

LANGUAGE USE **AND** PRESERVATION

A Festschrift in Honour Of

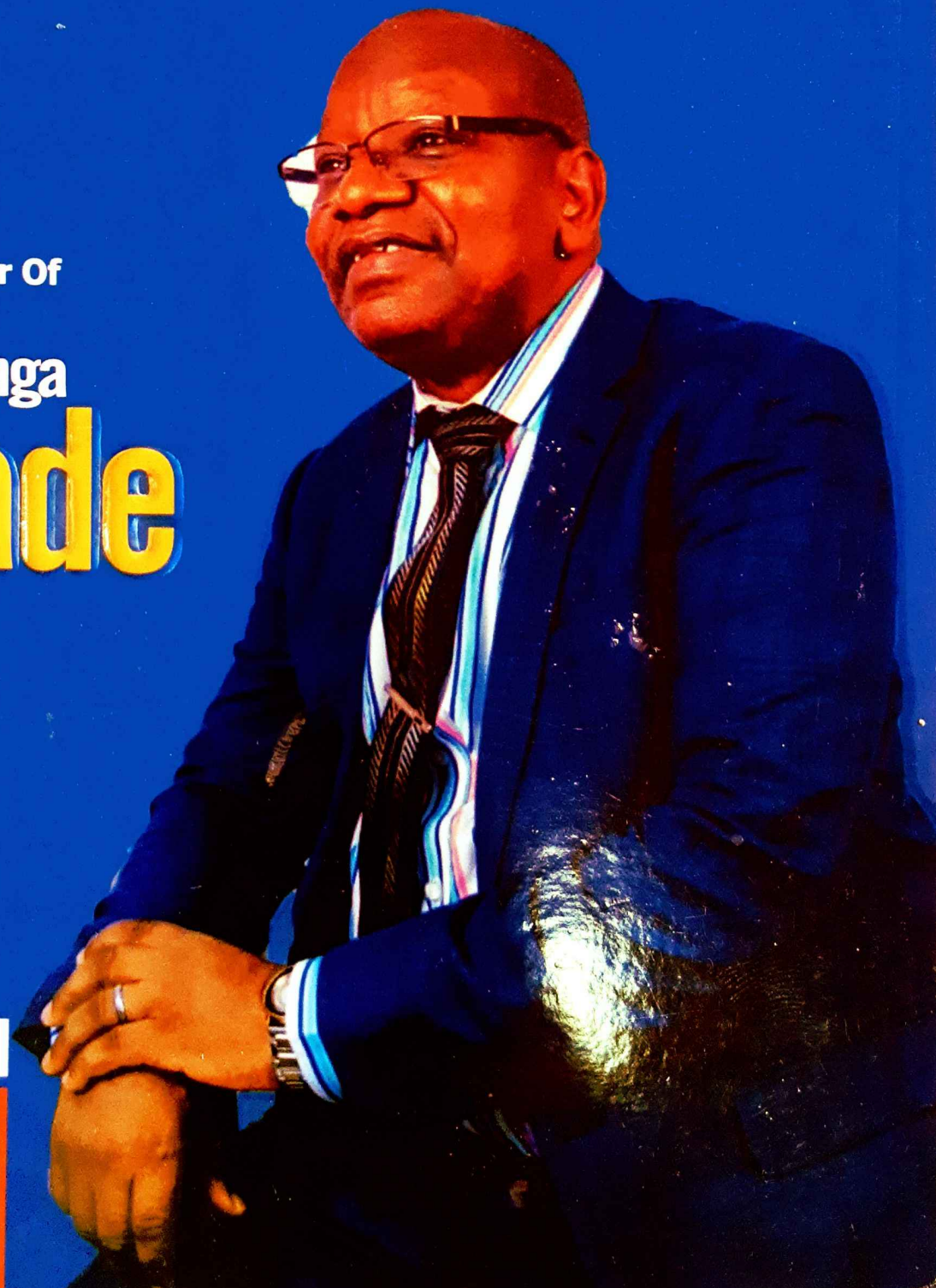


Prof. Abel Gbenga

Fakuade

EDITED BY:

DARE OWOLABI
JOSEPH FRIDAY-OTUN
ABDULLAHI S. BASHIR



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PROF. ABEL GBENGA FAKUADE**

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Reviewer: Prof. S. Oluwole Oyetade

CHAPTER EIGHT

ANIMAL IMAGERY IN IGBO PROVERBS

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Abstract

The Igbo people employ the features, characteristics, and manners of behavior of non-human animals in allusion to human beings to portray a range of meanings in proverbial sayings. This study sought to examine how animal imagery is used in Igbo to extol, admonish, warn, satirize, educate, etc. The data for the study were culled from textual materials, conversations with native speakers, interviews and introspection. The analysis centers on the projected imagery and connotations of the identified animals in the proverbs. The study revealed that some animals connote multiple images while some show specific and some peculiar images. A good understanding of the use of animal imagery in Igbo proverbs would promote effective communication and assist to overcome many language exchange barriers.

Keywords: Animal imagery, proverbs, Igbo worldview, Sources of proverbs, functions of proverbs, and totems in Igbo land.

Introduction

The cyclic nature of life in this earthly tripartite of animal, human and the spirit world is a belief the Igbo hold in high esteem. Life moves in cycles, through phases and has no end. The Igbo people from the ancients to the arrival of the colonialists and even up to the post civil war days were living with animals up to a disquieting level of closeness. They do not only go to sleep with the fowls but can keep nights with goats, sheep, cats, python, dogs, and cows, etc. Some communities in Igbo land ascribe their origin to one animal or another and as such hold certain totems regarding them. According to Liu (2013, p. 1844), "Since the ancient time, animals have been the most intimate friend of human beings, and people tend to express their feelings and points of view on animals. ...some animal words are added with people's feelings and associations, human beings often deliver ideas and feelings through animals". Psychoanalytic approaches suggest that the innate drive to associate with animals satisfies people's emotional need for affiliation (Levinson, 1972). Animals are believed to relate to symbolic thought according to Jungian theory on archetypes and the unconscious (Henderson, 1999). Additional emotional gratification comes from animals' non-evaluative support, which can reduce threat to the ego (Allen et al., 1991).

Human beings are rational beings and pride themselves as superior to other species on this planet. Animals are subservient to man and in certain ways inferior to him. Ahmed and Rafique (2014, p.522) captured the differences between man and animal saying:

The basic difference that makes human beings superior is their power to become learned, cultured and well-mannered by virtue of their faculty of being rational. They possess moral values which are necessary for a civilized and progressive society. They

work constructively to develop their culture and society. On the other hand, animals do not have any set of moralities to follow; they do not give explanations for their actions, justify themselves. They kill each other randomly for food or other minor reasons; they do not obey any rules of morality and if they ever do they have their own rules and their own prices.

In their descriptions, categorizations, and explanations of human behaviour and wisdom, the Igbo often use images of animals to naturalize their rituals and beliefs. The presence of animals in their proverbs and folklore reflect the environment in which they live.

Proverbs, in the words of Finnegan, is a rich source of imagery and succinct expression on which more elaborate forms can draw. Among the Igbo people, Ugonna states that proverbs can be conceived as a kind of mirror which reflects human experience. Noah goes a step further to note that proverbs generally do not only authenticate opinion and heighten interest in stories, but also add ornaments to stories. It is the spice of communication. The proverb is a multi-faceted and challenging concept to have an easily acceptable definition. Mieder (1985:119; 1993:24) defines the term as a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, but by maturity to understand, link and handle issues. It is used widely in rhetorics and oral expressive communication in a restricted order and protocol. In the preliterate Igbo world it proves the intellectual prowess, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and is handed down from generation to generation. The Oxford Dictionary defines it as 'a short pithy saying in general use'. Archie Taylor's 1991 definition extended to over 200 pages, and concluded that it is impossible to give a meaningful definition that was also brief. Proverbs, says Mieder (2000 :29) express traditional wisdom shared by all people of a culture. It derives from traditional intelligence and distinguishes the knowledgeable from the unwise, the children from the men not by chronological age as demonstrated in and by ones dexterity in the use of proverbs, idioms and anecdotes. Zellem (2012) claims that proverbs "can rival the great words of famous philosophers and writers throughout history in their richness, meaning and color." In his fascinating description of Dari proverbs of Afghanistan, he claimed that "a good Dari proverb, properly used, can match the wisdom of Confucius, the depth of Zen Koan, the whims of Lewis Carroll, the homespun words of Mark Twain, and the lyricism of Shakespeare - all in one short, meaningful phrase." Crepeau (1985:35) says that they "explicitly or implicitly express an ideal behavioral norm". Similarly, Christensen (1958:234) maintains that "proverbs may be regarded as the verbalization of social norms or "laws" which govern interpersonal relations." It is important to observe that some people believe that the proverb is a ploy to lie or deceive and that it does not contain any truism. Bond (1982:37) therefore claims that a proverb is a "folded or knotted speech" and that "using proverbs amount to avowal of frailty, of scheming and deceit."

In the Igbo language, proverbs are poetic, and as aptly described by Mieder (1990:218), they are a significant formulaic mode of speech. It is an entirely separate genre in speech. Ability to understand a language does not translate to ability to understand or use proverbs. Everybody cannot be good at all the genres of a language, though, it is expected that people improve in their understanding and use of proverbs with cultivated interest, exposure and age. It is in that vein that it is generally said that "Onye a tũrọ ilu, kọwara ya, ego ejiri lụọ nne ya lara n'iyi." (A person who is not good at all the genres of a language, though, it is expected that people improve in their understanding and use of proverbs with cultivated interest, exposure and age. It is in that vein that it is generally said that "Onye a tũrọ ilu, kọwara ya, ego ejiri lụọ nne ya lara n'iyi."

you speak to in a proverb and explain, the money used to pay the mother's bride price was a waste). This proverb is both disparaging and insulting and is viewed with all seriousness. It is confrontational and disruptive in communicational interactions. The major importance, however, is to invoke the people's expectation and challenge the addressee. However, as observed by Siran (1993:227) it is important to note that "criticism can be expressed without offending the receiver and without implicating the sender" and this is effectively achieved in Igbo through the use of proverbs.

It is the belief of the Igbo people that proverbs are socially more acceptably used by the elderly, traditional heads, the initiate in cults and societies, titled men and traditional priests (Obiefuna, 1978; Nwadike, 2009). Generally in Igbo community, women were not part of the community decision making process except on some rare occasions. Women's use of proverbs are limited and controlled and in some areas of Igboland like in Ngwaland they are hardly expected to use or understand proverbs as it is said among them that "*E were ilu chaa ikpe, ndi ndom agbara aka ikpe laa*" (if proverbs are used in deciding cases, women go home empty handed. Nwadike, 2009:27). The young ones and particularly children are not expected to use proverbs and especially when addressing an elderly person. In that respect it is usually said that "*Okoro etoghi eto wara ogoḍo, ikuku eburu ya na ogoḍo ya*" (If an immatured man ties a wrapper, wind will carry him and his wrapper.)

It is important to explain that though proverbs are generally true in their propositions, their applicability and understanding, they are at times limited to specific speech communities. This is especially so in Igbo because of the fragmentary and scattered village or isolated nature of habitation of the Igbo society. The dialects are very many and they are not easily mutually intelligible. The understanding of proverbs can therefore be predicated on wide exposure to other people, dialects and situations as it was correctly noted by Siran (1993:227) that "a proverb's meaning is never exhausted by its present use: it is rather a potential space on which the actual situation will leave its marks". Outside the group or society, therefore, explanation is understandable, necessary and not frowned at.

Different languages make use of proverbs in different ways and for different purposes. Proverbs are culture specific and translation of proverbs across languages does not ensure an understanding of the proverbs across the languages (Siran, 1993:225). It is true as noted by Zellem that "proper use of another culture's proverbs demonstrates respect and understanding of that culture at a very high level."

Animals in the Igbo world

The animals known to the people are innumerable but the most common ones include fowls, goats, pigs, dogs, sheep, cows, horses, turkey, rats, lizards, various types of snakes like python, cobra etc., chameleon, tortoise, snail, elephants, antelopes, hyenas, guerrillas, monkeys, baboons, porcupines etc. The animals seem to have the same general semantic import to the people generally but they connote different things to different people depending on their history, culture and tradition. Some animals are linked to the history of some communities or to the founding figure of the communities. These are among the factors that contribute to the image the animals have for the various Igbo groups or communities. It is almost a common knowledge that some animals are deified in Igbo culture and

tradition and not mere fiction as Achebe's readers may be tempted to think or believe. It is a serious and important issue in the affected communities. No wonder Equiano, one of the educated Igbo ex-slaves remembered to mention it in his writing as quoted by Nwashioku Ighediwa (2015) saying 'We have serpents of different kinds, some of which are extreme. Omens when they appear in our houses, and there we never molest. I was desired by some of the wise to touch these (snakes) that I might be interested in the omens, which I did, for they were harmless' (sic).

Animals symbolize good and bad things. It is believed that God uses the animal image to communicate to man. In the traditional belief system we have the concept of omen. An omen foretells the occurrence of a bad thing like accident or the death of a person. Animal images are constantly used as omen especially the evil ones. Somehow rare animals are mostly used for this purpose. Animals like the chameleon, reptiles like python, cobra, short- black snakes, monkeys, antelopes etc.

Table 1: Totems in Igbo land

Name of Animal	English equivalent	Community Where it is a totem
<i>Abú àlà</i>	Viper	Nnobi
<i>Agū</i>	Tiger	Umugagu, Umuchiagu, Amagunze
<i>Agúiyi</i>	Crocodile	Agulu, Akaeze
<i>Agwó ndù</i>	Green Snake	Nnewe, Ojuma, Agbor, Mpu, Mmaku, Nnewi, Ogbaku, Akaeze, Isiagu
<i>Azù</i>	Fish	Amaeke, Mmazu, Uduma, Umunya
<i>Edi àbàlì</i>	Leopard	Obiangwu
<i>Ehi</i>	Cow	Abiriba, Amuzu, Umubo, Unenehi in Obiangwu
<i>Ejula</i>	Snail	Akwukwu, Nnobi, Nimo, Mbaitolu, Ukwale
<i>Eké</i>	Python	Idemmili LGA, Njaba, Oba, Akwakwu, Orlu, Uli, Unubi
<i>Élé</i>	Antelope	Umuhia
<i>Élé mmiri</i>	Buffalo	Amaorie, Obibi-Ezena
<i>Enwè</i>	Monkey	Awka, Imerienwe, Elem, Odekpe, Inyi, Amawbia
<i>Éwí</i>	Bush Rat	Nnewi, Dikenafai, Igbozo, Ozubulu, Ihe Mbosi, Orafiite
<i>Mbè</i>	Tortoise	Achi, Akwueze, Ogbunike
<i>Ngwéré aghu</i>	Alligator	Kwali, Atani, Ogbaru, Oji River
<i>Nkita</i>	Dog	Isielu in Asaba, Odekpe, Nnewi, Onitsha
<i>Obú</i>	Owl	Nnobi
<i>Okwà</i>	Partridge	Nneokwa, Nnokwa

Sources of Proverbs

Proverbs, according to Omoniyi (1987), are a universal phenomenon. They are of primordial origin and present in the oral tradition of the people in Africa, especially, and handed down from generation to generation. They emanate from historical facts and happenings; historical characters, old myths and legends of the people; known and imaginary people, animal symbolism and ancient beliefs and a lot

are a product of literary creativeness. Sharndama (2014) opines that proverbs evolve from the people's interaction with nature, social relations and attitudes to life.

A source of common European proverbs, generally, and animal proverbs, in particular, is the Holy Bible mainly the Old Testament. After a careful study of both the traditional and the modern proverbs most people seem to agree with Sharndama (2014: 97) that "they are not spontaneously created but created as after math of an incident or long time observation of a natural or social phenomenon". However, Ashipu and Amende (2013:11) identify an occasion that can produce a proverb spontaneously in a quote credited to Firth (1972):

At some notable moment of his life, perhaps at a time of stress, of imminent danger to himself or the tribe, or maybe even when confronted by death itself, a man of rank, preserving his composure, makes some remark which displays such aptness, picturesqueness and facility of phrase it (proverb) strikes the ear of the bystander and lingers in the memory. This is repeated later in the communal meeting-house, where the details of the whole event are narrated to an eager crowd of listeners – the usual Maori Habit. There this remark so appeals by its fitness to the occasion and happy turn of phrase that it is treasured in the mind of the community, is told and retold, becomes adopted to common use.

Igbo Worldview

A worldview reflects a people's basic assumptions about, and perceptions of the universe, which give orientation and value to their lives. Kalu (1978) and Kraft (1979) agree that worldview can be understood in terms of a unified picture of the world explained by a system of concepts, which order the natural and social rhythms, and the place of individuals and communities in them. Animalu (1990) believes it refers to a people's way of organizing their activities which explain the how and why of daily existence.

The Igbo people perceive the world as having a tripartite form made up of *igwe* (the sky), *ala* (the earth) and *mmuo* (the underworld). The *igwe* or sky is the dwelling place of the Supreme Being (*Chukwu*). The Supreme Being is believed to have a host of other powerful divinities and primordial beings like *Anyanwu* (the sun god), *Amadioha* (the god of thunder), *igwe* (the sky god). *Ala* or the earth is the dwelling place of human beings, the earth deity, minor divinities and personified nature forces. In like manner, spirits which include ancestral spirits and other spirits live in the spirit or underworld also known as *mmuo*.

Despite their being highly fragmented republican communities, their various calendars are a roaster for the worship of the gods, one after the other. The central belief is in *chukwu-abiam* nonetheless. They believe that unity is strength. Despite their fragmentation into uncountable independent villages, they easily unite against a common enemy. They carry themselves along as crystallized in the saying "*Onye aghana nwanne ya*" (let nobody leave his or her brother/sister behind). They have a very strong belief in their progenitors. Their old departed ones are not really seen as dead but as metamorphosed beings directing their affairs and fighting for them. They also believe in the existence of *Ekwensu*-the devil.

The constituents of the environment which include man, animal, the material and non-material elements combine to give each place its special rich culture and shape the tradition of the

people. This is to say that there is a relationship between human beings, animals, the material and non-material elements in the environment and the mental and emotional processes projected on linguistic expressions.

Literature Review

Olateju's (2005) study shows that names of animals have been used metaphorically to refer to human beings. The work reveals that animal metaphors are used to refer to human beings. It also says the animal metaphors are interpreted based on culture and context. Forti's (2008) study on the 'Animal Imagery in the Book of Proverbs' is a combined investigation that considers the zoological traits of the animals alongside its literary image in the bible. The didactic framework of proverbs and its impressive use of various literary patterns were the essential points of reference in the analysis of the image and its rhetorical implications. The work of Heimpel reported by Forti (2008) treats animals as metaphors or similes, and categorized them according to the traits emphasized.

Black's (1996) monograph on the image of winged creatures in Sumerian poetry analyzed the relation between the image, the imaginary, and the literary sample in expressing the diverse rhetorical function of the image. Sulton (2017) points out how animals are used for teaching, based on the simultaneous similarity and dissimilarity of the animal and the human being. The work takes to task the anthropomorphizing tradition that treats animals merely as of human values and behaviour. Ahmed and Rafique (2014) explored the use of animal imagery in Adiga's *The White Tiger*. The images portrayed in the work were both vicious as well as benevolent. The images of animals in the novel are analysed and interpreted to deconstruct their use. Kobia (2016) conducted a metaphorical analysis of domestic animals in selected Swahili proverbs focussing on chicken metaphor based on their source domains. He examined the socio-cultural and economic background that shapes Swahili proverbs and their underlining inherent meanings and concluded that Swahili proverbs are used metaphorically as a repository of traditional wisdom of the people and a vehicle to articulate their worldview.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) that grew out of their work *Metaphors We Live By*. The underlying belief of the theory is that metaphors are essential to the structuring of human thought and language. According to Kövecses (2005), the theory has a long history, building on centuries of scholarship and considering metaphor not only as an ornament in language but a structuring and restructuring conceptual tool for and in the creation of reality.

A conceptual metaphor is understanding one domain of experience (that is typically abstract) in terms of another (that is typically concrete) or better still it is "a systematic set of correspondences between two domains of experience". Aristotle says metaphor is "a shift carrying over a word from its normal use to a new one (Richards, 1965, p.89). In cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor or cognitive metaphor refers to the understanding of one idea, or conceptual domain, in terms of another. Every metaphor has two mental representations namely the Source domain (SD) and the target domain (TD).

Prominent among those who contributed to the development of CMT are Gibbs (1994) and Kövecses (2000, 2002, 2005). And among the major critics were Cameron & Maslen, eds., 2010, Deignan 2005; Steen, et al. 2007. The critics identified four basic problems with the CMT theory:

- (a) The theory is attributionary ambiguous about the locus of metaphor motivation,
- (b) Commits a form of infamous "homunculus problem" in philosophy of mind,
- (c) Employs circular reasoning to formulate hypotheses and interpret linguistic evidence, and
- (d) Is not parsimonious.

Methodology

The data for this study were extracted mainly from: *Mmanu e ji Eri Okwu* Vol.I by F.O.F. Onwudufor, conversations with native speakers, interviews and introspection of the researcher who is a native speaker of Igbo. Onwudufor's text material has eight hundred and sixty one (861) Igbo proverbs from which the researcher extracted 113 animal proverbs. Proverbs from other sources are fifty. The corpus studied therefore was one hundred and sixty three out of which twenty were purposively selected for analysis due to time and space constraints.

Analysis and Interpretation

1. *Aturu muru ebule gba aka nwa.* (A sheep that begets a ram is childless).
 Meaning: Not having a child at all is better than having a worthless one.
 This proverb is used to empathize with people who have wayward children.
 The sheep represent the obedient and gentle people but the ram is the otherwise, a flirt and avid.
2. *A na-akpu aru ndi mere eme nwamkpi a na-achughari nne ya.* (When people are busy cleansing the abomination already committed, the he-goat is there making love to his mother).
 This proverb is used to upbraid the wicked who are expected to turn away from their atrocities but are rather busy committing new ones. *Nwamkpi* (small he-goat) represents the wicked people who pride themselves in crimes
3. *O dighi mma iji iwe mkpi were zojie nne ewu ukwu.* (One ought not smash the leg of the she-goat when it was the he-goat that annoyed him).
 The image shown here is that of related people and that even there transfer of aggression is never justified. *Mkpi* (he-goat) represents violator of the law or criminal and *nne ewu* (the she-goat) the offended.
4. *O buru na awo bu uzọ a daa olulu, ndi so ya n'azu amuru ako.* (When the toad in front falls into a pit, the ones following it learn their lesson).
 The *awo* (toad) is the first to suffer a misfortune through which others following learn their lessons.
5. *E chebe ka awo puo odudu were luo di, o n'ulo nne ya were kaa nka.* (Anyone who insists that the toad must develop a tail before marriage is asking it to rot in his mother's house).

- It is needless expecting an impossibility to become possible as a condition for progress. The toad not having a tail is natural and nothing can change that condition. It is its own unique characteristic.
6. *Ngwere ghafee ukwu osisi aka akpara ya.* (When a running lizard bypasses a tree, it must surely be caught).
 One exposes himself to more danger when he snubs a possible source of defence and help in time of trouble. *Ngwere* (lizard) here represents a person in trouble pursued by enemies and the tree is the opportunity of escape.
7. *Akatiokpo enwebeghi ohere were gbupu akwu chara ya n'isi ma ya fodu icho nke agadi nwaanyi o ga-egbupuru ya.* (The agama lizard does not have time to cut down the ripe palm bunch on its head and he is being asked to help an old woman with the same assignment).
 The agama lizard here represents a human being. The proverb is saying that it is difficult for one to help others with the same thing he cannot afford for himself.
8. *O buru na ngwere esobe nkakwu o buru anwisi.* (When a lizard goes about in the company of a shrew, it becomes a smelling reptile).
 Bad company corrupts good moral. *Ngwere* (lizard) does not smell but seen always in the company of the shrew would be taken as smelling as the shrew.
9. *O na-aka mma ka okuko were onu ya tupuo akwa ya.* (It is better for the hen to break its egg with its own beak).
Okuko (fowl) here represents a human being. A person who wilfully damaged his own property has nobody to blame.
10. *Okuko siri na ya tigbube onwe ya otu umu ya si anwu, na uru anu agaghị adikwa ya n'aku.* (The fowl says that if he had to cry the way it loses its chickens, that it will certainly have become a mere skeleton).
 The image of the fowl here represents a perpetually unlucky person. A person who encounters too many tribulations must have worked out a means of surviving them.
11. *Any nne okuko na-eche akwa ya.* (The eye of the mother hen protects her eggs).
 One's physical presence matters a lot especially when matters concerning him are being decided. *Any nne okuko* (the eye of the hen) is a synecdoche. *Akwa ya* (her eggs) represents her property. It means one protecting himself by himself.
12. *Nkita riri akpakuru nchi adighi aghazi ichu nta.* (Any dog that tasted the bowel of a grass cutter, will never stop hunting).
 Once one gets used to a particular bad habit, he finds it very difficult to discontinue it.
13. *O buru m ka e ji ebe nkita odudu.* (The person to cut the tail of a puppy must first of all put himself in the position of the animal).
 The appeal here is for empathy to moderate human actions against one another. Do unto others only what you wish them to do unto you.
14. *Anu tagburu nkita na-ata ajo aru.* (Any animal that could bite a dog to death bites terribly).
 A man of valour must be given credit for the feat he has achieved.

15. *Ewu dila n'ala dilakwa n'elu akpukpo ya.* (The goat that is lying on the ground is lying on its own skin).
One reserves the right to put his property to whatever use he so desires.
16. *Ewu batara n'ulo nyuq mmamiri ma nyukwaa akpuru, o baghizi uru na a chubara ya ka o puo.* (When a goat comes into a house and has defecated and urinated, it is useless trying to chase it out).
Certain misfortunes could be avoided if necessary steps are taken in good time to check it.
17. *Anaghj ata anu nshiko na nzuzo.* (It is difficult to eat a crab without attracting attention).
It is not easy to cover up whatever took place in public.
18. *Uwa adighiri enwe mma ya gbara otu lee nwaanyi ya omugwo.* (The world is not good for the monkey and he was caring for the wife that just put to bed naked).
It is not the wish of anybody to make a mockery of himself.
19. *Ikunye enwe mmiri abughj okwu, o bu inata ya iko.* (Giving water to the monkey is not the problem, it is retrieving the cup).
Ikunye enwe mmiri (giving water to the monkey) means being kind or generous to other people. However, some people abuse the privilege.
20. *Uchicha mere ihe e boro oke* (the cockroach that did the thing the rat was blamed for).
Uchicha (cockroach) represents an unsuspected person who committed a crime for which other people were held liable.

Conclusion

We have seen, in this study, that in Igbo proverbs, images of animals are used to represent nature and human life. Some of the animals are benevolent while some others are vicious. Animal imagery helps us to recognize things in our behaviours and illuminate general human behaviour. This reinforces a wise man's empirical observations and worldviews and gives meaning and direction to the daily conduct of human beings.

Generally, animals embody the authority of reality and connote a connection with the mythological or nature. Animal suffering elicits an affective connection that encourages empathy with the victim. Igbo people associate animals with certain moral qualities, personality traits, habits, peculiarities, emotions, etc. The dog, for instance, is seen as a physical and spiritual animal. It sees hidden and spiritual things. It serves as a guard in the home and some follow their owners in hunting expeditions. The goat is associated with negativity. It is not smart and can be very stupid and silly.

It is important that animal images in proverbs are well understood for one to have full proficiency in the Igbo language, and for smooth and effective communication in its use. This is an area linguists in other African languages should explore for its richness in not only preserving our heritage, but the humanness in us and for effective communication.

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