CONTEXTUAL USE OF IGBO PROVERBS IN SELECTED PLAYS OF ONYEKA ONYEKUBA

NGOZI GLORIA ADUNCHEZOR
Department of English
Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe
Anambra State.

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CHRISTIANA OBIAGELI UDOGU
Department of English
Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe
Anambra State.

Abstract
Proverbs as integral part of history are living educational documents which depict many challenging circumstances and depressing social and political scenes as well as revolutionary visions, glorious chapters and great success in Igbo history. The oral narrative, especially proverbs, brings into play the recurring common themes such as moral issues, wealth and power, kindness, generosity, misjudgement, genuineness, treason, honesty and problem of being affected by self seeking attitudes. The primary aim of this research is therefore, to study how Onyeka Onyekuba uses proverbs in her plays: Regal Dance, and Whose Fault. The study focuses on the contextual use of proverbs by the playwright. However, as meanings and uses are interrelated, the contextual meanings of the proverbs have been considered in the course of the analysis of uses. The research was mainly library research. The theory used by the researcher was contextual approach which was propounded by Roger Abraham et al. The results observed were that Igbo proverbs are used mainly in association with situations in speech occasions. They make sense and become clearer when they are examined in the context of their application. In Onyeka Onyekuba’s plays, proverbs are used to generate and strengthen plot. Onyekuba uses proverbs to create and resolve conflict, to reinforce her themes, to criticise and characterise her personae and give more meaning and more action to their existence. She applied proverbs to show that they are essential in serious usage and context.

Keywords: Igbo proverbs, playwright, History and Educational Documents

Introduction
Proverb is a short, popular saying of unknown authorship, expressing some general truth or superstition (Akparaboro, 2005 p. 49). It is an effective mode of traditional expression formulated for the purpose of moral education and for the amplification of thought and experience (Akparaboro 2005, p. 79). Proverbs are ways of expressing public opinion and the vehicles for providing effective means of social control. The fact that wisdom lore reflects universal truths about the daily activities of the people makes it popular in its appeal to people’s imagination. To the African traditional societies, the major role of proverbial lore is to unfold the value of ancestral wisdom, the philosophical way of thinking and a code of behaviour for the new generation. Discussing the function and nature of proverb Obi (2018), stated that proverb has been and remains a most powerful and effective instrument for the transmission of culture, social morality, manners and ideas of the people from one regeneration to another. Like some of the other oral forms, it records the history, experience, the trauma and tension of society at every stage in its evolution (Nwachukwu – Agbada, 2002, p. 4)

In their style, Igbo proverbs are framed in brevity in which metaphor, symbolism, satire, irony, are sometimes concentrated in a single or more lines. Each proverb has its symbolic and metaphorical quality wherein certain images are discussed in a few words and the discussed situations or events have deep cultural implications. In their content, all proverbs aim at conveying certain concrete messages concerning the society that created them or the general human condition. Proverbs have their origin in oral tradition. They existed before the written culture. Because of this, they are generally worded or couched in such a way as to be remembered easily.
Proverbs are metaphorical, and it is through proper understanding that their metaphorical nature is unravelled. They are neither clichés nor sententious maxims. They establish truths of life, which could be universal or relative. There is no occurrence in human affairs to which some proverbs are not existentially applicable and it is in their correct application to life that their intrinsic values lie. They cover the wide sphere of human existence. This is why (Oba 2008) describes proverb as literary forms which offer the traditional artist, speaker, philosopher and priest a veritable medium for the projection and fulfillment of a variety of socially desired goals.

It has been observed that the elders, mainly, use proverbs in several speech occasions. Although riddles, oral poems, and folktales are available, proverbs still make the central part of their day-to-day socio-cultural expressions. Thus, there is frequent use of proverbs in speeches at rituals, local assemblies, and other different kinds of gatherings. The beginning and end of prayers, blessings and reconciliation are enriched with proverbs. It appears that in the African oral culture, the frequent use of proverbs in discussions or conversations seems to be perceived as a mark of wisdom. Therefore, the manner in which they function and are applied to specific situations calls for attention. What a speaker tries to do with them in a specific context of conversation becomes an intriguing problem tempting one to conduct a study.

To study function, it is essential to examine the actual occasions in which they are used, what people discuss on such occasions and how the proverbs relate to issues raised. In other words, questions such as: when and where do the African people use them? Who usually uses them? For what purpose do the people use proverbs? All need consideration. They need to be studied contextually in order to demonstrate the socio-cultural realities and world outlooks of the people. Furthermore, as stated by Grzybek, “The close interrelationship of proverb context and proverb function has long been neglected” (1995, p. 91). To fill these gaps, this research focuses on contextual analysis of uses of proverbs in selected plays of Onyeka Onyekuba.

The use of proverbs permeates the entire African society, making it known for its richness in oral tradition, which is the foundation of social and cultural wisdom. They are the most widely and commonly used in this tradition of oral arts. According to Ssetuba, “in Africa, the proverb is regarded as a noble genre of African oral tradition that enjoys the prestige of a custodian of a people’s wisdom and philosophy of life” (2002, p 9). Achebe states that “proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten” (2008, p. 1). If they are the palm oil with which words are eaten, it shows that a proverb is an important aspect of African life and culture. Proverbs, therefore, to a large extent, form the basis of African thought and philosophy.

Africans believe that proverbs are used to express wisdom. According to Gyekye, wisdom, like knowledge, is conceived in traditional African societies and having a practical as well as a theoretical dimension. However, theoretical wisdom should have direct relevance to practical problems of life, dealing with concrete human problems. The intellectual activities of the traditional African sages, or thinkers, are of course theoretical, even though the basis of their wisdom is in human experience. African maxims, which are generally the creations of the sages, are intended to convey truths that are profound and abstract.

Theoretical Framework: The Contextual Theory

The contextual approach to the study of folklore (particularly proverbs) was developed in the second half of the twentieth century (20th C) by folklorists such as Roger Abrahams, Dan Ben-Amos, Alan Dundes, Robert Georges, and Kenneth Goldstein.

These contextualists insist that the concept of folklore apply not only to a text but to an event in time in which oral tradition is performed or communicated. Therefore, the whole performance or communicative act must be recorded. The collector can no longer simply write down or tape-record a text for the text is only part of each unique event. To circumvent this difficulty, literary and ethnographic methods, which complement each other, and emphasis on fieldwork are considered keys to successful contextual studies. According to Dorson,

“The shift from the library to the field not only adds new supplementary information, but also changes the perspectives of the text from linear narration to multidimensional performance, which forms the essential background of all folkloric events, that the contextualists refuse to extrapolate the text from its context in language behaviour, communication expression and performance” and be guided by the old static typology of folklore texts (1972, P. 33).

In this study context can be explained as a situation, an event or action in which a proverb is used or performed. Such a context could be cultural or social discourses, rituals, ceremonies of a society. The need to study the contextual use of proverbs arise here because without the context proverbs meaning will not manifest. Finnegang (1970, p. 40) corroborates this view when she writes that “the actual import of proverbs’ use depends on the context of use…”. Thus, it is evident that the change in context may change
the function of a living folklore. In the same way it is possible to learn that the connection between actual life and proverb is very close as the persistence of actual life in it is strong.

Uses of Proverbs in Onyeka Onyekuba’s Plays

Philosophical use of Proverb

The Igbo people of Nigeria possess a rich folklore tradition. Among the various forms of folklore known by the people are folktales, riddles, proverbs, legends, idioms, myths and rituals. Proverbs are particularly crucial to Igbo discourses because it is an important oral formulation in Igbo culture. Nwachukwu Agbada (2002, p. 5) affirms that one of the sources of proverb popularity among the Igbo is its philosophical content.

Application of proverbs in practically all varieties of human communicative situations arises from the fact that the people regard them as “oil with which words are eaten” and as devices and means by which one can communicate effectively. They are, therefore, indispensable in authentic Igbo discourse. In their use is seen an embodiment of philosophy and wisdom, that is why, people who are gifted in using them are highly respected in the society. Therefore, a good speaker has to use them in appropriate contexts because context plays a major role in their interpretation.

The Igbo people’s life pattern can be basically shown through proverbs which serve as a reminder to the people’s identity. This question of identity can be illustrated in one of the proverbs that say: “However rain beats the leopard, it retains its spots”. This can be interpreted to mean that “no matter what changes occur in people’s life pattern, their basic life principles cannot easily be affected.”

The philosophical content of Igbo proverbs, then usage and functions, is as a result of the fact that the Igbo estimate them as a means of communication and of moral education. They also think that a true Igbo man is he who is competent in the use and interpretation of proverbs. From the above discussion, so far, some of the pertinent proverbs which demonstrate Igbo people’s attitude of life shall be considered. There is a belief that man is responsible for all his actions in life.

Man as the Cause of His Actions

The researcher took a critical look at the philosophical contents of some of the proverbs used by Onyekuba in Regal Dance and Whose Fault. It can be seen that some of them explain that man is responsible for all his actions in life.

The proverbial narrative is a social metaphor and the representation of a people’s philosophy in which the whole range of human experiences, principles, instructive issues, revolutionary visions, dreams, great expectations and the aspirations to be empowered are brought to mind in allusive language.

In the play, an argument is going on among the village women who were announcing the death of Akubuike. The second woman is in support of Akubuike and his evil deeds while the other women are against him. The second woman then says: “That’s your business… If I were you, I would just mind my business, or else, you will end up getting the fly on somebody else’s sore killed on your own legs.”

In response to the second woman’s speech, the first woman lets the fifth women know that people are no longer interested in speaking the truth for fear of being killed. She ends her speech in the following way “Is it not from the house of the coward that fingers are pointed to the ruins of what used to be the house of the valiant” (1995, p 5).

In the first proverb, the second woman is reprimanding the other women for intruding in a problem that does not concern them. She is one of those who believe that no matter how evil one is, people should not interfere in others’ businesses, else they get hurt. Caution is very important in some situations and places, especially where there is conflict. The proverb means, that one should not get involved in a matter without knowing its details or the consequences in interfering in it might bring big troubles upon oneself.

The second proverb by the first woman to the fifth shows that things have changed and only those who follow changes can survive. The second proverb is used to show that in a situation where misfortune reigns, people lose human dignity and quality because they no longer have the power to control their own lives. In times of adversity, people who are subjected to degrading conditions are always at the mercy of the fortunate ones. In other words, there is no greatness when human beings are silenced by destitution. The proverb is about the people of Ubibi’s discontent and debasing condition of destitution. In a forced situation, which the likes of Akubuike subjected them, the people do not have any other choice other than accepting the unfair condition. It also reflects the importance of showing moral stamina in a situation where people are unable to air their views freely and are reduced to speaking tools because of severe oppression.

A Guide to Moral Conduct
Some proverbs in Igbo land are used to show that man should act responsibly and appropriately. An individual must know his limitations in life in order to succeed in doing these.

In Regal Dance, the first proverb below explains the unacceptability of a man killing another for revenge, no matter how devious the man would be. This is seen in the discussion going on among three men – First Man, Second Man and the Flutist. These three men see the action as inappropriate because the young man that has killed Akubuike for betraying him does not seem to know his limitations and consequently he is plunged into disaster. The proverb spoken by the first man clearly illustrate this.

**1ST MAN.** If you decide to chase a naked madman and you are naked too, two of you would be regarded as madmen. Both of them are now the same thing – murderers (1995, pp 19-20).

The proverb reveals the universal folly of man who sees himself to be wise but becomes the victim of his own mistakes. Incorrigible human characters, both the traditional and the modern people, often overestimate themselves without foreseeing the sharp mind of others.

In a master–servant (Akubuike and Cobby-Mbadu’s son) social structure, there has never been and will never be a time when a heart of gold – a kindness of a good servant- softens a master who has a heart of stone.

However, the second and third proverbs are seen in Whose Fault. They were said by Onyechi, one of the elders of Umuagom town, during the Council of Elders meeting. In the meeting, Beka, one of the village richest men is informed that he has been chosen by the gods of the land to be the next chief priest. Beka vehemently rejects the offer of the gods and pretends not to understand what the elders are trying to communicate to him, hence the proverbs by Onyechi to Beka:

**ONYECHI.** “Let me remind you that a warrior who wages war against his mother’s kinsmen is fighting a very bad war” (1995, p 21).

The philosophical use of these proverbs explains the fact that man is capable of bringing calamity upon himself. Onyechi makes use of the two proverbs to caution Beka on fighting against their gods and their community at large.

Onyechi wants Beka to think of what his refusal or stubbornness will bring to the community. The proverbs reveal that man’s fate to a greater extent depends on the way he makes decisions. More correctly, as the journey of life goes on, people encounter problems of different kinds of which most of them are the outcome of their own making, whether unintentional or because of negligence. The private lives and social conditions of individuals are often in jeopardy, partly or wholly, due to their failure to control their lives. These proverbs are uttered when an individual is exposed to danger, just like Beka is faced with danger of being dealt with by the gods for his rejection of their “favour” as the next chief priest, after the present one is dead.

**Religious Usage and Function of Proverbs**

Religion is part of Igbo people’s life and philosophy. Religious proverbs are used to give advice. They also project the greatest respect and fear for the gods. The Igbo believe that the gods are capable of bringing punishments and evil on people who deride them, and blessings and good wishes to those who respect and obey them.

The sacredness of religious proverbs is the most vital aspect of them. They are never humorous, so it can be seen that the ancestors do not joke with the gods who are seen as having some authorities. This shows that the Igbo people are purely religious and do not play with the divine.

The proverb below is proclaimed by one of the assassins that have come to kill Akubuike. On arrival, they meet the village women sweeping the square. The gangsters cunningly find out from the women that the village square is actually the venue for the Vabi festival. Then Bob, one of the gangsters, gives the women some money. The Fifth woman who has a loose tongue prays for them and for the success of whatever they do, but that is after castigating them for looking like rogues. When the gangsters discuss their encounter with the village women, Billy says: “…And, the voice of the elders, they say, is the voice of the gods. Look we have succeeded already” (1995, p. 21).

The proverb signifies how solidly the Igbo people believe in the relationship between old people and the gods. They believe that the gods speak directly through the old people. Therefore, whatever they proclaim is heard by the gods and must come to pass, be it a blessing or a curse. In this case, a blessing from the Fifth woman shows that they have already succeeded in their devious plans.

The second proverb is spoken by the user in anger by Onyechi.

**ONYECHI:** We all agreed on it but now some of us are behaving like those who kill with the spirits and turn quickly to attend the funeral with the mortals (1995, p. 29).
This proverb is purely philosophical: it has both social and religious implications. It can be seen that human fate or lives are in the hands of the spirit. The spirits may decide to use a fellow human being to destroy another who has offended them. Socially, it’s a warning against those who are two-faced. It is a statement of warning to those who believe in false front rather than genuine effort and competence. In a situation that calls for serious deliberations, they play double role. Onyechi, therefore, uses the proverb to rebuke Onwurah for having sympathy for Beka, for it might look like others who have been with him were wicked and unsympathetic.

The proverb serves a moral function by telling one that one should play one role at a time. It is a serious rebuke of hypocrisy and sadism, that is, putting a person in trouble and joining in rejoicing over the person’s miseries.

Contextually, it raises the issue of disunity and the superficial oneness of people in which the pursuit of collective interests and genuine solidarity seldom occur. Our success and failure depends, to some extent, on whether or not we understand people’s behaviour and are able to communicate with them accordingly.

Thematically, it conveys the idea that human difference is natural and unavoidable. So, unity of purpose is not always expected even from those who are our close friends.

The third proverb is uttered by Osodi, one of the village women. She and Oyidi are discussing what has happened to Beka as a result of his rejection of the position of the chief priest.

OSODI. …Beka caused his own problems: “Didn’t our people say that….You can never wipe out the lines in anybody’s palms, that is destiny”? We must all live according to our fate (1995, p. 106).

The belief of the Igbo is that the destinies of all human beings lie in the hands of the gods. Each person has the lines on his or her palms given to him by the gods. Some people’s lines are favourable while some are not. From the above proverb, one can deduce that no matter how strong Beka strives to outwit the gods, his destiny must be fulfilled else, there will be calamity. In view of this, one cannot challenge the decisions of the gods, for to challenge one’s god means to hold in contempt the very source of one’s security and well-being. Whoever does that is acting with a most ridiculous folly and brazen stupidity.

In the plays, therefore, the way the proverbs are represented shows their philosophical and religious uses. It also helps in beautification of the literary work.

Social and Literary Uses

Proverbs are used in prose, drama, song and poetry. The reasons vary with the genre. Poetry and song tend to follow certain rhythmic structures, so the poetic and balanced syntactic structure of some proverbs can be appealing. In addition, they pack a great deal of information into a short statement, and poets and song writers often use verbal economy as a goal. Perhaps the most fundamental reason why proverbs appear in literary sources is that they have both emotional and aesthetic elements. This effect can be traced not only to their frequent use of poetic devices, but to their common omni-temporal (timeless) form and their arousal of affect-laden universal ideas about human affairs.

Many Igbo proverbs, though philosophical statements, carry with them some social values, depending on the situations under which they are said. Those which are used for social interactions are normally occur in story-telling. This will help to put people in a lighter mood, thereby making them feel relaxed. There are also proverbs meant for social gatherings such as meetings, marriage celebrations, moonlight games, festivals and other celebrations. When they are used according to the demand of a particular occasion, they excite people. Most of them are used to explain the customs, norms and beliefs of the Igbo people. They are also used to highlight personal achievements. It can also be seen that there are Igbo proverbs used for lamenting, for example, bereavement, and those used in the presence of strangers or younger ones as a cover-up for the meaning that is not intended to be disclosed so openly, especially to the uninitiated.

The proverb is one of the tools through which language can help in bringing peace and harmony to the different races of the world. However, since some of the psychological contexts of Igbo proverbs have been discussed, it is pertinent to also discuss some salient proverbs that are socially used. Firstly, the proverbs that depict Igbo people’s view of social justice shall be considered.

Igbo People’s Concept of Social Justice and Injustice

The ingrained attitude of the Igbo towards social justice could be found in the expressions that depict social norms and customs.
More than that, the proverbs drive home the need for proper social behaviour by holding up to criticism those who fail to conform to socially acceptable norms; and by eulogising those who live up to correct behaviour.

In Regal Dance, Akubuike tells Ken, his daughter’s boyfriend when he decides to set him free “Let the stranger not kill me with his visit and may he not have a hunchback after his visit” is uttered by Akubuike to show how benevolent he could be at times. He further says:

AKUBUIKE. Look, young man, I have decided to let you go. Today is a very special day for me and I don’t want anybody to spoil it…. You are a foreigner, so I will not want to hurt you. “But, let the stranger not kill me with his visit and may he not have a hunch back after his visit. I have forgiven you.” (1995, 35)

This same proverb is repeated as Muoneke prays over Kola for God’s favour.

MUONEKE. …we are not against the Oyibo ways

But we strive to maintain
And to uphold our own ways
May our visitor not kill us with his visit
And may he not leave with a hunch back
As he goes home

The chick-chaser must be prepared for a fall. (1995, pp. 14-15)

These proverbs convey the people abhorrence of intimidation, oppression and selfishness, encourage peaceful co-existence of the people in the society and do not allow the exploitation of any privilege by anyone. According to Igbo belief, the proverbs suggest that social injustice brings friction amongst members of a society. Here, selfishness is out of the question and that was what the traditional Igbo society valued. What this proverb signifies is a warning against selfishness. There is also an idea of man’s fellowship with man, which embodies human tolerance and greater harmony.

The proverb … “the snake that bit me that day has today hit you with its tail,” serves a moral function by implying that justice awaits everyone. It is uttered by the fourth woman. It comes up when the first woman arrives late to the sweeping of the village square. When she is asked to pay her fine, she starts arguing.

4TH WOMAN. Please pay your fine. Last month I met you sweeping and joined you all insisted that I should pay the fine for late coming and I paid. You were at the forefront that day. Look at it now, the snake that bit me that day has today hit you with its tail. 19

Thematic Use of Proverbs

This is another use that is glaring in Onyekuba’s works. She uses these proverbs to enhance the plot of her plays, to bring to the notice of her audience the messages she is trying to pass across. These proverbs serve as foreshadowing to the plot of the play or what will become of the chief characters. The vitality of these proverbs as part of a literary form is seen when they are echoed and inserted in various contexts. Onyekuba has carefully chosen them to suit her story line. For example, Amaka tells her husband as he threatened to kill her

AMAKA. You can’t threaten me with death which is your stock-in-trade. I am not afraid of death. But you who destroy human life at will, remember that you did not hang your own life at the fire place. If care is not taken, you will take your own share before those of us you want to kill. (1995, p. 6)

Contextually, the user is commenting on unhealthy human relations in which untrustworthiness, deception and mistrust become the result. She points out the significance of not revealing the truth to those whom one supposed to trust.

Thematically, the user (Amaka) stresses the problem of being torn apart due to misgivings and false display to achieve their purpose. Man can, therefore, benefit much and love much more by being accommodating than opting to show wickedness. Man must think of others and himself, while mistreating them, for he does not know what will befall him from cheating others.

In Regal Dance the proverbs are stated by the MC during the coronation of Akubuike as the Bura of Ubibi. The MC who was extolling the virtues of Akubuike stated these proverbs to show that though, he has many to talk but he was controlled by the occasion of the day.

MC: My people, the madman says that the reason why he is accused of talking too much is that when he is saying one thing, another one comes to his mind. The same madman says that he is very busy because he has lot of place to go to; he has so many things to talk about in addition to the madness that controls him (1995, p 83).
The two proverbs emphasise that the worst that can happen to people is the inability to be their own masters. The MC is a hired hand and he compares himself with a madman that is being controlled by his madness. Thematically, this shows that the loss of human dignity has its roots in the lack of positive self-concept. The narrator employs a biting satire to ridicule the people or groups who are always ready to obey or serve anyone who wants to use them as an instrument. The inability to build confidence, absence of reasoning power and the blind acceptance of command are mirrored in the proverbs.

2ND MAN. Those who kill others with machete must eventually fall by the machete. They must be his men and perhaps there was a dispute or disagreement so they gave him the dose he had been sending them to give to others. They showed him how well they learnt the language he taught them, that is, the language of meanness and brutality. (1995, p. 17)

In the context of use, the proverb is meant to criticise a person or an individual who engages himself in an activity that deviates from the common socio-cultural norms of the society. Thus, it conveys the message that individuals, who cause evil in the society, harm themselves first, before others. The Igbo therefore, use such proverbs to warn evil-doers that bad manners and evil activities lead the concerned person to failure and harmful life. In this context, it functions as a means of telling everybody to look into their day-to-day activities and hold themselves back from deviant behaviour.

In examining the theme, it holds the meaning that someone who tries to approach a problematic situation unwisely or inappropriately does not protect himself from its danger. Indirectly, the proverb indicates the necessity of wise and appropriate way of approaching a situation in order to cope with it. Though Akubuike is evil-minded and does so many evil things, the murderers should not have taken laws into their hands. In their minds, they have achieved justice by murdering Akubuike and his two sons, yet it is unjustified by societal laws. Akubuike gets what he has bargained for, because he is the reason why he is murdered. Then the law of Karma has taken place.

**Proverb Enhances and strengthens Plot**

Onyeka Onyekuba does not use proverbs for the sake of using them; neither can one argue that they are accidental in the context in which they appear. The argument here is that some of the proverbs the playwright has used are meant to develop and enhance the plot of the story. Others are used to anticipate the plot and future events, all leading to the inevitable but desired end of the plays. These proverbs shall be considered as used in the plays in order to support the argument that some of them function significantly for the purpose of shaping the events and directing the plot and flow of the story.

The Proverb, “the stubborn fly follows the corpse to the grave,” is used by the playwright to forshadow what is to happen to Beka for refusing to be the new chief priest of Udoh. In the play, Beka rejects his new position, and would not listen to all the advice given to him by the elders of his town. Beka is later visited with many problems and was also struck with madness by the gods he has dared. In *Regal Dance*, the proverb, “he who kills by the machete dies from the cut of the machete” also forshadows the kind of death Akubuike will die. Akubuike is later killed by those he has trained to kill others.

**Proverb as Tool of Criticism**

Proverbs in Onyeka’s plays are applied to criticize and condemn her characters when they deserve condemnation. This argument stems from the fact that proverbs, more than spoken words, carry more weight and potency than ordinary speech. An idea expressed naturally could be more impacting and appreciated when it is concise and expressed in with a proverb. The reason is because proverbs are highly respected and valued among the people as not reflecting the immediate time but reflecting the wisdom and world view of the Igbo people in the time past. This is why they are more valued than ordinary speech and are easily appreciated and hearkened to.

Thus, proverbs express the wisdom and thoughts of our forefathers and when applied criticism, they serve the vital purpose of striking the culprit at the heart and propel him for a change of action and attitude. Onyekuba uses several proverbs to criticise, condemn and satirise the action of some characters in the hopes of instilling a change of attitude and mindset in them. In the plays, the elders uses lots of proverbs for criticism, especially of erring characters.

**Conclusion**

In this research, an attempt has been made to analysed the uses of proverbs in selected plays of Onyeka Onyekuba. The approach to the study focused on the examination of meanings and functions of a particular proverb in a giver situation (context). In this approach, questions about who has used a proverb,
Igbo people make the philosophical and religious uses of proverbs as vehicles of reordering, shaping or protesting against any form of social disorder. They divulge their experiences, censure misbehaviour and disapprove of disagreements by using proverbs. In these situations the uses of proverbs emerge more significantly than the other aspects. In the context of this occasion, proverbs are used as a means of enumerating and activating socio-cultural elements like customs, morality and social laws of the people.

Proverbs embody the customary practices, the social values of morality and the power (strictness) of social laws. In other words, the traditional ways of these social laws are reflected in the proverbs employed in the plays. This shows that Igbo proverbs are mirrors of truth – values, accepted rules of conduct and conventional wisdoms of the society. They reflect the age and common socio-cultural models and experience of the people. The higher the social positions of elders are, the more their responsibility in maintaining the socio-cultural values. The stabilisation of social life and socialisation of the youth are expressed through the proverbs. Therefore, it is possible to observe that the values and standards of socio-cultural elements are expressively represented and projected through proverbs.

Onyekuba’s method of inserting and translating Igbo proverbs into English will help future writers to improve on their style of writing because artists after reading her works would be emotionally committed and would want to incorporate her type of style into their own works for the enrichment and popularisation of Igbo proverbs. Her effective use of proverbs has made her literary works to be enjoyed by both young and old, and by those who want to know more about the Igbo culture and tradition, especially at the international level.

She successfully presents Igbo proverbs accordingly. In Igbo society, it is believed that a speaker who can use language effectively and has a good command of proverbs is respected by his fellows and is often made a leader in the community. Onyekuba shows how proverbs can be incorporated into a creative work using English language as a vehicle for its message. It is in them that one can visualise the depth of one’s ancestral minds, their wisdom, philosophy, norms and sanctions in the ethics and culture.

The vitality of these proverbs, as part of living culture, is seen when they are echoed and inserted in various contexts. Onyekuba has carefully chosen them to suit her Igbo subjects and to give it the local colouring it needs or deserves. She uses proverbs to reinforce her themes, to characterise her personae and to give more meaning and more action to their existence. She uses proverbs to show that proverbs are not indispensable in serious usage and context. Although the Igbo proverb coiners have the didactic use as one of their objectives, their central motivation for formulating proverbs is to poeticise thought and make it fresh and artistic. Onyekuba uses proverbs for aesthetic reason; this shows that they beautify literary works. When a speaker’s use of them is deepened, in a moment, he is able to pick an appropriate one from his personal repertoire to suit the situation; he grasps the attention of his listener or listeners and this is what Onyekuba showcases in her works.

Recommendations

The paper recommends amongst the following, the need for the use of proverbs in our daily communication is important especially in passing on critical information amongst the igbo people. The use of proverbs can not be over emphasized considering the fact that it is a critical instrument in conflict resolution.
References


