

## A pragmatic analysis of selected Ogba proverbs

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**Abstract:** The way to examine the rigorous ways that language is being utilized to pass across knowledge, culture, traditional values, and social norms within the Ogba community is the use of proverbs. This study will examine a pragmatic analysis of selected Ogba proverbs. The study will be guided by speech acts and Grice's maxims theories. The analysis reveals that the proverbs carry secret meanings, subtleties in context, and communication goals. The research looks at the pragmatic roles that Ogba proverbs provide or play in our conversations and categorizes them according to their contextual meaning, like moral instructions, social values, and life lessons. The research applies qualitative and quantitative methods using a sample of 25 Ogba native speakers in its analysis, which is done by collecting data from native speakers. The findings show that the crucial aspect of proverbs in maintaining linguistic and cultural identity is very important, highlighting their enduring relevance in the present Ogba society.

**Keywords:** Culture, Ogba, Pragmatics, Proverbs, Speech acts

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### 1. Introduction

Proverbs have been extensively studied in linguistic and sociocultural frameworks as concise expressions of cultural knowledge, revealing fundamental societal norms, values, and viewpoints (Finnegan, 2012). African languages' traditional discourse often relies heavily on proverbs, which represent collective knowledge and offer insights into ethical and philosophical concepts (Yankah, 1989). Proverbs are determined by socio-geographical experience. This indicates that the kinds of images and forms that proverbs use to express the truth are highly reflective of the sociocultural context in which people live. Southern proverbs have a different "repertoire" of imagery than do northern proverbs. Since proverbs are a reflection of people's beliefs, hopes, and aspirations, the Ogba people's proverbs convey their values, beliefs, ambitions, and aspirations.

According to Leech (1983), speakers' capacity to deduce meanings beyond the literal and comprehend implicit messages through contextual cues is a major factor in the pragmatic value of proverbs. Since only adult males who are fluent in Ogba can use Ogba proverbs in discussions and conversations, they are genderized. When the need arises, the elders, who are revered and seen as the stewards of the society's customs and standards, successfully and naturally defend their position by displaying their wit and wisdom through proverbs. It is commonly regarded as an example of persuasiveness and skill. To illustrate the value of both written and oral heritage, they sometimes gather kids, adults, and even newborns in their living room to teach them Ogba proverbs.

Applying this theoretical framework to the study of Ogba proverbs reveals how speakers use these idioms to skillfully address topics like ethics, societal cohesion, and conflict resolution. According to academics, pragmatic analyses of African proverbs are essential for preserving endangered languages and cultural heritage (Akindele, 2020). The ability to learn and use proverbs in discussions and dialogues, as well as an awareness of the specific situations in which they should be used, are considered indicators of proficiency in the Ogba language and literature by Ogba people, like those in other African societies. Proverbs that are euphoric are used to mitigate the effects of unpleasant experiences. The Ogba people use proverbs to express their views on people and social issues. Proverbs are a phenomenon shaped by significant factors and communicative needs, and the Ogba people use them to effectively communicate pragmatically (Ordu & Odukwu, 2024).

Proverbs are common among the elderly, who use them to give specific moral teachings, cautions, and guidance because they have a greater mental impact than everyday language (Taiwo, 1986: 26). They are also used to highlight the wise people's remarks. The Akan people of Ghana place a high value on proverb usage in both their literature and daily lives. According to Finnegan (1970), cited in Ngaage (2004: 34), "Proverbs reveal the thought of the past, express unique ideas, and are means of overcoming hackneyed expressions" lends credence to this idea.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Pragmatics: Theoretical underpinnings and African contexts**

It is now possible to study language beyond basic phrase patterns in order to look into speakers' intentions and social situations, thanks to a branch of linguistics called pragmatics, which studies meaning as influenced by context. Levinson (1983) defined pragmatics as the study of how listeners use situational context and shared cultural background to extrapolate meaning from language beyond its literal content. It is evident how meaning is derived from proverbs, which often employ figurative language, thanks to Levinson's framework for speech acts, conversational implicature, and assumptions.

Because of its deep cultural entanglement, African languages have unique pragmatic implications. With scholars such as Akindele (1990) and Kperogi (2011) highlighting the importance of employing pragmatic frameworks that are culturally contextualized to analyze African linguistic systems, interest in pragmatics in African languages has increased recently. African proverbs are commonly employed as teaching, counseling, or reprimanding tools in African civilizations, according to Kperogi (Kperogi, 2011). Both direct and indirect uses are possible for them. This approach is crucial for understanding Ogba proverbs because they often have multiple meanings, including social observations, moral lessons, or unspoken counsel.

### **2.2. Proverbs as pragmatic tools**

The Igbo people consider proverbs to be "a living speech tradition, a heightened and compressed form of language based on metaphors of daily living and experience," according to Chukwuma (Chukwuma, 1994: 26). Thus, as the Igbos demonstrate, the impact of proverbs is connected to human experience on a daily basis. The Hausa would also interpret proverbs "emotionally." According to them, proverbs are "like lubricants used in softening rough joints."

According to Ameka (1994), proverbs in African languages have several beneficial purposes and are commonly used to highlight moral principles, offer direction, or criticize social behavior. Their indirect verbal acts usually emphasize respect for elders, communal ideals, and cautions against societal vices, according to Ameka's research on Ghanaian proverbs. According to Odeunmi (2006), many Yoruba proverbs take on different meanings depending on the situational and relational dynamics between interlocutors. Applying these perspectives to Ogba proverbs necessitates analyzing the contexts in which they are used because they are extremely intricate and often serve as nuanced representations of social norms.

### **2.3. Pragmatic theories in proverbs analysis**

Proverbs have been analyzed using a variety of pragmatic theories, such as Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and its tenets of method, quality, quantity, and relevance. These maxims facilitate the study of how proverbs convey implied meanings through indirect communication.

Because speakers use figurative language to convey ideas relevant to the discourse's context, the connection maxim is particularly significant in proverbs (Korta & Perry, 2006). Ogba proverbs can be assessed using this method, which shows how figurative language improves knowledge through culturally contextualized maxims.

Another theoretical framework relevant to proverbs is the relevance theory of Sperber and Wilson (1986). According to relevance theory, presenters and listeners must strike a balance between contextual significance and cognitive effort in order to communicate as effectively as possible. According to the idea of optimum relevance, Ogba proverbs are usually brief and only contain a few phrases that express complex ideas. Relevance theory makes it easier to analyze Ogba proverbs, which are strong declarations with deep meanings that call for shared cultural knowledge to fully comprehend.

#### **2.4. African proverbs and pragmatics**

Numerous studies have examined the pragmatic functions of African proverbs in various linguistic groups. Yankah (1989) examines Ghanaian Akan proverbs in detail, demonstrating how they foster a sense of community and social norms. By pointing out that proverbs are modified to fit the modern social milieu, reflecting societal norms and expectations, Yankah's work emphasizes the significance of context in proverb interpretation. This viewpoint is pertinent to the Ogba culture, where proverbs are a major source of cultural knowledge and behavioral advice in social interactions.

Nwachukwu-Agbada (1991: 3) states that a "proverb is one of the longest surviving non-material artifacts of heritage". Since preliterate times, people's social interactions have been enlightened by the wisdom of proverbs. Because it is succinct and powerful, it is used to add grandeur to otherwise ordinary and boring speech. Ogba people sometimes find it difficult to understand proverbs because their meaning is not always clear. This is the result of giving proverbial language precedence over everyday speech.

Achebe (2008) further emphasizes the significance of proverbs in Igbo culture by referring to them as "the palm oil with which words are eaten," underscoring the subtlety and complexity of proverbs' discourse-enhancing effects. Because of their shared cultural and linguistic heritage, Achebe's views are relevant to Ogba even though his research focuses on Igbo proverbs. According to Achebe, Igbo proverbs are frequently used to bolster counsel or temper potentially harsh statements, which is consistent with the practical applications of Ogba proverbs in regulating social discourse.

We can comprehend the pragmatic goals of Ogba proverbs by using data from more general African language studies, despite the paucity of research on the subject. Indirect language is commonly used in Ogba proverbs to address social norms, impart knowledge, and communicate moral values. Proverbs are important in both formal and informal contexts in Ogba culture, and elders frequently use them to teach younger generations appropriate conduct. It is possible to understand how Ogba speakers use proverbs to give counsel or warnings without using overt command language by embracing theories of indirect speech acts, such as those put forth by Searle (Searle, 1969).

Furthermore, the speech act theory's focus on the performative aspects of language is consistent with the application of Ogba proverbs in decision-making and dispute resolution. According to Ameka (1994), proverbs are used as mediation tools in many African civilizations, allowing speakers to discuss delicate subjects without directly confronting them. Ogba proverbs serve this purpose, as elders emphasize communal unity and utilize them to settle conflicts.

To create a framework for examining Ogba proverbs, this literature review has drew on theoretical and empirical research on African language pragmatics and proverbs. Ogba proverbs serve as effective but indirect means of communication that are understood within a common cultural framework, according to three pragmatic theories that were examined: the cooperative principle, relevance theory, and speech act theory. Researchers may discover how Ogba proverbs function as cultural knowledge repositories, socialization tools, and social behavior mediators by comprehending their pragmatic nuances.

### 3. Research methods

With a sample size of 25, this mixed-methods study uses both quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive analysis of the pragmatic components of a few selected Ogba proverbs. The study claims that the research is organized around an interpretative approach that entails compiling, analyzing, and interpreting a few chosen Ogba proverbs. By using qualitative approaches to reveal underlying cultural practices, values, and meanings, this study aims to investigate the communication functions of a few chosen Ogba proverbs in social contexts. The population was composed of native speakers, with a focus on those who are familiar with traditional proverbs and know how to apply them in different communication contexts.

To generate a representative sample of proverbs in a purposeful way, proverbs 1-4 must be applied, have real-world applications, and have contextual significance. These chosen proverbs will come from oral interviews, pre-existing collections of Ogba proverbs, and reliable native speakers who are familiar with Ogba cultural expressions. (Searle, 1969; Austin, 1962). The speech act theory will be applied to the illocutionary acts. The data analysis will use a theme method to find pragmatic elements in each proverb and categorize them based on their communication roles and cultural implications. The key findings and interpretations would be made available to a select group of Ogba speakers and cultural experts for validation. The participation of these individuals will ensure that interpretations represent indigenous perspectives.

### 4. Data findings and discussions

**Table 1:** Traditional authority (*Igbala ewu la ede ki ubelu*)

Title	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Elders	6	24%
Community Chiefs	3	12%
Traditional Rulers	2	8%
Total	11	44%

According to Table 1, elders, community chiefs, and traditional rulers accounted for 44% of the interviewees. This suggests that people in positions of cultural leadership preserve and interpret a sizable percentage of Ogba proverbs.

**Ogba Proverb:** *Igbala ewu la ede ki ubelu*

**Translation:** Do not defecate where the bushes appear to be taller than you.

**Meaning:** Do not start what you can not finish. Do not push yourself into trying to solve an issue that is obviously bigger than you.

**As shown in Table 1,** *Igbala ewu la ede ki ubelu*

The following analysis can be applied to the statement, "Do not push yourself into trying to solve an issue that is obviously bigger than you":

- 1. Directive: expressive force:** The statement conveys apprehension or prudence. The speaker makes the implication that trying to solve a problem beyond one's capabilities may be detrimental or pointless.
- 2. Perlocutionary effect:** The listener may be dissuaded from accepting a challenge that seems too big. The speaker most likely wants to shield the audience from failure or unfavorable outcomes.

3. **Contextual implications:** The statement implies knowledge of the listener's aptitudes and the nature of the issue. It suggests an assessment of the issue's relative magnitude and the listener's capacity to manage it.

Here, the illocutionary act is a directive with an expressive undertone that warns the listener against doing something that could be too difficult in order to shield them from possible bad consequences.

**Table 2:** Educators and language stakeholders (*Izo oglogo abuo iwno uche*)

Title	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Teachers	5	20%
Linguist	1	4%
Cultural Researchers	1	4%
Total	7	28%

According to Table 2, 28% of the sample consisted of educators and language specialists, indicating that formal education and scholarly interest are essential for recording and comprehending Ogba proverbs.

**Ogba Proverb:** *Izo oglogo abuo iwno uche*

**Translation:** Tallness does not mean wisdom

**Meaning:** Physical appearance does not translate into wisdom

**As shown in Table 2:** *Izo oglogo abuo iwno uche*

Statements with a communicative goal, like a promise, question, command, or declaration, are known as illocutionary speech actions. Using an illocutionary speech act, we can assess the statement "Physical appearance does not translate into wisdom" by looking at its intended purpose.

1. **Assertion:** An assertion is the main illocutionary act in this instance. The speaker is asserting a fact or making a claim. They are arguing that wisdom and physical appearance are not directly related.
2. **Expressive:** The statement may also express the speaker's opinions or attitude regarding how society views them. It's possible that the speaker is criticizing the widespread fallacy that intelligence is correlated with outward appearance.
3. **Advisory:** The statement may have an illocutionary or advisory force, depending on the situation. The speaker may be telling the audience not to evaluate people's wisdom based solely on how they look.
4. **Descriptive:** The statement describes a perceived reality regarding the absence of a direct correlation between wisdom and physical appearance, making it descriptive in nature.
5. **Directive (Indirect):** The statement may serve as an implicit directive, implying that one should not judge someone's wisdom based solely on how they look. This is a suggestion rather than a clear directive.

The illocutionary speech act of this statement is essentially an assertion that the speaker believes there is no connection between physical appearance and wisdom. It may also have overtones of advice or expression, depending on the situation.

Table 3: Community representation (*Ogbu opi zniga imi*)

Title	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Youth Leaders	2	8%
Women Leaders	2	8%
Farmers/Artisans	1	4%
Total	5	20%

Table 3 shows that 20% of the respondents were grassroots community members such as youth leaders, women leaders, and artisans, highlighting the relevance of proverbs in everyday communication and social interaction among different community groups.

**Ogba Proverb:** *ogbu opi zniga imi*

**Translation:** A flute player must dry his runny nose

**Meaning:** There always comes a point when those who are motivated and hardworking must allocate time to indulge in a period of relaxation.

**As shown in Table 3:** *Ogbu opi zniga imi*

The utterance's intended purpose and communication impact are examined in order to analyze the statement "There always comes a point when those who are motivated and hardworking must allocate time to indulge in a period of relaxation" using an illocutionary speech act paradigm.

**Assertive:** The statement expresses a conviction that motivated and industrious people need to unwind. It expresses the speaker's opinion on the significance of striking a balance between work and relaxation.

### Illocutionary force

The illocutionary power of the statement is to inform or remind the listener of a universal fact or principle. The speaker wishes to convey the idea that leisure must be a part of a diligent person's schedule.

### Function

- **Informative Function:** The speaker informs the audience about the importance of relaxation, which may not be immediately apparent.
- **Advisory Function:** The speaker subtly suggests that driven and diligent people should understand the value of rest. Rather than being a clear directive or recommendation, this advice is disguised as a general observation.
- **Intended Effect**

The intended effect of the statement on the audience could be multifaceted:

- **Acknowledgment:** The audience may accept the statement's veracity and realize how important relaxation is to their own lives.
- **Behavioral Influence:** If they haven't already, the statement might encourage driven and industrious people to set aside time for leisure.
- **Reassurance:** It can reassure those who already take time to relax that their behavior is justified and beneficial.

### Perlocutionary effect

The actual impact the statement has on the audience is known as the perlocutionary effect. Although this can vary, some possible outcomes are as follows:

- **Reflection:** Listeners may reflect on their own work-rest balance and consider adjustments.
- **Action:** Some listeners may take concrete steps to ensure they incorporate relaxation into their routines.
- **Affirmation:** Listeners might feel validated in their current work-life balance routines.

The statement primarily functions as an aggressive illocutionary act that is instructive and advisory. It aims to convey a universal truth about the importance of rest for hardworking people and to encourage the audience to consider or continue making time for rest.

**Table 4:** Religious and Moral leaders(*mbekni kuru la egwu kira uso akpo ya ntu ghno-ghira ya nno-ogo a ukwu*)

Title	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Clergy	2	8%
Total	2	8%

Table 4 shows only 8% of those interviewed were clergy, implying a modest but important involvement of religious figures in the transmission and interpretation of traditional proverbs, especially in moral and ethical contexts.

**Figure 4. Ogba Proverb:** *mbekni kuru la egwu kira uso akpo ya ntu ghno-ghira ya nno-ogo a ukwu*

**Translation:** Tortoise said that if the music is melodious, he could jump across his mother-in-law's legs

**As shown in Table 4** *mbekni kuru la egwu kira uso akpo ya ntu ghno-ghira ya nno-ogo a ukwu*

Using an illocutionary speech act framework to analyze the statement "Tortoise said that if the music is melodious, he could jump across his mother-in-law's legs" entails determining the statement's function or intent within a communicative context. The following elements can be used to dissect the statement:

1. **Locutionary Act:** the actual statement and its seeming interpretation. "Tortoise said that if the music is melodious, he could jump across his mother-in-law's legs," is the statement in question.
2. **Illocutionary Act:** the utterance's intended use or goal. This could involve making a request, stating an intention, warning, threatening, or asserting.
3. **Perlocutionary Act:** the statement's impact on the listener, including its ability to motivate, dissuade, or persuade.

In this context, the illocutionary act can be further analyzed as follows:

1. **Assertive:** Tortoise is making a conditional claim regarding his capacity to carry out an action in response to a particular circumstance (the musical melody).
2. **Expressive:** Tortoise may also be displaying a type of bravado or self-assurance by expressing his confidence or willingness to carry out a difficult action if the requirement is met.
3. **Directive:** A desire for the music to be melodic may be implied by this indirect directive, which could persuade the listener to make sure the music is melodic.

### Intent and Purpose

- **Conditionality:** The statement presents a conditional scenario, meaning that his willingness or ability to jump across his mother-in-law's legs depends on how catchy the music is.

- **Expression of Capability or Confidence:** If the condition is met, the tortoise is probably expressing his confidence or ability to carry out the action.
- **Indirect Influence:** Tortoise might be subtly encouraging the audience—musicians or listeners, for example—to compose or preserve melodic music by articulating this condition.

#### **Context and Interpretation**

- **Cultural or Situational Context:** It is essential to comprehend the statement's cultural context. Jumping across someone's legs, particularly a mother-in-law's, may have important meanings or be regarded as a noteworthy accomplishment in some cultures.
- **Social Dynamics:** The audience and Tortoise's relationship with his mother-in-law both influence how the illocutionary force is interpreted. It could be a challenge, a show of skill, or a show of respect.

The illocutionary act in Tortoise's speech seems to be primarily aggressive, with elements of directive and expressive goals. By announcing a conditional ability, he is expressing his confidence in his skills and possibly convincing others to fulfill the requirement (melodious music).

#### **5. Contributions of the study**

The study of **A Pragmatic Analysis of Selected Ogba Proverbs** helps show how the Ogba people use language to express wisdom, social values, and everyday realities. It reveals the meanings behind their proverbs, how they guide behavior, and how context shapes interpretation. In short, it deepens understanding of Ogba culture, communication, and the practical use of language.

#### **6. The implications of the study**

The implication of the study is that understanding the pragmatic use of Ogba proverbs can help preserve the language and promote effective communication within the culture. It also shows how proverbs can be used in education, conflict resolution, and social interaction, highlighting the importance of context and cultural knowledge in interpreting meaning.

#### **7. Conclusion**

The pragmatic examination of a few chosen Ogba proverbs demonstrates the intricate linguistic, social, and cultural elements that are deeply embedded in Ogba culture. These sayings function as a means of communication as well as a storehouse of common standards, values, and knowledge. In real life, Ogba proverbs can be used for teaching, warning, counseling, and fostering social cohesiveness, among other things. These proverbs' indirectness, contextuality, and situational appropriateness demonstrate how well they clarify complex concepts and improve interlocutors' understanding.

Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of cultural competency in understanding proverbs because their meanings are deeply embedded in the cultural environment of the Ogba people. The pragmatic nature of speech acts reveals that Ogba speakers strategically employ proverbs to accomplish communicative goals. This study emphasizes the importance of incorporating both linguistic and extralinguistic elements into proverb analysis in order to enhance our comprehension of language usage in cultural contexts.

This practical examination of proverbs enhances our comprehension of the Ogba language and provides valuable insights into the relationship between language, culture, and communication. It highlights the importance of proverbs to the Ogba people's linguistic legacy and sense of cultural identity, urging more research and preservation initiatives.

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