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A PRAGMA-STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF ISOKO APHORISMS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a study of Aphorisms in Isoko language. The Isoko language is one of the understudied minority languages facing threat of extinction from Nigerian Pidgin and the English language in the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Thus, in a bid to document and preserve aspects of the Isoko language, this paper undertakes a pragma-stylistic study of Isoko aphorisms. The data for the study consists of twelve (12) Isoko aphorisms collected from competent native speakers of Isoko through participant-observation method and recording and translated into English by a competent Isoko – English bilingual. They are then analysed using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980 & 2003) Conceptual Metaphor theory as analytical tool to ascertain the conceptual mappings between the compositional meaning of an aphoristic expression (source domain) in Isoko and its actual pragma-stylistic content (target domain). The findings reveal that the correspondence between the source and target domains in Isoko aphorisms help in accounting for both pragma-stylistic and social meanings in the real world. It recommends that studies of this nature should be carried out in other areas as it has the potentials of not only preserving and developing the Isoko language but also increasing the phrasal stock of the emerging Nigerian English.

KEYWORDS: pragma-stylistic, aphorisms, conceptual metaphor, Isoko language, compositional meaning

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a pragma-stylistic study of aphorisms in Isoko. An aphorism is a concise statement of a principle; it is a terse formulation of a truth or sentiment, equivalent to an adage. Aphorisms are metaphorical statements that are meaningful and establish a universal truth. They

almost always have proverbial meanings that are to be interpreted for clearer understanding. In fact, one can state that to some extent proverbs are aphorisms and aphorisms are proverbs. Like proverbs, aphorisms are aspects of the culture of a group of people, and thus, its language.

Isoko is an ethnolinguistic group inhabiting the Isoko geographical areas of Delta and Bayelsa States in the South-South geopolitical zone of the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The Isoko culture is closely related to several other cultures in the Niger Delta - namely, Urhob, Okpe, Ijaw, Ika, Ukwani, Itsekiri, Anioma, Aniocha-Oshimili and Olukumi people, except in few ways of dialectal variations and peculiarities. Among these tribes, the Urhobo tribe has the closest affinity with Isoko linguistically and culturally. One linguistic truth about the minority languages in Nigeria in general and the Niger-Delta languages in particular is the constant threat of extinction due to the predominant use of Nigerian Pidgin and the English language, negative attitude towards the indigenous languages, uncontrolled access to the social media with the English as its medium and rural urban migration of the youths. Because these minority languages have little or no social, economic, political, educational and military powers, they face serious threats as no attempt is made to study them.

The Isoko Language

Language, wherever it is spoken, is the veritable instrument of communication and identity. There is no natural language that is superior and/or inferior to another. Hence, all natural languages are equal but with varying degree of peculiarities and statuses, which Bamgbose (1998) (cited in Adegbite, Udofot & Ayoola, 2014, p. 6), refers to as “the degree of standardisation of linguistic innovations”. To Bamgbose (1998), these linguistic innovations are subsumed under linguistic structures such as lexical items, syntactic structures or the pronunciation of words as well as pragmatic and social aspects of language use. Although all languages are equal, this is not to completely undermine the sociolinguistic spread, standardisation, worldwide usage or dominance of some languages over the others upon which Bamgbose (1998) has suggested five measurements of degree of standardisation thus: demographic (numbers of speakers), authoritative (type of speakers), geographic (regional spread), codification (description) and acceptability (Adegbite, Udofot & Ayoola, 2014). It is quite possible for a language to richly enjoy the five statuses above over another language. This will only confer a higher status reputation on such language but notwithstanding, it is not to say that the other language is deficient linguistically.

Reputed to have about 400 languages, Nigeria is one of the most notable multilingual countries in Africa (Bamgbose 2001, p. 1). No doubt, the Isoko language is one of those many languages in Nigeria. The Isoko language is a South Western Edoid language of the Niger-Congo family (Elugbe, 1973; 1989) spoken by a population of 423,000 (Gordon, 2005) who live in the Isoko North, Isoko South and parts of Ndokwa East Local Government Area of Delta State.

In the areas of culture and tradition, there have been claims that the Isoko language is a dialect of Urhobo (Ilolo, 2013, p. 13). On the contrary, there are scholars who consider Isoko an independent language (Hubbard, 1952; Westermann & Bryan, 1952; Wolf, 1959; Lagefoged, 1964; Williamson, 1968; Mafeni, 1972). Additionally, Williamson (1968) concludes that Isoko is a language with several dialects and a fairly well-developed standard form based on the Uzere, Aviara and Irri dialects.

Isoko aphorisms are a body of native sayings that are proverbial in both content and form. An aphorism is an adage that reveals indigenous wisdom, knowledge and truth. The Isoko language, which is very rich in oral tradition, embodies several aphorisms that are of utmost significance in the study of the language. The Isoko aphorisms constitute a paradigm of native thoughts and expressions that are metaphorically proverbial. Isoko aphorisms are often being said

by the elderly in specific situations to correct deeds, resolve conflict, admonish, and reveal the likes and the dislikes as well as the taboos of the people.

Aphorism

Aphorism, according to Abram (2012, p. 111), is “a pithy and pointed statement of a serious maxim, opinion or general truth [...] a related prose form is the *proverb*”. This shows that aphorism is a concise but metaphorical statement that is meaningful and establishes a universal truth. Aphorism almost always have proverbial meanings that are to be interpreted for clearer understanding as Cuddon and Habib (2013, p. 46) state, “[...] proverb is often aphoristic”. Aphorisms are not used in speeches for use sake: they have moralistic impact. Hence, Morrell (2006, p. 367) avers that “aphorisms are summary texts designed to make an impact”. He claims further that “aphorisms also share similarities with sayings such as adages, saws and proverbs, in the sense that their wording is fixed” (p. 368). Aphorisms are philosophical sayings that are patterned by the human cognitive system for societal edification and enlightenment. In other words, they constitute conceptual routines that are evoked to group a target-scene relative to an alternative source-scene because they are self-contained, original and useful native knowledge. The construction of aphorisms is often based on individual experience; it is such individual experience (whether pleasant or horrific) that makes the individual in question to produce an aphoristic statement that may later become a universally acceptable statement of truth or wisdom.

Due to the metaphorical property of an aphorism, it is often confused with other closely related concepts. Even Morrell (2006, p. 368) observes this confusion in his remark that it is difficult to separate aphorism from other similar forms known as “paroemias”. There are several other concepts that function just like aphorism and some can, in fact, be used interchangeably with it. Few of these related concepts may include axiom, maxim, saying, adage, proverb, paroemias, epigram, quip, et cetera.

The Concept of Pragma-stylistics

Pragma-stylistics is a morphological blend of two disparate, yet related disciplines into a hybrid theory for analysing a text that shares both features of the two units that make it up. Pragmatics is the study of language in use. It is concerned with how language users interact, communicate and interpret linguistic behaviour. Stylistics on the other hand is concerned with how paying close attention to language use can contribute to and account for how texts are understood and evaluated. Despite the apparent overlaps and commonalities of interest between these two disciplines, there has been relatively little work that explores the interface between the two disciplines (Chapman & Clark, 2014). This interface is what this study attempts to explore in the study of the pragmatic and stylistic features of Isoko aphorisms.

In studying the stylistic potential of the language of a particular text, pragma-stylistics pays special attention to those features which a speaker may choose, or has chosen, from a range of acceptable forms in the same language that would be semantically, or truth conditionally, equivalent, but might perform or achieve different objectives or do so in different ways. In other words, the choices are seen as determined by the desired effects, by the communicative qualities aimed at, and by the context or situation itself. Thus, utterances with the same, or virtually the same, meaning may differ in their linguistic form and situational appropriateness, and these differences may have either stylistic or pragmatic explanations (Hickey, 1993).

As Hickey (1993) states further, Pragma-stylistics involves the study of all the linguistic and extra linguistic conditions which allow the rules and potential of a language to combine with the

specific elements of the context to produce a text capable of causing specific internal changes in the hearer's state of mind or knowledge. It distinguishes the abstract theoretical meaning or semantic import of a text from its usage or effectiveness in a specific situation and from what the speaker means or intends to achieve by using it.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

The concepts of aphorism and related forms have attracted the attention of scholars in the fields of linguistics and literary criticism over the years. Morrell (2006) analyses aphorisms from 20 different writers of notable reputation. Drawing insights from conversation analysis, he proposes a simple framework that allows for aphorisms to be analysed further in terms of two continua: whether they are convex or concave, and whether they are creative or destructive. The framework supplements content-based approaches with a structural account of how aphorisms may be organised and deployed. Adegaju (2009) focuses on the rhetoric of conflict-related proverbs. The study is a guide to constructive conflict resolution in Africa as it explores the possible place of Yoruba proverbs in the resolution of social conflicts and discusses the linguistic and rhetorical devices that underscore the wittiness and persuasive effectiveness of proverbs toward understanding conflict situations and devising strategies for resolving them.

Ogunrotimi and Afolayan (2018) emphasised the use of Yoruba proverbs as transcribed into English in Niyi Osundare's poetry. The study sees proverbs as praxis, stressing that the maxims contain moral sayings with the intention of Africanizing poetic meditation. In a similar manner, Ayinbola and Edwin (2014) studied Yoruba proverbs in Niyi Osundare's poetry but with different approach and thematic focus. The study undertakes an eco-critical inquiry into how Osundare deploys proverbs derived from Yoruba rhetoric and prosody to enunciate contemporary environmental and aesthetic realities with the view to creating his poetic vision on socio-aesthetic imperatives.

Using Dell Hyme's Ethnography of Communication with insights from Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis as theoretical framework, Maledo and Nwafor (2022) undertake a sociolinguistic analysis of Urhobo proverbs. They explore and analyse the selected Urhobo proverbs in the context of English as a second language in Nigeria. In a similar vein, Ohwovoriele (2009), analyses Urhobo proverbs. However, while the former is a sociolinguistic study of Urhobo proverbs, the latter approaches the Urhobo proverbs from the literary-cum-contextual point of view by stressing the communicative functions of the proverbs which offer the speaker a medium for the projection and fulfilment of a variety of socially desired goals. Mebitaghn and Obikudo (2018) is a translation-based comparative study of Nkoroo and Urhobo proverbs. Nkoroo and Urhobo, like Isoko, are among the minority languages spoken in southern Nigeria, specifically in the Niger Delta region. The paper discusses the translation of proverbs from Nkoroo into Urhobo, taking into cognizance the fact that Nkoroo belongs to the Ijoid family of languages while Urhobo is an Edoid language. It further examines the differences that occur in terms of sentence structure, phonological and morphological processes, cultural contexts, as well as sociolinguistic variations.

Furthermore, Egede (2007) investigates Ika proverbs (an Edoid language like Urhobo and Isoko in the South-South Niger Delta region of Nigeria). The selected proverbs are used to justify a claim within the work that a proverbial communication cannot be divorced from its referent communal or ethnic consciousness. Related to this is Monye (1996) whose study of Aniocha proverbs demonstrates that the Aniocha-Igbo people employ literary styles and strategies in their proverbs as it shows that the notion and practice of literary aesthetics are indigenous to African people at large. Its findings reveal that Aniocha proverbs, like those of Ika, Isoko, Urhobo, have literary, moralistic, social and cultural values.

Furthermore, Ehineni (2016) undertakes a discourse-structural analysis of Yoruba proverbs collected from oral interviews and native Yoruba texts. Basing the analysis on the theory of proverb as a *discourse medium*, the study reveals that proverbs are used to achieve different discourse acts and communicative goals of speakers. Applying the tenets of pragma-stylistics, Yeboah, Manu and Freitas (2022) study Yoruba-oriented proverbs as transcribed into English. This study is significantly distinct from every other work elsewhere in this review in the sense that it obtains its data from a 2018 Nigerian movie, *King of Boys*, as written and produced by Kemi Adetiba, and in which almost all the characters are of Yoruba origin. The analysis reveals that the proverbs are not used arbitrarily by screenwriters and movie actors, but are specifically used, through various figures of speech, to caution, warn or advise, assert one's authority and power, and show one's intent to achieve a goal. The study is particularly relevant to the present study as it adopts a pragma-stylistic approach which is the linguistic approach to our study.

So far, none of the studies above is based on the Isoko language as a linguistic entity and again none applies the principles and tenets of pragma-stylistics apart from Yeboah, Manu and Freitas (2022). Again, none of the studies is done using the Conceptual Metaphor theory as its theoretical framework. Also, apart from Morrell (2006) whose work is on aphorism, the other studies are domiciled in paremiology (studies on proverb), which has a significant affinity with aphorism.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as propounded by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). CMT can be used to account for a number of phenomena in figurative language use. It helps to ascertain the discrepancy between the compositional meaning of an expression and its actual semantic content (see Cserep, 2014, p. 261). The Conceptual Metaphor Theory as revised by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) view metaphor as cognitive process that allows one domain of experience, the target domain, to be reasoned about in terms of another, the source domain. The target domain is usually an abstract concept such as LIFE, whereas the source domain is typically a more concrete concept, such as DAY. The metaphor allows us to export conceptual structure about the more concrete domain to the more abstract target domain. So, conceptualising LIFE as DAY allows us to map the various structures comprising a DAY onto aspects of a LIFE, outstanding our BIRTH as the DAWN, OLD AGE as the EVENING, and so on. In accounting for meaning in figurative language, the theory reveals the correspondences between the source and target domains (Glotova, 2014, p.2446). The target domain is the literal object which evokes the comparison while the source domain is the object which describes it. For an expression to be metaphorical, the vehicle (or source domain) must be clearly stated while the tenor (or target domain) may be implied (Maledo & Emama, 2022). For instance, if someone says *that rose was too frail to survive the storm* when "rose" actually refers to a human being, only the vehicle is expressed and this makes the expression an example of explicit metaphor (Norgaard et al. 2010). Since aphorisms (our data) are rich in figurative language, CMT is therefore an appropriate theoretical tool for their analysis in this study.

To understand our key terms (target domain and source domain), we must put them in the more traditional terms such as *tenor* and *vehicle*, which were said to have been founded by I.A. Richards, as roughly the equivalents of target domain and source domain respectively. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) further claim that our language is saturated with metaphors, rooted in bodily experience, and that our language is metaphorical simply because our conceptual system is metaphorical. If the key tenet of CMT is that our language is deeply rooted in metaphor, then, aphorism as our data, are deeply immersed in metaphors. In the light of this, the relevance and

appropriate of CMT becomes evidential and helpful in the analysis of our data.

METHODOLOGY

Twelve Isoko aphorisms were collected from competent native speakers of Isoko through participant-observation method and tape-recording. They were later translated into English by a competent Isoko-English bilingual. For clarity and ease of analysis, they are numbered from Roman numeral (i) to (xii). In the analysis, they are first rendered in their original form in Isoko language. This is followed by their transliteration in English and next by their Standard English equivalent. Then, the communicative functions of the aphorism are stated followed by a pragma-stylistic commentary. This procedural method is followed and presented in a bullet form.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents and analyses the data for this study as state above.

- (i) ISOKO APHORISM: Amị-obuobu o rẹ dha iyie iva ha
 TRANSLITERATION: Water much does not offend fishes
 ❖ ENGLISH EQUIVALENCE: Too much water does not offend a fish
 ❖ COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION: To offer advice
 ❖ PRAGMA-STYLISTIC SUMMARY: The stylistic feature of this aphorism is in the collocational relation between water and fish to make it mnemonic. The natural habitat of fish is water and there is no quantity of water that will make a fish uncomfortable. When this aphorism is metaphorically applied to the human situation pragmatically, it encourages good deeds in the human society as there is no quantity of good deed that will be considered offensive. Thus, water is conceptually mapped to good deeds while fish is conceptually mapped to humanity or the human society.
- (ii) ISOKO APHORISM: Te Ukpokpo o maki kpe ovra ha, ure lei no ẹhụ
 TRANSLITERATION: Whether stone it even kill bird not, it will drive from nest
 ❖ ENGLISH EQUIVALENCE: If a stone does not kill a bird, it drives it out of its nest
 ❖ COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION: To offer advice, to warn
 ❖ PRAGMA-STYLISTIC SUMMARY: The pragmatic context of this aphorism affirms the fact that there is no harm in trying and that if one keeps on trying, no matter how little, one is bound to record a little success. It implies that a little attempt could eventually bring about a difference. If a stone that is aimed at killing a bird does not hit or kill the bird, it could chase the bird out of its nest, at least, a little has been achieved. This aphorism draws one's attention to the fact that life is all about taking risk and that only those who are willing to make attempts or take risks are those who are likely to achieve positive results. Syntactically, this aphorism is made up of two clauses (a complex sentence). The dependent clause is conceptually mapped to the need to make attempt in the affairs of this world while the second clause is conceptually mapped to the idea of success, no matter how little, if one tries. Lexically, there is also a collocational relation between "stone", "kill", "bird", "pursue" and "nest" to relate the meaning of the aphorism to its context.
- (iii) ISOKO APHORISM: Nọ atẹ be gwọlọ ubiẹrụ emery a ve kpohọ obọ uzou riẹ
 TRANSLITERATION: If they are searching eye fish they now go to head the
 ❖ ENGLISH EQUIVALENCE: It is on the head of a fish that you search for its eyes.

- ❖ COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION: To direct attention; to seek for an item or information
- ❖ PRAGMA-STYLISTIC SUMMARY: The interpretive meaning of this aphorism is that “in seeking anything, you have to go to the source”. This aphorism may be used in the context of marriage where a bridegroom visits the family of the bride to seek for her hand in marriage. Conceptually, “the eye of the fish” is mapped to the bride while “the head of the fish” is mapped to the bride’s parents. In Isoko tradition, a marriage cannot be contracted without the approval of the bride’s parents. The stylistic significance of this aphoristic statement is in the way language is creatively manipulated to represent the bride and the bride’s parents without naming them. It foregrounds the respect a would-be son-in-law has for the bride’s parents in such context. One of the functions of aphorisms is to orientate or intentionally give advice for instructional purposes to the hearer in mutual communication. In pragmatics, every utterance, say aphorism, has targeted goal and there is always more than one person for communication to take place. To support this claim, Bara (2010, p. 1) asserts that “communication is a social activity that requires more than one participant for it to take place”. Every communicative act is also based on certain intents that are deliberate, just as Bara (2010, p. x) puts it that “the intention to communicate must be a conscious one: no unconscious intention exists in communication”. Viewed in this way, the aphorism in question is uttered with a conscious intention to give a direction to the hearer to achieve a target goal by going to the appropriate quarter rather than focussing on irrelevancies.

(iv) ISOKO APHORISM: Egwoo nou Ovie, Ovie onou Egwoo

TRANSLITERATION: Community say King, King say community

- ❖ ENGLISH EQUIVALENCE: The community says it is the king and the king says it is the community.
- ❖ COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION: To foster collective responsibility
- ❖ PRAGMA-STYLISTIC SUMMARY: The aphorism above deploys the use of syntactic parallelism as a stylistic device in its presentation. Syntactic parallelism is the repetition of grammatical structure in written or spoken utterances. Parallelism may feature certain words or phrases to be repeated for emphasis, or to create a parallel position between two opposing ideas. As Ojaide (1996) observes, its use is common in oral literature in the expressive way of depicting additive thought and in conveying semantic re-iteration which in an oral performance, registers mnemonic impression (as cited in Maledo, 2019, p. 215). In “the community says it is the king and the king says it is the community”, there are two noun phrases, *the community* and *the king*, which are each repeated twice in the text and they are conceptually mapped to the target domain which is “communal shared or collective responsibility”. It is another way of saying “the community owns the king as the king owns the community”. The overall stylistic significance and the meaning of the aphorism is that it calls for collective responsibility and mutual understanding among the people of the community irrespective of the position where “the king” and “the community” are metaphorically yoked to each other as one entity. It also calls for due respect, consideration, commitment and contribution from each person towards the growth and development of a community at the micro level and our country at the macro level

(v). ISOKO APHORISM: Nọ ụkị uri kpoho arẹ riẹ ohwo nọ ore kịẹzẹ oka akwa ha

- ❖ TRANSLITERATION: When time has not dark they do not person the who lie end bow
- ❖ ENGLISH EQUIVALENCE: You do not know who sleeps at the edge of the mat in the dark.
- ❖ COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION: To caution

❖ **PRAGMA-STYLISTIC SUMMARY:** This aphoristic saying pragmatically implies that life is unpredictable. “Who sleeps” and “edge of the mat” are the metaphorical sources inherent in this aphoristic statement. They are mapped to the target domain in the real world to mean that it is always too early to know the one who suffers the vicissitudes of life. “Who” is a relative pronoun used instead of a human being whose gender is not overtly stated and this stylistically captures the unpredictability of the happenings in life. On the other hand, the term “edge of a mat” as the source domain, shows extreme distance. In other words, just as one cannot ascertain a person from an extremely far distance, one cannot also predict the occurrences of life. The prepositional phrase “in the dark”, that concludes the aphorism, is used as an adverbial phrase of place qualifying the verb “sleep”. Ordinarily, to “sleep” is a state of reduced consciousness or a state of unconscious consciousness. In fact, a person that is sleeping knows nothing about what is happening or what will happen next in the world. In this case, however, the sleeping is now taking place in the dark which further makes recognition difficult and thereby intensifying the uncertainty of life. This aphorism therefore cautions one not to look down on anyone with contempt since one does not know what the next minute could be.

(vi) **ISOKO APHORISM:** Nọ ubiedi ote kie fihọ ọfiho yọ o kpobo, obo, oniovu riẹ.

TRANSLITERATION: When palm nut fall into oil means he goes to brother’s place

❖ **ENGLISH EQUIVALENCE:** A palm nut that falls into the palm oil has paid its brother a visit.

❖ **COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION:** To express satisfaction

❖ **PRAGMA-STYLISTIC SUMMARY:** The palm nut and the palm oil are two common and interrelated delicacies of the Isoko people. This witty statement “the palm nut has fallen into the palm oil” simply means “all is well” or “a satisfactorily ideal situation”. For instance, the “palm nut” is the edible seed of the palm tree from which the palm oil is produced. Hence, if a palm nut falls into a palm oil, it is a signification for communal harmony as opposed to the palm nut falling into something poisonous. The entire aphorism is a source domain conceptually mapped to the unstated target domain in the pragmatic context of the discourse in which it is used. Stylistically, the parallel repetition of the nominal group “the palm nut” and “the palm oil” makes the expression mnemonic and memorable.

(vii) **ISOKO APHORISM:** Oniovo yọ aziakọ

TRANSLITERATION: Brother is blood of teeth

❖ **ENGLISH EQUIVALENCE:** Brother is blood from the teeth

❖ **COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION:** To promote peaceful coexistence and brotherhood among family members and relatives

❖ **PRAGMA-STYLISTIC SUMMARY:** The aphoristic statement, “brother is blood from the teeth” is an implicit metaphor where “blood of the teeth” is the source domain while “brother” is the target domain. Contextually, the actual pragmatic goal of this aphorism is to state the fact that “one swallows the bleeding of the teeth and that one does not spit it out”. Pragmatically, it implies that the excesses of one’s brother are to be tolerated notwithstanding the circumstances. The pragmatic implication of brother in this context extends beyond consanguine relations to include other relatives, male or female, if not an entire community in the African sense. The stylistic significance of this aphorism is that it employs the use of the metonymic reference to “blood” as a signification for “brother”, thereby propagating peace for harmonious living in the world in conflict times.

(viii) **ISOKO APHORISM:** Nọ a bi kperi owhe yọ owhe o kue

TRANSLITERATION: When they are propagating flood the flood it rise
❖ ENGLISH EQUIVALENCE: The continuous talk about flood increases it.
❖ COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION: To caution
❖ PRAGMA-STYLISTIC SUMMARY: Isoko is one of the riverine ethnic groups in the Niger Delta region of South-South Nigeria. Little wonder then when the issue of flood occurs in Isoko aphorism as it is a recurring phenomenon whenever the tributaries of the River Niger overflow their banks at a particular time of the year. The entire aphorism is used to refer to the need to be cautious of situations or issues in the real world depending on the context of discourse. “Flood” specifically is conceptually mapped to negative or unfavourable challenges in life which we humans have no control of. Thus, it cautions one to avoid unnecessary criticisms or talks against a person or thing since no matter what we say or do, what will be will be. This aphorism therefore offering an advice to individuals to invest their energies in sometime productive rather than wasting their time on much talks that will not yield any gainful result.

(vix) ISOKO APHORISM: Fiki uzou oyì a rọ dẹ etu
TRANSLITERATION: Because head that is why buy cap
❖ ENGLISH EQUIVALENCE: A cap/hat is made for the sake of the head.
❖ COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION: To advise and redirect attention or focus
❖ PRAGMA-STYLISTIC SUMMARY: The pragmatic meaning of this aphorism is that in some affairs in Isoko cosmology, specific things are meant for specific purposes just as the cap/hat is meant specifically for the head and not for the elbow or kneel. The entire aphorism is a conceptual metaphor to those specific things and their specific purposes where “cap” is conceptually mapped to such things in the real world and “head” is conceptually mapped to the purposes for such things. In most cases, it is used to draw attention to the specific issues at hand in a communal or family matters. For instance, if a communal meeting is convened to resolve a land dispute and a speaker digresses to a marriage issue, the utterance of this aphorism, pragmatically, is meant to direct the attention of the speaker to the issue at hand, that is, the land issue wherein, conceptually, the cap is mapped to the land issue while the head is mapped to the gathering. The stylistic use of lexical collocation between “cap” and “head” makes this aphorism memorable and helps to foreground the reason for the meeting and redirect the attention of the audience.

(x) ISOKO APHORISM: Edo ẹwhù u re dhe ọrẹ ẹkpa ha
TRANSLITERATION: Noise community not stop plantain produce
❖ ENGLISH EQUIVALENCE: The noise in the community does not stop the plantain from bearing fruits
❖ COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION: To encourage
❖ PRAGMA-STYLISTIC SUMMARY: The stylistic feature in this aphorism is seen in the parallel structure encoded through the nominal groups, “the noise” and the “the plantain”, which are the source domain in the conceptual sense. “Noise” is conceptually mapped to the vicissitudes of life or anything that hinders success or progress while “plantain from bearing fruits” is conceptually mapped to the idea of progress or success. The pragmatic implication of this aphoristic statement is the fact that one who is destined to be successful in life must be successful no matter the challenges and vicissitudes of life. Other aphoristic statements similar to this in Isoko (and by extension in the African context) are “an anthill that is destined to wear a cap must wear it even if an elephant steps on it” and “the rowdiness of a marketplace does not stop the traders from selling their wares”. It therefore encourages one to be steadfast in whatever good works that

one is doing and not to be distracted by challenges, unsavoury comments and criticisms which are metaphorically referred to as “noise” in this context.

- (xi) **ISOKO APHORISM:** Who te kpe ọrị no ohwo uke, whọ vẹ rihie neriẹ
TRANSLITERATION: If do kill tse-tse fly from person back, you now show him
❖ **ENGLISH EQUIVALENCE:** If you kill a tsetse fly from someone’s back, you should show it to him/her.
❖ **COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION:** To convince
❖ **PRAGMA-STYLISTIC SUMMARY:** This implies that if you have done something to protect someone in their absence, it is good you let them know for them to be convinced of your actions. Killing the tsetse fly on someone’s back is metaphorically mapped to saving someone from unpleasant happening while showing the tsetse fly to the person is a conceptual metaphor for letting the person know what you have done. This is one of the key principles of life because letting people know what you have done for them will help them in appreciating your kind gestures. This aphorism also admonishes us to help one another especially when one’s neighbour is in a precariously helpless situation that one should try to always be of assistance. This is because in this case, the neighbour’s hand cannot reach his/her back where the tsetse fly has perched but can only require a helping hand from someone else.
- (xii) **ISOKO APHORISM:** Ọmọ-ọvụ o re view evie oni hi
TRANSLITERATION: Child one does not suck breast mother his
❖ **ENGLISH EQUIVALENCE:** A single child does not suck mother’s breast where there are other children.
❖ **COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION:** To promote equity and fairness
❖ **PRAGMA-STYLISTIC SUMMARY:** This aphorism is an explicit metaphor used to discourage selfishness and self-centredness from our society. So, only a single child cannot continue to stick to the mother’s breast or milk while the other children are hopelessly anticipating. The mother’s milk here is a conceptual metaphor for benefit. That is to say, it is not appropriate for only one person to be enjoying the benefits of what is supposed to be meant for everyone. In other words, our collective wealth or national cake should be equitably distributed among the citizens. The entire aphorism conceptually abhors selfishness. It is a call for collective responsibility and growth in a country where the rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer due to the selfish interest of the ruling political class being represented as the target domain, “one child”, who wishes to endlessly continue to suck on the mother’s breast (national treasury) to nourish himself/herself at the detriment of the other children (the masses) who are marginalised and malnourished. This aphorism therefore advises that everyone should be given equal and fair opportunity.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that Isoko aphorisms are quite rich in metaphor. The data provide enough empirical evidences to support the Conceptual Metaphorical claim that all thoughts are essentially metaphorical as in our ordinary conceptual system in terms of which we both think and act. It further reveals that the correspondence between the source and target domains in Isoko aphorisms help in accounting for both pragma-stylistic and social meanings in the real world. The analytical approach of Isoko Aphorisms as translated into English are presented with the full realization that stylistic preferences and pragmatic realizations abound in the texts. The study has

made a major contribution in the area of the study and documentation of the Isoko language as one of the threatened minority languages in Nigeria. The transliteration into English is also a contribution towards increasing the phrasal stock of the emerging Nigerian English in particular and the English Language in general. It further reveals that Isoko aphorisms are saturated with metaphors which are conceptually mapped to issues and conditions in the real world. The study further shows through the analysed data that figurative use of language as manifested in Isoko aphorisms are after all used by the speakers of Isoko to caution, encourage, instruct, advise, admonish and to mirror the conceptual world view of the Isoko people. However, it should be noted that the meaning of aphorisms is dependent on the socio-cultural context of usage as an aphoristic statement may mean different things in different contexts.

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