

**IGBO PACIFICATION PROVERBS AND WELLERISMS IN AFRICAN  
PHILOSOPHY: TOOLS FOR PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

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**Abstract**

*Proverbs and wellerisms are wise sayings that address the heart of the discourse in any given context, truthfully and objectively. A good understanding of the Igbo proverbs and wellerisms would automatically lead one to an understanding of the Igbo man, his philosophy of life, tradition, culture and mode of living. The values of the proverbs and wellerisms in the Igbo society cannot be overemphasized. In relation to societal core values and education, they are regarded as instruments used for socialization and pacification with the aim of enhancing peace and unity. Among the objectives of the paper are: firstly to define proverb and wellerism, secondly to show the differences between the two and thirdly to examine the Igbo pacification proverbs and wellerisms in relation to peace and conflict resolution. The research design for the study is structured in line with descriptive method. The study is anchored on the Use and Relevance theories of meaning. The writer uses her intuitive knowledge as an L1-speaker of the Igbo language to generate the relevant primary data while the secondary data are sourced from relevant literature. From the analysis, it has been established that Igbo pacification proverbs and wellerisms are ready tools for conflict resolution at home, school and society in general. They also perform didactic functions and are seen to touch all aspects of human life. The paper suggests that interested researchers in this area of study should go further to look at pacification in other figurative expressions as a way of peace and conflict resolution. This will possibly create opportunities for the learning of the proverbs and wellerisms as useful tools for settling conflicts.*

**Keywords:** African Philosophy, Pacification, Proverbs, Wellerism, Conflict Resolution.

## **Introduction**

Nigeria has three major tribes namely Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. The Igbo tribe occupy the east and west of the lower Niger. They inhabit the Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States of the south-eastern region of the contemporary Nigeria. They can be found in some parts of Delta and some parts of Rivers States in the south-south region of Nigeria. Their language is Igbo.

Language as we know is a means of communication. Communication is the interaction between two people or more. For effective communication to take place, the people concerned must understand the language in use. Secondly there is need for intelligent use of the stylistic devices to spice up the linguistic utterances. Proverbs and wellerisms and other figurative languages are among the stylistic devices that can spice up the linguistic utterances.

Igbo proverbs and wellerisms are the archives through which one can see Igbo philosophy, culture and the general Igbo world view. They have remained the integral part of their culture over the years and are passed on from generation to generation.

Conflicts are matters which originate from the human mind and can set nations, towns, communities and families back. It could be interpersonal or inter-communal and can range from person to person, community to community, state to state and nation to nation. Various avenues have been created and applied for peace and conflict resolution and management in different areas. In religion, Christians use their Holy Bible, Muslims use their Holy Qur'an and so on

In Igbo culture, when people have conflict issues to resolve, what the constituted authorities do is to schedule meetings where concerned members are invited for settlement. This can be done in most cases by using traditional approach. Those involve in traditional approach of conflict resolutions are the Traditional Rulers, the Council of elders, Age Grade System, Nze and Ọzọ (titled men in the village) the Ụmụ ada (married daughters outside the kindred), Inyomdi (married women in the kindred) and so on.

In the contemporary time, modern approaches in peace and conflict resolution are applied and they include the use of Dialogue, Compromise, Mediation, Negotiation and Court Ruling. These approaches, whether traditional or modern has certain principles and values which must be adopted before it can be

effective. These principles and values are fairness, accommodation, moderation, impartiality, compromise and genuine reconciliation.

Conflicts, tensions, crises and at the extreme wars as earlier said can set nations, towns and communities back. As a result, Igbo pacification proverbs and wellerisms in African philosophy take the center stage for a remedy in Igbo community.

One of the objectives of the study is set to explain the meaning of proverb and wellersim. Another one seeks to explain the differences between proverb and wellerism and lastly but not the least is to examine some Igbo pacification proverbs and wellerisms as linguistic tools for peace and conflict resolution. The research design is descriptive method.

However, the paper is divided into four parts. The introduction, literature review, the analysis and summary and conclusion.

### **Review of Literature**

This section examines the works of literature that have some bearing on the topic of study here. The section is arranged under the following headings: conceptual studies, empirical studies and theoretical framework .

### **Conceptual Studies**

In this section, the major concepts relating to the study shall be discussed. These include: African Philosophy, Pacification, Proverb, Wellerism and Conflict Resolution.

### **African Philosophy**

To answer accurately what African philosophy is, is difficult and an attempt to define it can help one to understand what philosophy itself is. Philosophy is from a Latin word 'Philosophia' meaning, "love of wisdom". It is an activity people do when they try to know basic facts about themselves, the world in which they live, their relationships to the world and one another. According to Owolabi (1999), philosophy is the critical reflection of human beings on the problem of their existence and essence. On the other hand, African philosophy in a lay man's idea is everything that concerns the way African people live their life. In the words of Owolabi (1999), African philosophy is currently a mixture of various ideas and problems of traditional African thoughts and contemporary

philosophical cultures which have adopted Western philosophical traditions, but failed to compromise and balance their culture with other cultures.

Anyanwu (1983), sees African philosophy as “that which concerns itself with the way in which African people of the past and present make sense of their destiny and of the world in which they live.

In all these, a point that is worth noting is that African philosophers agree that the traditional belief system of the African people is an integral part of African Philosophy.

### **Pacification**

Pacification as seen by different scholars has a number of ideas. It simply means an attempt to maintain peace in a place. According to Wales (2017), pacification comes from a Latin word ‘Pacificare’ which means “to make peace, Pacify from ‘Pacificus’ meaning to bring to a condition of calmness. Cristal (1995) as seen in Ugwuoke (2018), pacification is the act of making peace between two countries or groups. He also added that pacification is the restoration of public tranquility. According to him, a Pacifist is one who is against fighting. Falola (2009) opines that pacification involves a lot of violence, to subdue the resistance of the natives. He stated that pacification was a system where individuals who caused trouble could be identified, arrested and punished.

In Adeleke (2015), pacification and indirect rule are two ways which British colonial rulers used to achieve their aim in Nigeria during colonial period. In the words of Booker (2003), pacification was a name given to the British policy of subduing resistance in Nigeria. He concludes that pacification is essentially another name for indirect rule. Going by the ideas of these scholars, one will rightly see pacification as a common occurrence in life situation. But for the purpose of this study, pacification is seen as a means of restoring and maintaining peace in a conflict situation which could be by force or by use of dialogue.

### **Proverb**

A proverb is a short saying which contains the wisdom and experiences of the old people and has a special message that it conveys. It is called ‘ilu’ in Igbo language. Mieder (1994) states that the origin of proverb is unknown but can be said to have taken its root from Latin word “ Proverbium” meaning ‘word or nayword’. It means a simple and concrete saying popularly known and

repeated. It expresses truth, based on common sense or practical experience of humanity. Igbo proverb is the archives through which one can see Igbo philosophy, culture and the general Igbo world view. In Igbo culture, proverbs are used as an effective spoken or written tool for expressing meanings and intentions and are context dependent.

In the words of Achebe (1958), proverb is the palm oil with which words are eaten. Finnegan (1970) went further to say that Proverbs do not often have specialized occasions for their use like riddle and stories but closely involved with speech and action on every sort of occasion including general conversation.

Generally, Proverbs teach morals, spice the speech of the people and are passed from generation to generation.

The following are few examples of Igbo proverbs and their translation in English Language. Example 1:

- i. 'Ndi nwere isi ka isi na-awa' - It is only those who have head that can feel headache.
- ii. 'Onye nwere n na ikè ekwesigh ka ihe na-enye ya nsogbu n'áfó - Anyone with mouth and anus should not complain of stomach upset

### **Wellerism**

The idea of wellerism in the Igbo culture has been existing since Igbo people started existing but the awareness of its existence as a different term from proverb is the contribution of English culture (Okodo 2012) The Igbo people called it 'asinilu' meaning the gossip one has made inside a proverb. Wellerism is believed to have been originated in Germany which is derived from the German term Vellerism. The term Wellerism as Brunvand (1968) claims, is named after the character Sam Weller in Charles Dickens Pickwick papers. The reason as he rightly pointed out is that Sam Weller uses a lot of Wellerism in his publication. According to Brunvand (1968:40) wellerism is "a saying in the form of a quotation to be followed by a phrase ascribing the quotation to someone who has done something humorous and appropriate"

It is a proverb to which gossip is added. In the words of Ngoesi (1993), wellerism is the type of proverb in which one quotes another entity when saying it rather than the type said right away.

Looking at the proverbs in example 1, i and ii above, it can turn to wellerism if a character is quoted to have said it which will appear in the following examples.

In Igbo people's idea Wellerism is a proverb which gossip is added that is to say that a certain entity said it. While proverb is a simple statement, Wellerism involves talking through a character in which case the characters expression is reported by the user of the language.

Example 2:

- i. 'Nshị kọ sị rị na ọ bụ ndị nwere ị sị ka isi na-awa'-

The crab says that it is only those who have head that can feel headache.

- ii. 'Ụsụ sị rị na onye nwere ọ nụ na ike, na ekwesighị ka ihe na-enye ya nsogbu n'afọ '-

The bat says that anyone with mouth and anus should not complain of stomach upset.

### **Conflict Resolution**

Conflict is an interpersonal misunderstanding of incompatible interests by different groups of people. Conflict according to Igboanusi (2017) is a feature of all human societies and an integral aspect of all social relationships. Conflict whether social, economic, political, religious or otherwise is inevitable in human society. Two types of conflict exist namely non-violent and violent conflict. Non-violent conflict is a form of healthy competition which is obtained in activities like sporting competition, football match, singing competition and so on. Violent conflicts on the other hand involve the use of weapons to settle incompatible interests and goals. Conflict whether violent or non-violent could be interpersonal, inter-ethnic, inter-state and so on as earlier said. It is on the linguistic tools used to pacify the violent conflict that the paper hinges on.

Conflict resolution relates to the order generally accepted by the general public as best approaches of monitoring, preventing and resolving conflict issues among people with incompatible interest.

### **Emperical Studies**

Okorie (2012) studied on the Philosophy in indigenous Igbo proverbs: Cross-cultural Media for Education in the Era of Globalization. In his paper, he maintains that there is philosophy in Igbo proverbs. He also contends that the basic ingredients of Igbo proverb are meaning, order, beauty, knowledge, wisdom, power, metaphysics and ethics.

He concludes that Igbo proverbs could also be a medium and potent force for education in the era of globalization because globalization is all about cultural diffusion or exchange of ideas from one part of the globe to another. He did not study how to use proverb and wellerism in resolving conflict issues as it is being studied here.

Egenti & Okoye (2016) wrote on the role of Igbo proverbs in conflict resolution and reconciliation. Their work analyzed some proverbs using Speech Act Theory to show the various functions and impact of proverbs in resolving conflict issues and promotion of peaceful co-existence in human interpersonal relationship. Egenti & Okoye did not apply Use and Relevance Theory in their work and did not study wellerisms too. Hence the reason for this paper.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theoretical framework to be considered for this work are Use theory of meaning and Relevance theory.

#### **Use Theory**

Use theory was propounded by Wittgenstein a German scholar in 1953. Wittgenstein in his book called 'Philosophical Investigation' proposed the theory as an alternative to other theories of meaning. The objective of his theories is to show that it is not proper to treat meanings as entities. To him, "the meaning of any linguistic expression (be it a word, phrase or a sentence) is determined by the context in which it is used". (Ndimele 1997:20) this is invariably another way of saying that what an expression means is the function of its use in the language.

Use theory is also referred to as Contextual Theory. It was observed that the meaning of certain classes of words could be lost if treated as just entities, hence the proposal of the theory.

#### **The Strength of the Theory:**

It has helped a lot in maintaining the meaning of certain classes of words that could be lost if meaning were treated as just entities. The theory also offers answer to questions like: how should we go about identifying the particular non-semantic property of a given word that is responsible for its meaning. Above all the theory is capable of giving a manageable account in the meaning.

#### **Weakness of the Theory:**

The limitation of the theory is that it fails to understand that no two persons or culture put the same object to the same use all the time. Also the theory fails to acknowledge that meaning has character.

### **Mode of Application**

The mode of Application of the theory simply shows that when a word is being used, there is intended speaker's meaning which reveals the context. For Instance, when a speaker is describing the benefits of living in peace, he or she may use the proverb. "Igwe bụ ike" meaning multitude is strength. So the speaker is trying to say that people can achieve more when they are together peacefully than when they are not as a result of conflict or crises.

Therefore in applying this theory, one is aware that the use theory of meaning contends that the meaning of any word, phrase or sentence at all is the use to which it is put in the society. Hence the "Igwe bụ ike" - multitude is strength has been put in the position of describing the importance of multitude of people staying together in peace and harmony for higher achievement.

So for one to understand a proverb or wellerism, he or she should know the meaning and how they are used by the speakers. Then the Use theory will be applied to ensure that such proverbs or wellerisms reflect the contexts in which they are used.

### **Relevance Theory**

Relevance theory was propounded by cognitive scientist Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson in 1986 which was seen in their book called "Relevance: Communication and Cognition" (1986, revised 1995). The theory can be defined as an attempt to work out in details one of Paul Grice's Maxims of conversation. The theory is a framework for understanding the interpretation of utterances. It states that every utterance conveys the information that is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee's effort to process it.

### **The Strength of the Theory:**

Relevance theory advocates that utterances are ostensive that means they draw their addressee's attention to the fact that the communicator wants to convey some information and inferential meaning that the addressee has to infer what the communicator wanted to convey, based on the utterances. Relevance theory

also attempts to explain figurative language such as hyperbole, metaphor and irony.

### **Weakness of the Theory:**

Critics said relevance used in the theory is not defined well enough to be measured so it is not possible to say what exactly is meant by relevant enough and the most relevant.

### **Mode of Application:**

The mode of application of the theory simply shows that one is allowed to make utterances that are relevant to the context at any given time. For Instance, when a speaker is describing the benefits of living in peace, he or she applies only the relevant proverbs. Other utterances the communicator wants to convey must be properly put in the manner that will draw the attention of the addressee.

### **Data Analysis**

#### **Similarities and Differences Between Proverb and Wellerism**

Proverb is similar to Wellerism but with some little differences because they are two different linguistic terms.

The common feature of proverb and wellerism is that both seem to be permanent, transmitted to succeeding generations. They tend to reoccur with the same meaning. Both are didactically used for teaching of morals and are context dependent. Also animals and other creatures can be used to portray all aspects of human life, either positive or negative. Wellerisms and Proverbs have slight comparison which could be made out of them.

Some significant differences are that with proverb, speakers mostly begin by saying that "our elders say that...." But wellerisms would begin with "the tortoise says that", "the monkey says that", "the chameleon says that..." Summarily, in wellerism, those creatures mentioned are personified as if they have the capacity to quote the statement.

While proverb is a simple statement, Wellerism involves talking through a character in which case the character's expression is reported by the user of the wellerism.

### **Igbo pacification proverbs**

Some Igbo pacification Proverbs that can be applied in conflict resolution and management are:

1. 'E were nka biri n'ụ lọ akanya ochie ọ dị ka ọ naghị ehi mmiri' - When there is understanding between two living in an old thatched house, it will look as if the roof is not leaking. The proverb is used to advice people in conflict situations to understand that life is full of challenges and for that reason they should always find a way of tolerating each other for peaceful co-existence. The implication of this is that for one to achieve peace in conflict situation, there must be tolerance. So tolerance is a feature of pacification here.

2. Kama ewu ga-esi n'ọ hị a gaba n'ubi ya nọ rọ n'ụ lọ taba nri - instead of a goat to move into the farm from the bush let it be tethered at home and eat fodder. This proverb implies that peaceful co-existence is sustained at a cost and by accomodation which is a pacification feature. It is used to advise members of the family that have a troublesome person on the need to accommodate and ignore certain things from him or her for peaceful co-existence. One can resolve conflict issues by accommodating and enduring each other.

3. Ụmụ nna abụ ọ lụ ba ọ gụ onye ọ bụ a akpara ala nna ha - When two brothers are fighting themselves, a stranger will take over their father's heritage. This proverb is used to advise two brothers, communities, towns and so on that are fighting each other the importance of tolerance which is a pacification feature. It is also used to advise the conflicting parties that progress and prosperity cannot be achieved where there is no peace and harmony.

4. Ọ na-abụ a malụ na-edi ndidi, ọ dị ka e bi n'udo - Where there is so much forbearances, it appears as if there is so much peace there. The interpretation of the proverb is that it takes a lot of sacrifice to sustain peace. The above proverb can be applied in a situation where the parties involved have sense of endurance on each other for peaceful co-existence amongst them. The implication is that one should know how to endure certain things for the purpose of peaceful co-existence.

5. 'Akwụ nikọ' ekogbuna osisi ma osisi ekogbuna akwụ nikọ. 'Akwụ nikọ' a parasitic plant must not suffocate the tree and let the tree preserve the parasitic plant. This proverb can be used to advise people against being selfish. Considering only your well-being without thinking of others around you is not a

good behavior and this invariably can lead to conflict situation. The implication is that one should not be selfish.

6. *Ọ bụ nwoke amaghị obi ibe ya mere nkị ta ji achụ enwe ọ sọ* - It is lack of understanding between one man and another that makes a dog to want to chase a monkey. This metaphorically implies that mutual mistrust could at times be misplaced. The interpretation of this proverb is that openness to each other will enhance peace and unity. The implication here is that people should understand each other in conflict resolution.

7. *'Ihe e ji asa ọ kụ ma e richaa nri abụ ghị maka ihe e riri kama ọ bụ maka nke a ga-eri echí'* - The reason for washing plate after eating each meal is not because of the food we have eaten but for the one that will be eaten tomorrow. The proverb can be applied for conflicting parties to have a rethink of what will be the fate of their future generations if they should not allow peace to reign amongs them. This will make them resolve their conflict for the good of their future generation.

8. *Anaghị alụ ọ gụ n'usekwu n'ihhi na ma eku agbajighi ọ kụ awaa* - Fights are not encouraged in the kitchen because if the soup ladle does not get broken the earthen bowl is smashed. This proverb can be used to advice two conflicting parties on the dangers of conflict mismanagement. The proverb shows that in conflict situation, both conflicting parties suffer.

### **Igbo Pacification Wellerisms**

The following are some of the wellerisms that can be applied in peace and conflict resolution:

1. *'Mbe sị rị na onye kari rị ya tū ọ rọ ya ọ gụ, ya emee ọ gụ ahụ ka ọ ghọ rọ mgba'* -The tortoise says that if a stronger man wants to fight him, he will make the fight look like wrestling. Metaphorically, there are many ways of running away from an enemy. This wellerism can be applied where it is noticed that one side of the conflicting party is weaker than the other one. It is applied so that the party will have a rethink. The implication is that bravery and maturity should be applied in conflict management and resolution.

2. *'Onyeisi sị rị na ihe ya jiri bụ rụ ọ kụ aga n'abalị abụ ghị ka ya were hụ ụ zọ kama na ọ bụ ka ndị na-ahụ ụ zọ ghara ikwatu ya'* - The blind man says that the lamp he carries at night is not necessarily for him to see but to stop those who see from running into him. This implies that in sustaining peaceful co-

existence all hands must be on deck. That means parties involved should endeavour to sacrifice something. Sacrifice is a pacification feature.

3. 'Atụ rụ sị rị na ihe ya jiri enete ihe anya aka bụ ka ya nwee ike ị kọ maka ihe ahụ nke ọ ma' - The sheep says that the reason it looks steadily at things is to enable it tell a better story. Metaphorically, good steps taken to solve a problem may prove to be more effective than hasty decision. This wellerism can be used to advice parties in conflict situation to always have a rethink and see the adverse effect of conflict first before embarking on it.

4. 'Ata sị rị na ihe ya jiri were hapụ onye rụ rụ ya bụ ka ọ rie nri ọ rụ ya, ma ọ bụ ghi ya, ọ gaara ị bụ ọ rụ rụ ya na-aga, ya a na-epu na-eso ya n'azu' - The spear grass says that he merely wants the weeder to be given food otherwise he would have been growing behind while he weeds. Metaphorically, he who seeks the welfare of another often makes sacrifice a lot without minding what he loses. Sacrifice is the pacification feature here.

5. 'Ala sị rị na ya kpacha anya gba nwoke ibe ya nkị tị ka ọ na-azọ ya ụ kwụ n'isi mana ya ga-echetera ya ma oge ị rụ ụ lọ ruo' - The soil says that he deliberately allowed his fellow man to match on him but will remind him about it on the day he will decide to build a house. Metaphorically, it is endurance, patience and forgiveness that sustain interpersonal relationship. The interpretation of this wellerism is that for one to maintain peace he should be able to overlook certain things capable of bringing conflict. The pacification features here are endurance and forgiveness.

6. Nkawkwụ sị rị na ihe ya jiri egbu opi ma ya na-aga bụ maka ndị achọ ghi anu isi - The shrew says that the reason he sounds his trumpet while making his way is to allow those who do not wish to encounter a smelling animal. The interpretation of this wellerism is that one should make every necessary effort to avoid anything that can make anyone to doubt him to avoid conflict situation.

7. Onye ara sị rị na ihe ya jiri arahụ ụ ra n'abali abụ ghi na ihe ọ na-ekwu agwụ la kama na ọ bụ ka onye ọ kụ kọ ya fuoro n'abali ghara ị kpọ ya aha - The mad man says he has to sleep in the night not because he has nothing more to say but because he does not want to be implicated when anybody loses his fowl at night. The interpretation of this wellerism is that one can avoid conflict situation when he does something with moderation and caution. So if the wellerism is properly applied will help the conflicting parties to be cautious in whatever they are doing to avoid conflict situations.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The paper has succeeded in showing the meaning of proverb and wellerism, the similarities and differences between both of them are equally seen as two linguistic terms. The concepts listed are equally explained which facilitated the understanding of the topic. The functions of Proverbs and wellerisms have been seen to be enormous not only for teaching and educating the audience but are also veritable tools for peace and conflict resolution. The two theories used for the paper are appropriate. The Use theory emphasizes that the meaning of any linguistic expression be it word, phrase or sentence is determined by the context in which it is used. Therefore, the Igbo pacification Proverbs and wellerisms used in this work properly fit into the context.

The Relevance Theory which states that every utterance conveys the information that it is relevant enough for it to be worth the addressee's effort to process it. Therefore, the proverbs and wellerisms selected for this study are very relevant and effective in peace and conflict resolution.

In conclusion, proverbs and wellerisms are two different linguistic concepts but can serve the same functions. Both of them have been seen to be effective linguistic tools for maintaining peace and very effective in conflict resolution and management because they were developed based on people's experiences and real life situations.

The writer therefore suggests that scholars should look at pacification in other figurative languages as a way of peace and conflict resolution.

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