, hence speakers, writers and general users of the Yoruba language rely maximally on the use of proverbs to articulate their views and opinions philosophically to educate, entertain, admonish and, on the general note, to oil the wheel of interactions in virtually all their quotidian activities.

Nnyigide (2016:203) posits that proverbs are very essential in Igbo speech. According to her, not even modernity and technological advancement could erode their usages in speech, especially that of the elderly. She likened any speech or literary work devoid of appropriate proverbs to “ofe e jighi nnu tee” -

soup prepared without salt. This underscores the importance of proverbs in the language.

However, it is disheartening that these rich traditional sub-genres are fast eroding from Igbo social discourses because the ‘modern’ Igbo people, that is, the majority of those who have acquired Western education comprising of adults and youth alike, scarcely use them to the effect that their speeches are devoid of the stylistic devices, like, metaphors, similes, paradoxes, etc. embedded in these rich traditional sub-genres. Such adults lack the art of proverb usage in their conversations even in high occasions, like traditional marriage and title taking that demand profuse use of appropriate proverbs and other figures of speech that elevate such traditional ceremonies and mark adults out as custodians of Igbo culture. Consequently, these ‘modern’ Igbo people, who are seen in the Igbo speech community to speak too plainly like untutored strangers, are rarely called upon or allowed to speak at serious traditional occasions because their ‘empty exhibitions’ are highly frowned at by the aged and the well groomed in the Igbo society. It is noted that the nonchalant attitudes towards the Igbo language (see Nwankwere, A.U.N., Mmadike and Eme, 2017 on poor attitudes of the Igbo) exhibited by the ‘modern’ Igbo is an aftermath of the advent of technology, for instance the television and currently the handset telephone that have led to the relegation and abandonment of Igbo traditional entertainment at moonlight settings for folktales, games and other plays. As a result, Igbo people stopped engaging in their traditional moonlight gatherings during which time they engage in various types of cultural entertainment, exchange folktales and engage the children and youth in the use of riddles and other sub-genres. Consequently, this aspect of entertainment among the Igbo people is seen to be fast going into complete

extinction and needs to be purposely brought back into the limelight in the scheme of things for extended use in Igbo soivial life in current times.

The paper aims at illustrating the aesthetics in some selected Igbo proverbs and riddles, and through this way showcase the wisdom of our forebears and the richness of the Igbo language for which all the Igbo must embrace their usage. Proverb is a wise saying requiring very deep thought or reflection for its proper understanding. Eze and Ossai (2019) see proverb as one of the universal media of communication as well as a vehicle of traditional wisdom and statement. The Igbo have a popular saying that proverb is the palm oil with which words are eaten. According to Udu and Shagba (2017), proverbs have aesthetic quality and compelling effect on listeners, and so “people pay more attention to proverbial expression than plain language”. No wonder adults usually engage them to give their speeches the mature and intelligent touches they desire. On this, Ushie and Tanyi (2017) say of Bekwarra and Ejagham proverbs, “They are commonly deployed by home grown and communicatively competent Bekwarra and Ejagham speakers in private and public spheres depending on the maturity of the audience.” However, in terms of riddles, they are believed to be popular among children and adolescents.

Generally, it is said that riddles are often employed by or directed to children or the youth for them to learn wisdom, especially through the observation of natural phenomena. Nwadike (2003) agrees with this view, explaining that the Igbo use riddles in the form of questions, stories, difficult words or deep expressions accompanied by explanations to teach their young ones to be wise and atuned to their natural environment or habitat. Okafo and Ewelukwa (2008) add that riddles provide

entertainment to the Igbo, particularly during moonlight nights and are highly significant in learning because they sharpen the brain and train children in the art of questioning. Mbah and Mbah (2007) contains an extensive study on riddles. They describe riddles as a genre with a question and answer pattern. The question part uses one figure of speech or rhetorical question to give some information, describe an object, action or situation while the answer part consists of a word or plain statement employing decoded message. They further note that riddles employ several stylistic devices, like, metaphors, similes, paradoxes, etc.

In his description of stylistics, Simpson (2004:2) explains that language is very important to stylisticians because the various language forms, patterns and levels are invaluable in textual function, a gateway to the interpretation of texts. Though linguistic features do not constitute the meaning of a text, they give impetus to stylistic interpretation and certain types of meaning. In modern times, stylists study not only literature, but other areas of creativity and language use like advertising, journalism, popular music and casual conversation.

Our paper borders on stylistics, as it is a stylistic analysis of some selected Igbo proverbs and riddles which usually consist of coded interpretations and meanings. Stylistics, as we employ it in this study, is what Crystal (2003:440) calls ‘literary stylistics’, which, according to him, “deals with the variations characteristic of literature as a genre and of the ‘style’ of individual authors.” The style of individual creative artists like poets, playwrights, novelists and music composers is defined or, at least, influenced by their personality. For instance, writing on Dan Agu’s style in teaching and mentorship as a musicologist, Sunday-Kanu (2017:30) has this to say, “The personality of Dan Agu cannot be

separated from his style...” Just as the style of an artist tells much about his personality, the style of a literary work, like proverbs or riddles, characterizes it and places it in its appropriate class of literary genres.

Unlike many other modern literary works like novels, poems and plays whose authors are known, the authors of proverbs and riddles are not known. What we know is that they originated during the period of our forebears, who painstakingly handed them to their children, who in turn handed them over to their own children. In this way, they were handed down to us. Even though new proverbs and riddles incorporating modern ideas and objects are noticed to have diffused into the genres, their authorships are still unknown. We cannot, therefore, study the style of their authors since we do not know them. We can only study the proverbs and riddles in order to illustrate their stylistic features, for we align with Edem’s (2017:1) claim that it is through stylistics that the intuitive insight of the audience or readers of a literary piece are awakened, making them develop an appreciation of language. For Batool et al (2014), cited in Onyemaechi (2014:118), “Style is a primary aspect of any literary piece...”

The paper delimits the study to tonal and lexical contrasts, repetition, sound symbolism, tonal rhyme, assonance, and consonance that characterize the selected proverbs and riddles. The collection of data for the study spanned from December 2017 to February 2018, a period of three months. The data were collected from diverse sources. For instance, as these genres are within the public domain, the riddles and a few of the proverbs were provided by the researchers who are Igbo native speakers. Though, we got a few of them from available published compiled sources of proverbs and riddles, like Mbah and Mbah (2007),

most of the proverbs that form part of the data were got mainly during village meetings and traditional ceremonies such as marriage and title taking.

## **2.1 Works on stylistics**

Simpson (2014:3-4) defines stylistics as “a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language.” He goes on to say that we do stylistics so as to “explore creativity in language use.” Following this, studies have been conducted in the analyses of both written and oral literary genres. According to Finnegan (1979:2), “there is no clear-cut line between ‘oral’ and ‘written’ literature, and when one tries to differentiate between them ... it becomes clear that there are constant overlaps.”

A stylistic and pragmatic study of proverbs in Kipsigis was embarked on by Soi (2014). The study focuses on the analysis of the rhetorical devices found in the proverb data, the function of proverbs in the society under study and the functions of the proverbs within the framework of Relevance Theory. Soi asserts that Kipsigis proverbs are typified by several stylistic devices. For instance, there are sound patterns like alliteration, assonance and consonance. According to her, “these sound patterns make these proverbs to be musical, rhythmical, memorable and generally pleasant to listen to” (Soi 2014:68).

Osundare’s *The eyes of the earth* forms the study of Oyali (2006). In the anthology, Oyali investigates the linguistic deviations at the morpho-lexical, syntactic and semantic levels of linguistic analysis. According to Oyali (2006), this goes contrary to the opinion in certain quarters about the exclusion of poetry from linguistic analyses. However, the study shows evidence of deviance at the various levels of analyses and a preponderance of

phonological and structural repetitions which characterize other literary genres.

Fatuase's (2015) paper examines some bridal chants as a sub-genre of Yoruba oral poetry. This sub-genre is said to be used in preparing an intended bride for the marital transition. In terms of stylistic features, these chants are found to be replete with the open vowel /e/, produced with open lips, signifying disbelief and surprise. The extra-ordinary presence of the bilabial nasal /m/ is said to indicate murmuring and sobbing, while the prevalence of the plosives /k, g/ makes the bride to be to stammer. The bilabial plosive /b/ and the sound /gb/ suggest the notion of child bearing. In concluding his study, Fatuase (2015:25) states that "the sound structure of the chant is phonological. The choice of the poet in this phonemic juxtaposition and tonal variation is to create parallelism ... rhetoric ... repetition," among others.

The Bette proverbs in Ashipu (2015:4) are profuse with both consonant and vowel repetition. The proverbs also provide "words or lexical items that serve ideophonic purposes. They constitute sounds that are symbolically linked with certain semantic referents [and] physical attributes in Nigerian cultures." The consonant and vowel features associated with the Bette proverbs are said to be designed to facilitate their memorable nature.

A stylistic investigation of the narrative strategies employed by Achebe in *Anthills of the Savannah* is the focus of Onyemaechi (2014). The paper shows that Achebe's use of various narrative techniques and strategies such as juxtaposition, retrospect, eye-witness account, analogy, contrast and allusion enabled him to vividly present the society that, though ruled by a cruel and oppressive dictator, was going through a political transition. According to her, "The narrative techniques employed

in the novel have succeeded in setting a converging pattern for the narrative by knitting the storyline together from different perspectives for the basic elements constituting narrative in stylistics – the action and the agent” (p.128).

Edem (2015) studies reiteration as a stylistic device and its function in the poetry of Tanure Ojaide and Benji Egede. He claims that reiteration, a stylistic device that gives logical emphasis through which the reader is made to focus his attention on the key words in the text, “forms an essential aspect of the language of literature and also a poet’s idiolect” (p.29). For him, both poets make extensive use of reiteration which, among other things, helps the reader to easily understand the poets’ poems.

Discourse-stylistic approach is applied by Aluya and Ocholor (2017) to the analysis of the use of rhetorical questions (RQs) in nine of Osundare’s essays in *Dialogue with my Country*. They see Osundare’s application of RQs as effective. They point out that an RQ does not anticipate an answer, but stylistically makes a point to be prominent, interesting and powerful. RQs, therefore, contribute in capturing the readers’ attention.

Lamido and Abdulqadeer’s (2017) work is a comparative stylistic analysis of intensive and extensive complexity in Hausa old fiction and Hausa modern novels. They explain that intensive complexity arises when an author “necessarily or unnecessarily makes a phrase long and wordy in structure”, while extensive complexity is when a complex sentence is expanded to have many subordinate clauses as a result of either the author’s attempt to more vividly explain his thoughts or to incorporate some flashbacks. The paper discovers that whereas both Hausa traditional fiction and modern novels use intensive complexity, it is found more in modern novels than in traditional fiction. Also, only in modern novels is extensive complexity found.

Although these reviewed works are related to our present study in one way or the other, none is a stylistic analysis of Igbo proverbs and riddles, with the objective for illustrating the aesthetic stylistic features like tonal and lexical contrasts, tonal rhyme, assonance, and consonance that characterize these Igbo proverbs and riddles.

### 3.1 Data presentation

We present the data for the study in two tables. Table 1 contains the selected Igbo proverbs, their literal meaning and English gloss. There are twenty five proverbs in all. Twenty Igbo riddles and their English gloss form the data presented in Table 2. The answers to the riddles are written in italics for easy identification. The tone marking convention adopted is leaving high tone (H) unmarked, using grave accent [ ` ] for low tone (L) and macron [ ¯ ] for downstep or step tone (S). It is important to note that a number of people, like, Nwadike (2003), Umezi (2005), Mbah and Mbah (2007), have published compilations of Igbo oral genres. While we have selected from them, we observe that the ones we elicited are also contained in these published compilations. Also note that we tried to maintain the standard Igbo spelling and tone of the data; though some of them are left in their dialectal forms.

#### 3.1.1 Proverbs

**Table 1 Proverbs and their meaning**

SN	Proverbs	Literal meaning	Gloss
1.	Anya kp̄ōr̄ō ākp̄ō alāgh̄ī n'iyì n'ihì nà ọ kà òkwà n'isi.	A blind eye is not totally wasted because it is still in the head.	Some damaged valuables can still be put into use.

2.	Òke òhjá kaa nkā, ò nùba ara nkwā yā.	When a bushrat gets quite old, it begins to suck the breast of its own offspring.	Elderly parents desire the care of their children.
3.	Mà onwụ egbūghị jì e jìrì chọ àjà, ò ghaghị ipū òmē.	If death does not kill a piece of yam used for sacrifice, it must surely sprout.	One that has a positive endurance always has a cause to smile at last.
4.	Ekwē ēkwē nà- èkwe n'ute ekwēē.	An obstinate person agrees in a death mat.	An obstinate person certainly meets his doom.
5.	Kà nwune nwune dị òtu à, nwùnè nwùnè ò dị òtu òlè?	If 'nwune nwune' is like this, how will 'nwùnè nwùnè' be?	If the aroma is so enticing, how delicious will the broth be/If the sight is so good, how would its taste be?
6.	Egbùgbèrèonū adīghị mmā kà ò nòrò kà mmīrī maa ezē.	The lips cannot be present while the teeth are beaten by the rain.	Negligence of duty is inexcusable.
7.	Mà ojì aghāghị ughā, osè agāghị àghā ughā.	If the colanut does not lie, then the pepper will also not lie./If the colanut keeps to the agreement, pepper will also keep to the	Mutual cooperation and friendship thrive on honesty and trust.

		agreement.	
8.	Agwọ̀bị kwaa elū kwaa àlà, ànyị mààrà olu diḡkpā ọkụkò.	However the cobra crows up and down, we know the voice of a cock.	One can always identify a positive value in the cacophony of values.
9.	Kpègbuo mmūḡ kpègbuo mmaḡ kpègbùchàrà, ùdèlè èjupùta eluigwē.	When a person wins a case both against the living and the dead, multitudes of vultures usually appear in the sky to give testimony.	Whoever wins in all cases enjoys an overwhelming support.
10.	A tṣiwa aji dī n'aji, ọmā aji àgbara ọtḡ.	When/If the wool of a woollen garment is to be all plucked out, the wearer of the garment goes naked.	He who counts someone's wrongs can hardly see any good in that person.
11.	E bibe ozū aka kà a hà nwere yā, ò tie mbadamba.	If all the relatives of the dead lay their hands on the corpse, it gets flattened.	.A few persons should be delegated to handle a delicate issue on behalf of all or else the issue will be botched up.
12.	Onye biāarā nī ọrụ duru nnwa nā-ebe ọbūbē obube, m gawara	If my work partner comes to my farm with a crying baby, when it comes to	It is better to retaliate a deliberate mischief (to serve as a

	yā èwèrè nī ọgū nā-afìọpū afìọpū.	his/her turn, I will take with me a hoe whose blade falls off.	deterrent in future).
13.	Òkwe ngwa ñgwà nà-èkwe ñke ọ gààrà ijū, ebe ọju ngwa ñgwà nà-àju ñke ọ gààrà ikwētā.	One who hurriedly agrees, accepts what he would have rejected while one who hurriedly rejects, rejects what he would have accepted.	Acting before thinking can lead to a regrettable situation.
14.	Gìdìgìdì bụ ùgwù ezè.	Multitude attendance lends a big support to the king.	No king can succeed without the support of his subjects.
15.	Aka nā-āgā n'agìgā ọkù nà- àgakwa n'agìgā ọnū.	The hand that goes by the corner of the dish also goes to the corner of the mouth.	A trivial effort yields a meager income.
16.	À naghị èzo ēzō àgba àtànì àkụ màkà nà ò nweghị ihe ọ gà-ème.	One does not hide when shooting a bushbaby because it cannot do anything.	It is needless to fear when safety is assured.
17.	E mee nwokē kà o sèbe okwū, ò kpebe ūdō, mànà e mee nwaànyị kà e kpebe ūdō, ò sebe okwū.	When a man is provoked , he begins to sue for peace, but when a woman is invited for peace, she	A situation that is considered to be a hopeless one may turn out to be redeemable, and <i>vice versa</i> .

		initiates a quarrel.	
18	Aka aja ājā nà- èbute ọnu mmanu m̄mānū.	Soiled hand brings oily mouth.	One who labours reaps the reward.
19.	Onye ọ nà-eme omume ọmūmē nà-èbe obube ọbūbē.	One who feels tortured cries often.	One who is always afflicted is always grief-stricken.
20.	A tūghī alò gaa ògù, ndị gārā āgā agāghī àlọta.	If there was no planning before executing a war, those engaged in the war will not return.	He who fails to plan, plans to fail.
21.	Mà nkè mbē mèrè, mà nkè mbē ẹmēghì, aghughò dì yā, à kpọba mbè.	Both that which the tortoise did and the one tortoise did not do, once trick or mischief is involved, tortoise will be named/blamed.	A trickster or mischief maker can easily be accused wrongly.
22.	Onye bū ozu enyī n'isi ekwēsīghī ijī ukwu na-àkpa abuzù.	One carrying an elephant on his head is not supposed to be picking a cricket with his leg.	One who is richly endowed should not be chasing irrelevancies.
23.	A nū n'otù olū, à gbaa n'otù akā; a nū n'olu àbūō, à gbaa n'aka àbūō.	One shows surprise on hearing a story from one person; but shows	One expresses surprise on getting a piece of information from

		greater surprise on hearing the same story from two persons.	one source; and is highly perplexed on hearing the same thing from double or multiple sources.
24.	Ọkụkō gā-ābū okē, àkwa yā nà-anyị arō.	You know the egg that will hatch a cock by the heaviness of the egg.	A great or progressive person can be identified right from childhood.
25.	Nkītā sị nà ya nà-ekèle onye ọbịa, ụmū ùwà sị nà ya nà-àbara yā m̄bā.	Dog said he was greeting the visitor, people of the world said he was shouting on or scolding him/her.	People can easily misunderstand the actions of others.

### 3.1.2 Riddles

**Table 2 Riddles and their meaning**

SN	Riddles	Gloss
1.	Ihe a gùrù ahà, ọ dị kà ahà a gùrù ya. <i>Ọnwụ.</i>	That which resembles the name it is given. <i>Death.</i>
2.	Ihe pūtārā n'ùtùtù wèrè ụkwù ānō gaa ijè, ruo n'ehìhiè wèrè ụkwù àbụō gaa ijè, ruo n'abàlì wèrè ụkwù ātō gaa ijè. <i>Mmadụ.</i>	That which comes out in the morning and walks on four legs, comes in the afternoon and walks on two legs, comes at night and walks on three legs. <i>Human being.</i>

3.	Àgboghō mārā ezigbo mmā m̀nà à naghì ebì yā ākā. <i>Oku.</i>	A damsel who is very beautiful but cannot be touched. <i>Fire.</i>
4.	Ihe gbārā kpm̄ gbabà ohiā. <i>Ūkpakā, Ūgba.</i>	That which clapped ‘kpm̄’ and ran into the bush. <i>Oil bean seed.</i>
5.	Ūm̀nnē àbūō ihu obodobo ihū obodobo. <i>Eluigwē nà àlà.</i>	Two siblings each with a wide face. <i>Sky and earth</i>
6.	Òjì isi èje mà wèrè āzū àla. <i>Diòchì.</i>	That which goes with the head and returns with the back. <i>Wine tapper.</i>
7.	Anū nō bē èzè na-èkwere yā n’isi. <i>Ngwèrè.</i>	An animal in the king’s palace and nodding for him <i>Lizard.</i>
8.	T̀m̀ t̀m̀ gem gem. <i>Ọsọ’</i> <i>m̀gbàdà b̀ n’úgwú.</i>	‘T̀m̀ t̀m̀ gem gem’ <i>The race of the antelope is on the hill.</i>
9.	Kpòròkpòtò n’òbi ògàrànyà. <i>Ogbiri ehì</i>	‘Kporokpoto’ in the rich man’s house. <i>A cow’s tether</i>
10.	Ọgbazùrù agū ọsọ mà òsụsọ esūghì yā. <i>Nkità</i>	That which runs across the farmland without perspiring. <i>Dog.</i>
11.	Ebūghì ụzọ ekpèghì àzú. <i>Nkità</i>	Never in front, never behind. <i>Dog.</i>
12.	Ihe nā-ābū ọ bjawā ābiāwā mpekele m̀pèkèlè, ọ lawā ālāwā mpekele m̀pèkèlè. <i>Onwa.</i>	That which when it is coming comes in fraction/fraction by fraction and when it is going goes piece by piece. <i>Moon.</i>
13.	Gbim̄ nà yom̄. <i>Isi akwū</i> <i>nà igù.</i>	‘Gbim̄’ and ‘yom̄’. <i>The bunch of palm fruits and the palm fronds.</i>
14.	Àgboghō tōrō n’afọ laa	A maiden that matures in a year

	n'afọ. <i>Ọkà.</i>	and goes (disappears, dies) in a year. <i>Maisze/corn.</i>
15.	Umunnē ānō gārā ñjēm, àbuọ ālōtā, àbuọ alòtaghì. <i>Itè, efere, utàrà, ofe.</i>	Four children of the same mother went on a journey, two returned, two did not return. <i>Pot, plate, foofoo and soup.</i>
16.	Ọnọ na mbà àbara mbā ọzọ m̄bā. <i>Egbè.</i>	That which scolds a town from another town. <i>Gun.</i>
17.	Ihe dērē ụrì mà ò nweghì ānyā. <i>Esu/Arịrị.</i>	That which applied indigo but has no eyes. <i>Millipede.</i>
18.	Ihe mmirī sàrà àhụ mmā yā ārūọ. <i>Nnu.</i>	That whose beauty gets spoilt after a bath. <i>Salt.</i>
19.	Íhe e gbūrū mmà màrà ò gbaghì ọbàrà. <i>Osisi kpōrō n̄kū.</i>	That which is struck with a knife but it does not bleed. <i>Dry wood.</i>
20.	Kpara kpara n'elū anūghì gìdìm n'àlà. <i>Akwukwo kpōrō n̄kū.</i>	'Kpára kpára' on the treetops but noiseless on the ground. <i>Dry leaf.</i>

## 4.1 Data analysis

### 4.1.1 Tonal contrasts

The Igbo language uses pitch variations to distinguish meaning. Such pitch variations, called tones, are also stylistically employed in the literary genres of the language. Tonal contrast is the use of contrasting tones on certain words within a proverb or riddle. One of the effects of tonal contrasts is the aesthetics. The researchers discovered that some of the proverbs and riddles of our study contain instances of tonal contrasts which add more beauty and music to the language. Examples are, in Proverb (henceforth Prv) 5 nwune nwune HH HH and nwùnè nwùnè LL LL; Prv10, aji HH and aji HL; Prv 13 ngwa HH and ñgwà LL; Riddle (henceforth

Rdl 3 mārā SS and mārā LL; Rdl 8 tùm tùm LL LL and gem gem HH HH.

#### 4.1.2 Lexical contrasts

By lexical contrasts we mean lexemes which constitute antonymous sets. They are in the proverbs and riddles for stylistic effect. Instances are Prv 8 elū ‘up’, àlà ‘down’; Prv 9 mmūō ‘the dead’, mmadū ‘the living’; Prv 13 òkwe ‘one who agrees’, òjū ‘one who rejects’; Prv 17 nwokē ‘man’, nwaànyị ‘woman’; Prv 17 kpebe ūdō ‘suing for peace’, sèbe okwū ‘initiating a quarrel’; Rdl 2 ùtùtù ‘morning’, ehìhiè ‘afternoon’, abàlị ‘night’; Rdl 6 èje ‘going’, àla ‘returning’; Rdl 11 ebūghị ụzọ ‘never in front’, ékpèghị àzụ ‘never behind’; Rdl 12 bįawa ābįawā ‘when coming’, lawa ālāwā ‘when going’.

#### 4.1.3 Repetition

Repetition is a literary device wherein words or group of words occur in a sequence. It is employed basically for emphasis. There are many instances of repetition in our data: Prv 5 nwune nwune; Prv 5 nwùnè nwùnè; Prvs 12 and 19 òbūbē obube; Prv 12 afiōpū afiōpū; Prv 13 ngwa ñgwà, ngwa ñgwà; Prv 18 aja ājā, mmanụ mīmānū; Prv 19 omume òmūmē; Rdl 2 wère ụkwụ ... gaa ijè, ...wère ụkwụ ... gaa ijè, ... wère ụkwụ ... gaa ije; Rdl 5 ihu obodobo, ihu obodobo; Rdl 8 tùm tùm; Rdl 8 gem gem.

#### 4.1.4 Sound symbolism

Sound symbolism is the use of sounds in words to imitate the kind of noise associated with an entity, or a vivid representation of an idea using sounds. We discovered that Igbo proverbs and riddles are enriched with sound symbolism. In such cases one can deduce the concept or entity being referred to by the sounds. The

use of sound symbolism in these literary genres creates a euphonious effect. Examples: Prv 11 mbadamba ‘a state of being flattened’; Prv 14 g̀d̀g̀d̀g̀d̀ ‘a representation of the stamping of feet by a crowd’; Rdl 4 kpaṁ ‘popping sound made by the explosion of the oil bean pod’; Rdl 5 obodobo ‘a state of being broad’; Rdl 8 t̀m̀ t̀m̀ gem gem ‘the canter of an antelope on a hill’; Rdl 9 kp̀r̀r̀kp̀t̀t̀ ‘the sound made by dropping the cow’s tether on the ground’; Rdl 13 gb̀m̀ ‘thud of a palm fruit head’; Rdl 13 ỳm̀ ‘sound of a light weight object like palm frond hitting the ground’.

#### 4.1.5 Tonal rhyme

Igbo proverbs and riddles are embellished with words that rhyme in tone. Such words have the same tone with another word within the same proverb or riddle. Instances in our data are: Prv 1 anya HH, isi HH; Prv 7 aghāghī HSS, agāghī HSS; Prv 10 t̀s̀iwa LHH, àgbara LHH; Prv 12 onye HH, oṛu HH, duru HH, nnwa HH; Prv 13 òkwe LH, òju LH; Prv 13 nà-èkwe LLH, nà-àju LLH; Prv 16 àgba LH, àkù LH; Prv 16 àtànì LLL, màkànà LLL; Prv 19 nà-ème omume òm̀m̀m̀ LLH HHH SSS, nà-èbe obube òb̀b̀b̀ LLH HHH SSS; Rdl 6 èje LH, wère LH, àla LH; Rdl 9 kp̀r̀r̀kp̀t̀t̀ LLLL, òg̀r̀ànyà LLLL; Rdl 13 gb̀m̀ LL, ỳm̀ LL.

#### 4.1.6 Assonance

Assonance is when in a structure there are identical vowel sounds in the words but different consonants. Many instances of assonance can be found in Igbo proverbs and riddles. Assonance makes the structures melodious. Examples are: occurrence of series of [a] in Prvs 1, 2, 8, 11 and 18. For example: anya, ākp̀, anāghī, ihì nà, kà, d̀kwà (Prv 1), aka, aja, ājā, nà-èbute, mmanu,

m̄mānū (Prv 18); the vowel [e] in Prvs 4, 7 and 9. For instance: ekwē, ēkwē, nà-èkwe, n'ute, ekwērē (Prv 4); kpègbuo, kpè`gbuo kpègbùchàrà, ùdèlè, èjupùta, eluigwē (Prv 9); the vowel [u] 'u' in Rdl 2 pūtārā, n'ùtùtù, ùkwù, ùkwù, àbùō, ùkwù; [ɔ] 'o' appears in Rdl 10 ògbazùrù, òsò, òsùsòō.

#### 4.1.7 Consonance

For consonance, there are, within a structure, identical consonants in the words but different vowel sounds. Like assonance, consonance makes the structures melodious. We have many instances of consonance in the proverbs and riddles: [kw] in Prv 4 ekwē, ēkwē, nà-èkwe, ekwērē; [ɣ] 'gh' in Prv 7 aghāghī, ūgha, agāghī, àgha, ūghā; [g] in Prv 20 gaa, ògù, gārā, āgā, agāghī; [s] in Rdl 10 òsò, òsùsòō, esūghī; Rdl 12 has many [w] sound: bīawa, ābīawā, lawa, ālāwā; [l] in Prv 12 mpekele, m̄pēkēlē, lawa, ālāwā, mpekele, m̄pēkēlē.

### 5.1 Summary and conclusion

So far we have discussed the stylistic features of Igbo proverbs and riddles with focus on tonal contrast, lexical contrast, repetition, sound symbolism, tonal rhyme, assonance, and consonance. The paper showed the aesthetics in these sub-genres of literature following the stylistic application of such features. The authors claim that these features characterize proverbs and riddles as sub-genres of literature and make them “musical, rhythmical, memorable and generally pleasant to listen to” (Soi 2014:68). Being in the public domain as no one can lay claim to their authorship, their possession of these stylistic features is a clear evidence of Igbo creativity. No wonder the Igbo, especially the aged or elderly ones still appreciate these sub-genres even in

modern times, to the point of taking appropriate application of proverbs in speech as a mark of wisdom and rhetorical skill and frown at the 'modern' Igbo who relegate them and fail to transmit them to the younger generation.

The authors join the elderly or aged Igbo to call on the 'modern' Igbo people to avail themselves of all traditional genres in their discourses for cultural enrichment, and imbibe them as social or status symbols of recognition since they are looked upon as current and future custodians of the Igbo culture. Moreover, they should bequeath them to their children for proper identity and safeguarding the Igbo cultural heritage to stop them from going into extinction. It will also be a worthy venture if the Igbo governments and their agencies provide for the Igbo children and youth to be more exposed to these Igbo cultural milieu through teaching them the art and act of public speaking in Igbo culture both at school and in the media. Again, efforts should be made to establish technological means and ways of enhancing all traditional aspects of entertainment, like folktales, moonlight games and plays both at home and at school to motivate and engage the children and youth in the use of riddles and other sub-genres as a way of imbibing traditional wisdom and rhetorical skills in order to exhibit Igbo oratorical prowess.

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