

COGNITIVE AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF IGBO PROVERBS RELATED TO HUMAN BODY PARTS

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Abstract

This study delves into the rich tapestry of Igbo people proverbs, exploring the intricate cognitive and semantic mechanisms underlying the use of body-part references. Focusing on a sample of 25 proverbs collected from 25 diverse Igbo speakers across five southeastern states in Nigeria—Enugu State, Anambra State, Ebonyi State, Imo State, and Abia State—data were collected using writing materials and audio recordings. The study aims to uncover the deep-rooted cultural beliefs and values embedded in these linguistic expressions. Using a carefully designed methodological framework, the researchers employed content analysis, metaphor analysis, and interpretative phenomenological analysis. The body parts examined include the head, heart, eyes, hands, back, legs, and fingers, among others. For example, the proverb “Aka aja aja na-ebute ọ̀nụ̀ mmanụ̀ mmanụ̀” (a sandy hand brings about an oily mouth) conveys the idea that hard work and diligence lead to positive outcomes or rewards. Here, aka aja aja symbolizes industriousness, while ọ̀nụ̀ mmanụ̀ mmanụ̀ represents the reward of such effort. By analyzing the symbolic representations of body parts in these proverbs, the study provides a valuable insight into the Igbo worldview and their profound conceptualization of the human body.

Keywords: Proverbs, Igbo, cognitive, semantic, body-part

1. Introduction

The study of proverbs is a rich and fascinating area of research that provides valuable insights into the cultural beliefs and values of a society. In the context of the Igbo people of Nigeria, proverbs play a significant role in communication, passing down traditional wisdom, and reflecting the worldview of the community. This study focuses on the cognitive and semantic analysis of Igbo proverbs related to human body parts, aiming to uncover the deeper meanings and symbolic representations associated with various body parts in Igbo culture. By examining the mental processes involved in understanding these proverbs and the nuanced meanings of the words and phrases used, this research seeks to shed light on how the Igbo people perceive and conceptualize the human body through the lens of their traditional proverbs.

Therefore, Proverbs are an integral part of Igbo culture, serving as concise expressions of wisdom, values, and cultural beliefs. Igbo proverbs often draw upon various aspects of daily life, including the human body, to convey deep meanings and insights. This note aims to explore the cognitive and semantic analysis of Igbo proverbs that are centered around human body parts, shedding light on their significance and underlying cultural concepts.

Cognitive analysis of Igbo proverbs related to human body parts involves examining the mental processes involved in understanding and interpreting these proverbs. This includes looking at the underlying concepts, categories, and relationships that are expressed in the proverbs. For example, proverbs that refer to the ‘head’ may symbolize leadership, wisdom, or authority, while proverbs that mention the heart may represent emotions, feelings, or desires.

Semantics is the study of meaning in languages (Nick, 2010). Semantic analysis, on the other hand, focuses on the meanings and interpretations of the words and phrases used in the proverbs. This involves looking at the literal and figurative meanings of the body parts mentioned in the proverbs, as well as any cultural or contextual associations that may be relevant. For example, a proverb that mentions the ‘eyes’ may symbolize perception, insight, or awareness, while a proverb that refers to the ‘hands’ may represent action, skill, or ability.

2.1 Theoretical Studies

Dirk (2006) defines cognitive semantics as a subfield of cognitive linguistics that examines how the mind processes language in relation to meaning and conceptual content within specific contexts. This approach emphasizes that language is integral to human cognition, investigating how linguistic structure and meaning are influenced by general cognitive processes like categorization, conceptualization, and metaphors. Cognitive semantics posits that meaning arises from embodied experiences, cultural contexts, and cognitive mechanisms rather than being arbitrarily determined by linguistic conventions. It aims to understand the interaction between language and broader cognitive capacities, highlighting key principles such as the relationship between language

and cognition, the influence of cognitive processes on linguistic meaning, and the recognition of the embodied and cultural aspects of meaning construction. Overall, it portrays language as interlinked with our cognitive abilities and conceptual frameworks rather than a detached system.

2.2 Empirical Studies

The study of proverbs through a cognitive semantics perspective has been explored by various researchers, although there has been a notable lack of focus on proverbs associated with the human body in the Igbo language. Here is an overview of relevant studies from different languages and their main findings:

Abeer and Luqman (2022) analyze Jordanian proverbs related to body parts, categorizing them into five groups such as those pertaining to relationships, traits, guidance, and food. This descriptive analysis aimed to understand how bodily expressions influence social interactions and cultural insights.

Elza and Mulyadi (2020) analyze animal proverbs in the Batak Toba language using a cognitive semantic approach. Data was collected from the Umpama and Umapasa Collection by Richard Sinaga. Employing a descriptive qualitative methodology, they grouped proverbs by lexicon and conducted interviews with native speakers. Their findings revealed 33 animal-related lexicons, categorized into positive and negative conceptualizations. Notable examples include: Negative mammals: babi (pigs), bodat (monkeys), bagudung (mice), lobbu (cattle); Positive mammals: babiat (tigers) and horbo. Birds showed similar patterns, with manuk sabungan being positive and lali (eagle) and leang-leang (swallow) being negative. Negative fish and insect proverbs were also noted, illustrating how these proverbs reflect the Toba Batak people's perceptions and daily experiences.

Firman (2019) investigates Wolio proverbs about human body parts through a cognitive semantic lens, aligning meanings with cultural experiences. Mapping reveals how body part metaphors influenced understanding of human behavior, showing both cultural specificity and universality.

Altynshash et al. (2018) examine Kazakh and Turkish proverbs relating to "tongue/language" without a cognitive semantic approach. Their research identifies several semantic groups including the language-thought model, language and feeling model, language-art model, language-power model, and others, illustrating cultural perceptions tied to language.

Collectively, these studies reveal the intricate relationships between proverbs, culture, and cognition. While some adopt a cognitive semantic approach, others focus on comparative analysis without explicitly using this perspective. All study the cultural context in which proverbs are situated, but most use different languages and specific themes. In contrast, the current study focuses on Igbo proverbs concerning human body parts, utilizing a cognitive semantic perspective to deepen the analysis. Unlike prior works, this study intends to analyze a larger corpus of 25 Igbo proverbs, thereby expanding the exploration of this theme within the Igbo linguistic context.

2.3 Research Methodology

The research design involves analyzing twenty-five 25 Igbo proverbs related to human body parts to describe the cognitive and semantic processes involved. Data was collected through oral interviews and observation with native Igbo speakers. The study was conducted in Igbo-speaking communities in southeastern Nigeria, covering five states: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. Twenty-five (25) individuals were selected, comprising five from each state (15 males and 10 females). The population was generated from individuals across these five Igbo states, and random sampling was used to select Igbo proverbs that met certain criteria. Data collection methods included face-to-face interviews and observation of native Igbo speakers. The researchers, as native Igbo speakers, also relied on their own knowledge and intuition. For data analysis, methods such as content analysis, metaphor analysis, and interpretative phenomenological analysis were utilized. This process involved identifying metaphors and metonymies and exploring the cognitive processes and subjective interpretations involved in the proverbs. This research adopts the Green and Igwe (1963) tone marking convention which leaves the high tone (´) unmarked, but marks the low tone and the downstep tone with the grave accent (`) and macron (-) respectively.

3. Data Presentation and Analysis

Data Presentation

1. Ikwē n' aka gafèe ñkù akā ò bànye n'ìhe òzò - When a handshake passes the elbow it becomes another thing.
2. Onye na- enyò isi yā à na-apùta – The more you peep the more visible your head becomes.
3. Nwatā nā- asà akwà nà- àkwò aka yā – A child that washes cloth washes his hand.
4. Afò adīghī àtụ egwù ò wèrè buru ụzò – The stomach has no fear and it came first.
5. Ihe agwūghī nà ñtì mà àgbà ezùlà ike – when something does not finish in the cheek, the jaw will not rest.

6. Ihāpù ikē nyuru ahù keē isī òkpọ –To leave the buttocks that farted and knock the head.
7. Àzụ bù ọdù – The back carries jewelry
8. Anya nà izizè –The eyes and blinking
9. Ụkpàná òkpokò gbùrù ntị chiri ya – A grasshopper killed by a parrot must be deaf.
10. O jì anya èrì – He eats with the eyes.
11. Otù mkpìsì akā rùta mmānū ò zùo òhà onū – When a finger is smudged with oil, it gets to everyone's mouth.
12. I taa m aru n' isi asoghī ntùtù, m taa gī n' ikè asoghī òsì – When you bite me on my head not minding my hair, I will bite you on your buttocks not minding the feces.
13. Ụkwù nā-ējē wàrà wàrà anya nā- ēlē wàrà wàrà nà- àhụ yā – The leg that walks cunningly, the eyes that watch cunningly see it.
14. Aka aja ājā nà- èbute onū mmanụ māmānū. – A sandy hand brings about an oily mouth.
15. Nwa akwò n' àzụ amāghī nà ijè dī ùfù – A backed child does not know that walking is painful.
16. Obì dī aghùghò karja ihe nīlē – The heart is deceitful than every other thing.
17. Agadī nwaanyị ì siri ya mechapụ atị anyā, ọ nwuru ì gā- àkpukpù isi yā? – An old woman you told to remove the rheum in her eyes, if she dies will you remove her head?
18. Aka èkpè kwòchaa aka nrī, aka nrī àkwòchaa aka èkpè – When the left hand washes the right hand, the right hand will wash the left hand.
19. Èbùlè jì isi èje ògù – A he-goat fights with its head.
20. Otù anyā jì isì ụgwò – An eye that is in debt to the blind.
21. Ikpèrè anāghī àtọ ebe e gbùrù ya – A knee does not remain where it was knelt.
22. A gbakọọ akā onū è buo ibu dī ārò – When hands are joined together a heavy load will be carried.
23. Ụkwù jie agū, mgbàdà ènwebe anùrì – When the tiger's legs get weary, the antelope rejoices.
24. Anya a fùrù mbụ amāghī èle – The first sight does not see well.
25. Onye nje nje ka onye isi awò mara ihē – A traveler is wiser than a man with gray hair.

Data Analysis

Based on the analysis of twenty-five (25) proverbs that use the outside parts of human body to conceptualize human behavior, traits, circumstances and feelings were selected. Igbo proverbs that use the human body as a source of inspiration can be explained as follows in cognitive semantic perception.

Proverb 1. Ikwē n' aka gafèe nkù akā ò bànye n'ihe ọzọ.

When a handshake passes the elbow it becomes another thing.

Source Domain	Target Domain
Ikwē n' aka gafèe nkù akā	Too much familiarity

When a hand shake passes the elbow	
ò bànye n'ihe ọzọ	Causes negligence

It becomes another thing.

The above proverb generally contains the meaning of people who takes little chance given to them to misbehave. The word nkù akā 'elbow' is mapped with human respect. In Igbo land, the hand is normally used for handshake which is a way of greeting, and one cannot leave the hand meant for greetings to greet with the elbow, that can be seen as an insult to someone's personality. A handshake offered to a person means a chance, and that chance should not be an avenue to disrespect your fellow human being. This conceptualization came as a result of experiences, social norms and values within Igbo community.

Proverb 2. Onye na- enyò isi yā à na-apùta

The more you peep, the more visible your head becomes.

Source Domain	Target Domain
Onye na- enyò	Nosy and prying behavior of a person

The more you peep	
isi yā à na-apùta	Can lead to unwanted attention.

The more visible your head becomes.

The above proverb contains a message of being cautious and discreet in one's action. It serves as a reminder to exercise restraint and respect for privacy, as constant and intrusive observation can draw attention and potentially have negative repercussions.

The word isi 'head' is mapped to someone's identity. Because it has everything that one can be identified with such as the face and once it becomes visible, it can draw attention that will lead to negative repercussions. Enyò 'peep' on the other hand is mapped to a nosy behavior of a person. This conceptualization is greatly influenced by Igbo people experience and behaviors of people in their environment. The conceptualization of how people peep to see something and how they keep bringing their head out to see clearly or have a better observation of what is happening is of great significance in Igbo setting. The mechanism used in this proverb is metaphor that is using what is in a particular level to represent what is in another level.

Proverb 3. Nwatā nā- asā akwà nà- àkwọ aka yā

A child that washes cloth washes his hand.

Source Domain		Target Domain
Nwatā nā- asā akwà	-----	Hard working
A child that washes cloth		
nà- àkwọ aka yā.	-----	Is rewarding
washes his hand.		

The above proverb implies reward of a hardworking person. A hardworking person will eventually get rewarded and the good you do is for yourself. The word *asā akwà* 'washes cloth' is perceived as hard work because working hard is what one does to help himself. In the other hand, *àkwọ aka yā* 'washes his hand' is mapped to reward after working hard or implication of hard work. This conceptualization is influenced by the Igbo people experience of washing cloth and eventually, how their hands get washed in the process. This was how this proverb was created. And the mechanism employed in this proverb is metaphor.

Proverb 4. Afọ adighī àtụ egwù ò wèrè buru ụzọ.

The stomach has no fear, and it came first.

Source Domain		Target Domain
Afọ adighī àtụ egwù	-----	A man
The stomach has no fear		
ò wèrè buru ụzọ.	-----	That is brave
And it came first.		

The proverb above is interpreted as a brave man who will always come out to face any situation or obstacle even when others are running away. The word *Afọ* 'stomach' is perceived as braveness because when you look at a man from the side, the most visible thing you will see is the stomach especially men with pot belly as such it will be the first to meet danger. This conceptualization came as a result of the experience Igbo people have of their men with big stomach, and how their stomach becomes the first to encounter danger.

Proverb 5. Íhé agwūghī nà ñtì mà àgbà ezulà ike.

when something does not finish in the cheek, the jaw will not rest.

Source Domain		Target Domain
Íhé agwūghī nà ñtì	-----	When a goal/objective is not achieved
when something does not finish in the cheek,		
mà àgbà ezulà ike.	-----	Man will not rest
the jaw will not rest.		

The proverb above emphasizes the persistence, determination and drive to achieve a goal. It suggests that when we have unfinished business or unfilled objectives, we will continue to work tirelessly until we get the desired outcome. The word *ñtì* 'cheek' is mapped as a person with an unfinished business. This is because one of the functions of the cheek is that it helps in eating and it shows when there is something in the mouth. It also helps in carrying what is being eaten. *Àgbà* 'jaw' on the other hand is perceived as a person working tirelessly to accomplish what set out to do. This is because the jaw helps in performing the action of chewing something. The jaw moves as something is chewed. This conceptualization is greatly influenced by the experience of the Igbo people in observing their eating process.

Proverb 6. Ìhāpụ ikē nyurụ ahụ keē isī òkpọ.

To leave the buttocks that farted and knocked the head.

Source Domain		Target Domain
Ìhāpụ ikē nyurụ ahụ	-----	Leaving the guilty
To leave the buttocks that farted		
keē isī òkpọ.	-----	To punish the non-guilty.
knocked the head.		

The above proverb implies an expression of injustice towards an innocent person. The word *ikē* 'buttocks' is perceived as an offender because when the buttocks farts, the unpleasant smell that comes out of it offends people around it. *Isī* 'head' on the other hand is perceived as the innocent. The main function of the head is carrying load which makes it an innocent in this situation. This conceptualization is influenced by the experience of Igbo people of how they leave the buttocks and knock the head that have no business with farting. It serves as a critical comment on the unjust nature of certain situations, highlighting the frustration or anger that arises when blame or consequences are misplaced. Metonymy was employed here as a mechanism.

Proverb 7. Àzụ bù ọdụ

The back carries jewelry.

Source Domain		Target Domain
Àzụ	-----	Future
The back		
bù ọdụ	-----	Is great

Carries jewelry.

The above proverb suggests that the future holds valuable or positive things. Azú ‘back’ in this sense means future. The good things that will happen after a man, is a future for the living. In the other hand *odù* is jewelry and it is perceived as greatness. *Odù* is a white jewelry made out of an elephant tusk usually won by titled men and women in Igbo land which signifies their noble nature and greatness. This conceptualization is influenced by the experience of Igbo people about their culture.

Proverb 8. Anya nà izizè

The eyes and blinking

Source Domain		Target Domain
Anya	-----	Human being
The eyes		
nà izizè.	-----	That is clever/sensitive.
and blinking.		

The proverb above represents a clever person. It attributes to intelligence or cleverness of someone based on their observant nature or quick thinking. Anya ‘eyes’ is mapped as a symbol of perception and observation; represents a person’s ability to keenly observe and understand his surroundings. This is because the main function of the eyes is to see and observe situations. On the other hand, *izizè* ‘blinking’ is perceived as quick thinking or mental agility. Igbo people envisioned this from the experience they have about their eyes and attributed it to a clever person. The mechanism employed here is metaphor.

Proverb 9. Ûkpàrà òkpokò gbùrù ntị chiri ya.

Grasshopper killed by a locust is deaf.

Source Domain		Target Domain
Ûkpàrà òkpokò gbùrù	-----	A stubborn man
Grasshopper killed by a parrot		
ntị chiri ya.	-----	Who does not heed to warning/advice.
is deaf.		

The proverb above implies a stubborn person who does not take heed to warning or advice. Ûkpàrà ‘grasshopper’ is mapped as a stubborn individual, òkpokò is a bird that makes a lot of noise and that noise is perceived as a warning. Therefore, for this bird to kill a grasshopper, such grasshopper must be a deaf one ‘ntị chiri ya’ because a warning has been given. This proverb employed metaphor as mechanism.

Proverb 10. O jì anya èri.

He eats with the eyes.

Source Domain		Target Domain
O jì	-----	A man
He uses		
anya èri.	-----	That is greedy
Eyes to eat.		

The above proverb represents a greedy person who is easily tempted by what he sees and would want to have them all to himself. ‘Eyes’ in this sense is mapped as the appetite or desire to have something to oneself, while eating symbolizes the consumption or acquisition of material possessions. This conceptualization came as a result of the experience the Igbo people have about the character of a greedy person and how he would always want to have what is meant for him and others just by looking at it. This proverb employed metaphor as a mechanism.

Proverb 11. Otù mkpịsị akā rùta mmānū ò zùò òhà ọnū

When a finger is smudged with oil it reaches to everyone's mouth.

Source Domain		Target Domain
Otù mkpịsị akā rùta mmānū	-----	Mistake of a person
When a finger is smudged with an oil		
ò zùò òhà ọnū.	-----	Affects everybody.
It reaches to everyone's mouth.		

The proverb conveys the idea that a mistake or wrongdoing does not remain isolated to the person who committed it but can have a wider impact, potentially affecting the reputation, relationships, or well-being of others. ‘Finger’ symbolizes an individual’s actions, choices, or mistakes. It represents the person who commits the error or wrongdoing. ‘Oil’ represents the negative consequences or repercussion that results from the mistake or wrongdoing. ‘Everyone’s mouth’ symbolizes the broader community or group of people affected by the mistake. It represents the way the consequences of mistake or wrongdoing can extend to others. The proverb metaphorically compares the spreading of oil from a smudged finger to the way a mistake or wrongdoing of one person can have widespread effects and impact others. This conceptualization came as a result of the experience the Igbo people have during the process of eating especially one of their cultural food white yam and palm-oil. During this process of eating, if you are not carefully eating oil from your finger will spread to other part of your body thereby causing stain.

Proverb 12. I taa m aru n' isi asoghī ntùtù, m taa gī n' ikè asoghī òsì.

When you bite me on my head not minding my hair, I will bite you in your buttocks not minding feces.

Source Domain

Target Domain

I taa m aru n' isi asoghī ntùtù, -----

To revenge

When you bite me on my head not minding my hair,

m taa gī n' ikè asoghī òsì. -----

Without minding the consequences

I will bite you on your buttocks not minding feces.

The proverb above portrays a willingness to retaliate or seek revenge even if it means enduring unpleasant consequences or stooping to a lower level in the process. Biting represents an act of aggression or harm; the head and the hair symbolize oneself or personal boundaries. The buttocks and feces, on the other hand, represent the other person and the undesirable consequences that may come from retaliating. The knowledge the Igbo people have about their buttocks is that it is used to discharge waste product from the body and it is not good for consumption as it may cause harm. So, for a person to bite someone on the buttocks because he was bitten on the head means the person knows that he is bringing harm to himself but he is bent on revenging. The mechanism employed here is metaphor.

Proverb 13. Ukwu na-ējē wàrà wàrà anya nā- ēlē wàrà wàrà nà- àhụ yā

The leg that walks cunningly the eye that watches cunningly sees it.

Source Domain

Target Domain

Ukwu na-ējē wàrà wàrà -----

A corny man

The leg that walks cunningly

anya nā- ēlē wàrà wàrà nà- àhụ yā. -----

Is seen by fellow corny man

The eye that watches cunningly sees it.

The above proverb conveys that nothing is entirely hidden, especially when it comes to behaviors or characteristics that are noticeable or evident. It suggests that individuals who possess certain qualities or exhibit specific behaviors are more likely to recognize those of same qualities in others. Ukwu 'leg' is mapped to a person's movement; wàrà wàrà is mapped to corny way. While anya nā- ēlē wàrà wàrà is mapped to a person that moves in a corny way. The eye is a sensitive part of the body that makes movement just like the leg but in a different way because as the leg moves the eye sees it. Therefore, the eye that moves cunningly denotes a sharp person. This conceptualization came as a result of the experience of Igbo people about their environment, behaviors of their body parts which they compared to human behavior.

Proverb 14. Aka aja ājā nà- èbute ọnu mmanụ mmanụ.

A sandy hand brings about an oily mouth.

Source Domain

Target Domain

Aka aja ājā -----

Hard work

A sandy hand

nà- èbute ọnu mmanụ mmanụ.-----

Pays

brings about an oily mouth.

This proverb conveys the idea that hard work and diligence can lead to positive outcome or reward. Aka aja ājā implies a hardworking man, while, ọnu mmanụ mmanụ implies reward of hard work. In the olden days in Igbo land, farming is one of the things the Igbos are known for and how much you farm will show how much you will harvest at the end of the season. The process of farming involves getting your hands dirty with sands which cannot be avoided and farming is one of the ways through which they put food on their table by selling their products in exchange of money and leaving the ones they will be feeding from. So if one refuses to get his hand dirty, there won't be food for the person. This conceptualization came as a result of their experience with farming.

Proverb 15. Nwa akwò n' àzụ amāghī nà ijè dī ùfụ

A backed child does not know that walking is painful.

Source Domain

Target Domain

Nwa akwò n' àzụ -----

A pampered person/child

A backed child

amāghī nà ijè dī ùfụ -----

Does not have sense of responsibility.

does not know that walking is painful.

This proverb conveys the idea that a pampered or excessively protected person may not understand or appreciate the difficulties and challenges that others face. Nwa akwò n' àzụ refers to someone who has been constantly supported, shielded, or indulged, often to an excessive extent. The metaphorical image of a child being "backed" suggests that children are constantly carried or supported, preventing them to experience the hardships and struggles that come with walking on their own. Amāghī nà ijè dī ùfụ a person that had not faced challenges or responsibilities lacks the understanding or empathy for those who do. He may not appreciate the effort, resilience, or discomfort that comes with taking on responsibilities or facing hardships. This conceptualization came as result of the knowledge the Igbo people have of a backed child who is so dependent on the mother. The mechanism employed here is metaphor.

Proverb 16. Obì dī aghùghò karja ihe nīlē.

The heart is deceitful than every other thing.

Source Domain		Target Domain
Obì dī aghùghò	-----	Human cunning behavior
The heart is deceitful than		
karja ihe nīlē	-----	more than every other creature.
than every other thing.		

The above proverb implies that human beings are driven by their emotions and guided by their hearts, which can sometimes engage in behaviors that are perceived as corny or overly sentimental. The heart is mapped as the seat of emotions and feelings that has the tendency to exhibit deceptive behavior more than any other aspect of human nature. This conceptualization was influenced as a result of experiences the Igbo have of their body parts and the conceptual basis provided for understanding human behavior and relationships within Igbo community.

Proverb 17. Agadī nwaànyị̀ ị̀ sị̀rị̀ ya mechàpụ̀ atị̀ anyā, ọ̀ nwurụ̀ ị̀ gà- àkpụ̀kpụ̀ isi yā?

An old woman you told to remove rheum in her eyes, if she dies will you eat her head?

Source Domain		Target Domain
Agadī nwaànyị̀ ị̀ sị̀rị̀ ya mechàpụ̀ atị̀ anyā,	-----	Giving concern
An old woman you told to remove rheum in her eyes		
ọ̀ nwurụ̀ ị̀ gà- àkpụ̀kpụ̀ isi yā?	-----	To something that is of no use.
if she dies will you eat her head?		

The proverb above conveys the idea of giving concern or attention to things that are insignificant or not worth the effort. The underlying meaning of the proverb extends beyond the literal interpretation. It serves as a metaphor for situations where individuals waste time or energy on insignificant or inconsequential matters. This conceptualization came as a result of the opinion the Igbos have about their old women. Therefore, giving concern to their looks, what they wear and the character they exhibit are of no use because these women are no more in search for husbands, and they are off the market. In Igbo land there is what they call “ìkpụ̀kpụ̀ isi ewū” which means eating goats head. This particular act is usually carried out by men of same kindred. They attributed eating goats head (something of worth) which they can eat to eating of old woman head (something of no worth) which they cannot eat, because the Igbos do not eat human being.

Proverb 18. Aka èkpè kwọ́chaa aka nrī, aka nrī àkwọ́chaa aka èkpè.

When the left hand washes the right hand, the right hand will wash the left hand.

Source Domain		Target Domain
Aka èkpè kwọ́chaa aka nrī,	-----	
When the left hand washes the right-hand		Collective effort.
aka nrī àkwọ́chaa aka èkpè	-----	
the right hand will wash the left hand		

The proverb conveys the idea of collective effort, cooperation and mutual support. It suggests that when one or a group takes care of another, the favor is reciprocated, leading to a mutually beneficial and harmonious relationship. “Left hand” is mapped to one individual or group who initiates the act of support or assistance. “Right hand” is mapped to another individual or group who receives the support or assistance. In this case, the proverb metaphorically compares the hands to represent individuals or groups who are supporting and helping each other. This conceptualization came as a result of Igbo people experience and behavior involved in washing of hand. When one is washing his hand eventually, he is washing both hands at the same time. So, they attributed it to their behavior of helping each other, and corporation towards work which will bring benefits to everyone.

Proverb 19. Èbùlè jì isi èje ògù

A goat fights with its head.

Source Domain		Target Domain
Èbùlè	-----	A man
A goat		
jì isi èje ògù	-----	Utilizes what he has
goes to war with its head		

The proverb suggests that a person should make use of his own abilities, resources, or strengths when facing challenges or engaging in difficult tasks. It implies that individuals should rely on their own capabilities and utilizes what they have to confront situations or achieve their goals. “Head” represents the person’s intellect, abilities, or resources that they possess. “Goat” symbolizes the individual or person who is facing a challenge or engaging in a difficult task. The proverb metaphorically that just as a goat goes to war with his head, individuals should utilize their own capabilities, skills or resources when confronted with challenges. It emphasizes on importance of self-reliance and making the most of one’s own strengths and resources to overcome obstacles and achieve success. This conceptualization came as a result of the attributes goats exhibit observed by Igbo people. The goat usually fights using its head, goats can never be seen fighting with gun or knife or sword rather they

utilize head. The Igbo people created this proverb and attributed it to human being to use what they have to solve their problems.

Proverb 20. Otù anyā jì isì ụgwō.

An eye that is in debt to the blind.

Source Domain		Target Domain
Otù anyā	-----	An only chance
An eye		
jì isì ụgwō	-----	one can't afford to lose
that is in debt to the blind.		

The proverb suggests that there's something valuable or precious in one's life he cannot afford to lose. "Eyes" represents something of significant value or important to a person. This conceptualization came as a result of the experiences the Igbos have about a person that has only one eye. A man with only one eye is always careful to avoid losing the other eye, because a single mistake can cost him the other eye. So they attributed it to human valuable possession or a chance that cannot get lost. For instance, when someone has valuable possession (like having an only child or an only son) that will cause him damage when lost, he will make sure he uses his last breath to take care of it. Or when a person has an only chance to win something, he will see the person working tirelessly or putting all his effort to win that.

Proverb 21. Ikpèrè anāghī àtọ ebe e gbùrù ya

A knee does not remain where it was knelt.

Source Domain		Target Domain
Ikpèrè	-----	Pleading for forgiveness
A knee		
anāghī àtọ ebe e gbùrù ya	-----	Does not reduce one's personality
does not remain where it was knelt.		

This proverb metaphorically conveys the idea that pleading for forgiveness or showing humility does not diminish one's worth or character. It suggests that seeking forgiveness or expressing remorse does not diminish a person's dignity or value. "Knee" is mapped to the act of humbling oneself, asking for forgiveness or expressing remorse. This conceptualization came as a result of the experience the Igbo people have about their knee and its functions which they attributed to human being to teach the importance of showing remorse to whom you offended and how it does not reduce one's value or dignity. This proverb teaches humans to be humble.

Proverb 22. A gbakọọ akā ọnụ è buo ibu dī ārọ

When hands are joined together a heavy load will be carried.

Source Domain		Target Domain
A gbakọọ akā ọnụ	-----	Collective effort
When hands are joined together		
è buo ibu dī ārọ.	-----	Makes work easier
a heavy load will be carried.		

The proverb conveys the idea that collective effort or cooperation can make a difficult task or burden more manageable. It suggests that when people work together and unite their efforts, they can accomplish task that will be challenging or burdensome for an individual. "Hands" are mapped to individuals or group of people who are working together. "Heavy load" represents a challenging task, responsibility or burden. The proverb metaphorically suggests that when people join hands together, meaning they collaborate and work collectively, they can bear and overcome difficult tasks or burdens more effectively. This conceptualization came as result of the experience the Igbo people have about the use of their hands, how people join hands together in carrying out a task to make it easier and afterwards result. They attributed it to human collective effort or working together to accomplish a difficult task.

Proverb 23. Ụkwụ jìe agū, mgbàdà ènwebe anùrì

When the tiger's leg gets weary, the antelope rejoices.

Source Domain		Target Domain
Ụkwụ jìe agū,	-----	When the oppressor becomes weak
When the tiger's leg gets weary		
mgbàdà ènwebe anùrì	-----	the oppressed feels free/ rejoices.
the antelope rejoices		

The proverb suggests that when the oppressor, dominant force or wicked person experiences a setback or weakness, the oppressed or weaker party feels a sense of relief, freedom, or joy. It implies the balance of power shifts, allowing the previously oppressed to experience a sense of liberation or respite from their oppressive circumstances. "Ụkwụ" in this context represents power which a person uses to oppress others. 'Ụkwụ jìe agū' represents the powerful or oppressive entity, typically associated with strength, dominance or control, while 'mgbàdà' symbolizes the weaker or oppressed party, often associated with vulnerability or subjugation. This conceptualization was influenced by the experience the Igbo people have about their society and environment

where the powerful uses his power to oppress the weak. So, they created this proverb to teach that no condition is permanent. Therefore, people should not use what they have today to oppress others because tomorrow may not be favorable.

Proverb 24. Anya a fùrù mbụ amāghī èle

The first sight does not see well

Source Domain

Anya a fùrù mbụ

The first sight

amāghī èle

Does not see well.

Target Domain

First appearance

Does not say much about a person.

The proverb conveys the idea that judgment or opinion about someone based solely on their initial appearance or first impression can be misleading. It suggests that one should not make hasty judgment about others without further observation or understanding. “Anya a fùrù mbụ” is mapped to the initial impression or observation that someone has of another person. The proverb metaphorically suggests that the first sight despite being personified as having the ability to see, does not see well, implying that initial judgment may not accurately reflect a person’s true character or qualities. Humans have this behavior of always judging others based on their first appearance, the Igbos experienced this behavior in their environment from their fellow humans, so this proverb was created using the eye which is an organ for seeing. That was how this conceptualization came about.

Proverb 25. Onye ñjè ñjè ka onye isi awō mara ihē

A traveler is wiser than a man with gray hair.

Source Domain

Onye ñjè ñjè

A traveler

ka onye isi awō mara ihē.

is wiser than a man with gray hair.

Target Domain

A traveler

Is wiser than an old man.

This proverb conveys the idea that wisdom is not necessarily determined by age alone. It suggests that someone who has traveled and gained diverse experiences may possess more wisdom than an older person who has not had such experiences. “Traveler” represents a person who has explored the world, gained diverse experiences, and encountered different cultures and ideas. “Man with gray hair” symbolizes an older individual, typically associated with age and potential wisdom. The proverb metaphorically suggests that the wisdom gained through travel and diverse experiences/exposure can surpass the wisdom gained solely through age or the passage of time. In Igbo land old people are usually seen as people with wisdom because they have had better experiences in life than the younger ones, but this proverb entails that a traveler can be wiser than an old person because of the exposure he has gained during his time of traveling around the world and encountering different cultures. Igbo people termed a traveler as a man with more wisdom than an old person because his experience is not just within his environment but beyond his environment which gave him the privilege to experience new things that a person who is older could not. This was the conceptualization that brought about the creation of this proverb.

4. Summary and Conclusion

This study examines the rich tapestry of Igbo people proverbs, exploring the intricate cognitive and semantic mechanisms underlying the use of body-part references. A meticulously designed methodological framework was employed, including content analysis, metaphor analysis, and interpretative phenomenological analysis. The study focuses on a sample of 25 proverbs collected from 25 diverse Igbo speakers across five southeastern Nigerian states—Enugu State, Anambra State, Ebonyi State, Imo State, and Abia State—using writing materials and audio recordings as research instruments. The research aims to unveil the deep-rooted cultural beliefs and values embedded within these linguistic expressions.

The body parts explored include the head, heart, eyes, hands, back, legs, fingers, and stomach. The study extracts Igbo proverbs that reference human body parts and dissect their symbolic representations, providing a window into the Igbo worldview and their profound understanding of the human form. For instance, the proverb “*Afọ adighi atụ egwu, ọ wéré buru ụzọ*” (the stomach has no fear, and it comes first) is interpreted as referring to a brave man who will confront any situation or obstacle even when others flee. In this context, *afọ* (“stomach”) is perceived as a symbol of bravery, as the stomach, particularly in men with prominent bellies, is often the first part of the body to encounter danger. This conceptualization arises from the Igbo people’s lived experience and observation of their men. Conclusively, beyond the literal semantic meanings of words, particularly human body parts, Igbo proverbs reflect the cognitive mechanisms through which the Igbo worldview and cultural insights are articulated.

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