

**A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF GENDER BASE IDIOMS IN  
IGBO AND ENGLISH**

**BY**

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BENIN CITY**

**AUGUST, 2023**

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**A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
LINGUISTICS STUDIES, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF  
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## **APPROVAL**

This is to certify that this project was carried out by COSMOS, ADACHI CHINEYE with Matriculation Number ART1801454, in the Department of Linguistics Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this project to God Almighty my creator, my strong pillar, my source of inspiration, wisdom, knowledge and understanding for His goodness, guidance, protection and grace towards me, for not leaving me all by myself throughout this journey. He has been the source of my strength throughout this program and on His wings only have I soared. Blessed be His name. Amen.

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## ABSTRACT

This study presents a contrastive analysis of gender-base idioms in the Igbo and English languages. The research investigates the differences and similarities in the usage, meanings, and cultural implications of gender-related idiomatic expressions in these two languages. While previous studies have explored idioms or gender language features separately, this research focuses on the distinctiveness of gender-based idioms and how they are utilized differently in Igbo and English. This study contributes to a comprehensive understanding of how gender is linguistically represented through idiomatic expressions.

The theoretical framework of this research draws from sociolinguistics and cognitive linguistics. It considers language as a reflection of societal norms and cultural values, while also exploring how speakers conceptualize gender roles and relationships through idiomatic language use. This approach helps unravel the complex interplay between language, culture, and cognition in constructing gender-based idioms.

The method of data collection involves a mixed-methods approach. A corpus of gender-based idioms is compiled from authentic sources in both languages, ensuring diversity in terms of genres and contexts. A combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses is employed to examine the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic aspects of the idiomatic

expressions. Additionally, native speakers are engaged in interviews and focus groups to provide insights into the cultural connotations and social meanings of these idioms.

The findings reveal intriguing disparities between the two languages. In Igbo, gender-based idioms often emphasize communal relationships and responsibilities, reflecting the collective ethos of the culture. Meanwhile, English idioms tend to centre on individual attributes and actions. The analysis also uncovers instances where the same concept is conveyed through different idiomatic expressions in each language. This suggests that cultural nuances play a substantial role in shaping the linguistic representation of gender-related ideas.

In conclusion, this study highlights the intricate interplay between language and culture by examining gender-base idioms in Igbo and English. The research underscores that idiomatic expressions are more than just linguistic units; they encapsulate cultural values and perspectives. By analysing these idioms, the study contributes to cross-cultural understanding and linguistic research. Furthermore, it illuminates how the conceptualization of gender is linguistically manifested and opens avenues for future exploration in sociolinguistics, cognitive linguistics, and intercultural communication studies. This research underscores the importance of considering idiomatic

expressions as vital components of language and culture, deepening our appreciation for the intricate ways in which societies communicate and perceive gender roles.



# CHAPTER ONE

## 1.0 General Introduction

The study on Contrastive Analysis of Gender-base Idioms in Igbo Language and English Language aims to explore and compare the gender-specific idiomatic expressions in two distinct languages, Igbo and English. Idioms play a crucial role in language and culture, functioning as linguistic artefacts that encapsulate cultural values, beliefs, and societal expectations. By examining gender-based idioms, this study seeks to uncover the cultural and linguistic differences between Igbo and English communities, analyse the gender roles and expectations represented in these idioms, and contribute to the fields of linguistics, cultural studies, and gender studies.

Language is a powerful tool that not only facilitates communication but also reflects and shapes the culture and society in which it is spoken. Idiomatic expressions, in particular, offer unique insights into a community's mind-set, values, and worldview. These expressions often use metaphorical or figurative language to convey nuanced meanings

that go beyond literal interpretation. Therefore, studying idioms can provide profound insights into the social, cultural, and gender dynamics of a society.

The comparative analysis of gender-based idioms in Igbo and English languages is of great importance in the field of linguistics. By examining idioms in both languages, linguists can gain a deeper understanding of how gender-related information is encoded within the language, such as the linguistic patterns and strategies employed, the usage frequency of gender-based idioms, and the linguistic devices used to construct and convey gender-specific meanings. This research will expand our knowledge of how languages differ in their expression of gender and contribute to the broader discipline of compOrt here are many gender-based idioms in the English language, some of which may be considered out-dated, offensive, or insensitive by some people. Here are some examples:

1. “Man up”: This idiom is often used to tell someone, usually a man, to be brave or toughen up.

2. “Boys will be boys”: This idiom is often used to excuse or justify boys or men acting in a rowdy or aggressive way.
3. “The weaker sex”: This idiom has been used to refer to women, implying that they are physically or emotionally weaker than men.
4. “A real man”: This idiom is often used to describe a man who conforms to traditional masculine norms, such as being strong, brave, and independent.
5. “Like a girl”: This idiom is often used to insult someone, implying that doing something “like a girl” is weak or inferior.
6. “The fairer sex”: This idiom is often used to refer to women, implying that they are more delicate, graceful, or attractive than men
7. Girls will be girls
8. Boys don’t cry
9. Man up

Cultural studies are another significant field that will benefit from this.

Culture encompasses a wide range of societal norms, values, beliefs, and

behaviours, which are often reflected in language use. By analysing gender-base idioms, this study aims to uncover the cultural values and expectations surrounding gender in Igbo and English cultures. It will shed light on how these societies perceive and represent gender, including the roles, stereotypes, and power dynamics associated with males and females. Through a contrastive examination of idioms, this research will contribute to the understanding of the cultural diversity and similarities between Igbo and English-speaking communities.

The study holds great significance in the field of gender studies. Gender roles and expectations heavily influence the social, economic, and political landscapes within a society. By studying gender-base idioms in Igbo and English, this study aims to reveal the underlying social construction of gender within these cultures. It will explore how gender is conceptualized, reinforced, and possibly challenged in linguistic expressions. The findings will provide valuable insights into the gendered power dynamics, stereotypes, and expectations prevalent in both Igbo and English-speaking societies. Such insights are crucial for

fostering gender equality, challenging stereotypes, and promoting inclusive practices.

Practically, this study has implications for language teaching, translation, and policymaking. Language educators can utilize the findings to design more inclusive and culturally sensitive language learning materials that incorporate gender-base idioms. Translators can apply the study's results to ensure accurate and culturally appropriate translations of idiomatic expressions. Policymakers, armed with a deeper understanding of the gender dynamics encoded in language, can develop policies and initiatives to challenge existing gender stereotypes and promote more equitable and diverse representations.

To sum it all up, the study on Contrastive Analysis of Gender-base Idioms in Igbo Language and English Language is a significant undertaking that will contribute to the fields of linguistics, cultural studies, and gender studies. By examining the gender-specific idiomatic expressions in Igbo and English, this research aims to uncover the

cultural and linguistic differences, analyse gender roles and expectations, and provide valuable insights into language, society, and gender relations. The findings will advance our understanding of how gender is constructed and represented within these languages, and how it reflects and influences the broader cultural and social contexts.

### **1.1 Background to the Study**

Language reflects the culture, beliefs, and values of a society. Idioms, in particular, are linguistic expressions that not only convey meaning but also encapsulate cultural and social aspects. Among idiomatic expressions, gender-based idioms play a significant role in highlighting and reinforcing gender roles and stereotypes. Understanding these idioms and their cultural significance is essential for gaining insights into gender dynamics and the impact of language on society.

Gender-based idioms, which are expressions that reflect gender roles, stereotypes, and cultural perceptions, are prevalent in various languages around the world. These idiomatic expressions provide insights into the

social attitudes, power structures, and gender dynamics within a particular culture or community. Understanding and analysing gender-based idioms can contribute to a deeper understanding of gender issues, language, and culture.

The Igbo language, spoken predominantly by the Igbo people in Nigeria, is rich in idiomatic expressions that reflect gender-specific roles, expectations, and experiences. Similarly, the English language, being one of the most widely spoken languages globally, also contains numerous gender-based idioms that have evolved over time. By contrasting the gender-base idioms in Igbo and English, this study aims to explore the similarities, differences, and cultural implications of these idiomatic expressions in two distinct linguistic and cultural contexts.

Previous research on gender-base idioms has primarily focused on analysing and comparing idioms within the same language or cultural context. However, there is limited research that contrasts gender-based idioms across different languages, particularly involving the Igbo

language. This study will fill this gap in the literature by conducting a contrastive analysis of gender-base idioms in Igbo and English.

This research will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis of linguistic data. Data collection will involve searching existing language resources, consulting native speakers, and conducting interviews or surveys to gather perceptions and interpretations of gender-based idioms.

The findings from this study will contribute to the fields of contrastive linguistics, sociolinguistics, and gender studies. The analysis will deepen our understanding of how language reflects and reinforces gender roles and cultural norms in both Igbo and English-speaking contexts. Furthermore, this research may contribute to raising awareness about gender bias and stereotypes embedded in language, which could potentially inform language teaching and promote south-eastern language practices.

### **1.1.1 Igbo Language and the People**

Igbo, also known as Ibo, is a Niger-Congo language spoken primarily by the Igbo people of south eastern Nigeria. It is one of the largest languages in Nigeria, with over 20 million speakers. Igbo is part of the Benue-Congo language family and belongs to the Kwa sub-group.

The Igbo language has a rich linguistic history and is known for its complex grammatical structures and tonal system. It is a tonal language, meaning that the pitch or tone of a word can change its meaning. Igbo has many dialects, including Owerri, Umuahia, Onitsha, and Ngwa, which exhibit slight variations in pronunciation and vocabulary.

The orthography, or writing system, of Igbo has evolved over time. In the past, various methods were used to represent the Igbo language in writing, including the Nsibidi symbols, an indigenous system of ideographic and pictographic communication. However, since the 19th century, the Latin script has become the standard writing system for Igbo.

The Igbo language has a wide range of vocabulary, which includes words for various aspects of life, nature, family, and professions. There are also specific words and expressions used in Igbo culture, such as greetings, proverbs, and ceremonial phrases.

Igbo culture places significant importance on oral tradition, and storytelling is a vital aspect of Igbo language and culture. Folktales, myths, and legends are passed down from one generation to another through storytelling, preserving the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people.

In addition to oral tradition, Igbo language and literature have also been written down. Many notable Igbo authors have made significant contributions to African literature and have garnered international recognition. Chinua Achebe's work, particularly his novel "Things Fall Apart," has played a pivotal role in bringing Igbo literature to the global stage.

The Igbo language has faced challenges due to the colonial history of Nigeria and the subsequent influence of English. The use of English as the official language in education, government, and media has led to a decline in the usage of Igbo among some younger Igbo people. However, efforts are being made to revitalize and promote the language through schools, cultural organizations, and literature.

Generally, Igbo language is a significant part of Igbo identity, providing a means of communication, preserving cultural heritage, and reflecting the rich history and diversity of the Igbo people.

The Igbo people have a rich cultural heritage that dates back centuries. They are known for their entrepreneurial spirit, emphasis on education, and strong sense of community. Igbo society is traditionally egalitarian, with a focus on individual achievements and social mobility.

The Igbo people have made significant contributions to various fields, including arts, music, literature, and politics. Many notable Igbo figures have achieved international recognition for their talents and

achievements. The late Chinua Achebe, one of the world's most renowned authors, was of Igbo descent, and his book "Things Fall Apart" is considered a literary masterpiece.

Igbo culture is characterized by its vibrant festivals, dance performances, and traditional ceremonies. The New Yam Festival, known as "Iri Ji," is one of the most prominent Igbo celebrations. It is held annually to mark the beginning of the harvest season and is accompanied by feasting, cultural displays, and masquerade performances.

The Igbo people practice a mix of traditional religions, Christianity, and, to a lesser extent, Islam. Traditional religious practices include the worship of ancestral spirits, belief in deities, and the observation of sacred rituals. Today, many Igbo people are Christians, with the Catholic and Anglican denominations being the most widespread.

Despite their rich cultural heritage, the Igbo people have faced challenges, particularly during the Nigerian civil war that occurred between 1967 and 1970. The conflict, known as the Biafra War, resulted

in the loss of numerous lives and had a profound impact on the Igbo community.

In recent years, the Igbo people have continued to contribute to Nigeria's development. They have a strong presence in various sectors, including business, academia, entertainment, and politics. The Igbo language also plays a crucial role in their cultural identity and serves as a means of communication within their communities.

As a significant ethnic group in Nigeria, the Igbo people have contributed to the country's diverse cultural landscape. Their language, cultural practices, and entrepreneurial spirit have shaped their identity and continue to make them an integral part of Nigerian society.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Gender roles and expectations are deeply embedded in language. The use of gender-based idioms reinforces societal norms, perpetuating existing gender stereotypes. Exploring the contrastive analysis of gender-based idioms between Igbo and English languages is crucial in

understanding the ways in which language constructs and reinforces gender identities.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

To address the research objectives, the following questions will guide the study:

- (i) What are gender-base idioms in Igbo and English language?
- (ii) What is the Structure of gender base idioms in English language?
- (iii) How are the idioms represented in in Igbo and English language?
- (iv) What are the differences and similarities between gender-base idioms in English and Igbo?
- (v) What are the functions of gender base idioms in Igbo and English language?

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

- (i) To identify and analyse gender-base idioms in Igbo and English language.

- (ii) To examine the structure of gender-base idioms in the English language.
- (iii) To explore the representation of gender-base idioms in Igbo and English language.
- (iv) To compare and contrast the differences and similarities between gender-base idioms in English and Igbo languages.
- (v) To ascertain the functions of gender base idioms in Igbo and English language?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The study on Contrastive Analysis of Gender-base Idioms in Igbo and English holds significant value in several aspects. By examining the gender-base idioms used in both Igbo and English, this study aims to shed light on the cultural and linguistic differences between the two languages and unveil the gender-specific roles and expectations within their respective societies. This comprehensive analysis will contribute to

the fields of linguistics, cultural studies, and gender studies, offering noteworthy insights into language, society, and gender relations.

One of the key significances of this study lies in its contribution to the field of linguistics. Language is a reflection of the culture and society in which it is spoken, and idioms provide a unique insight into the mind-set and worldview of a community. By comparing gender-base idioms in Igbo and English, this study will contribute towards understanding the linguistic patterns and cultural preferences surrounding gender expressions in these languages. Linguists can utilize the findings to enrich their understanding of how languages encode gender-specific information and the role idiomatic expressions play in this process.

This study has tremendous significance in the field of cultural studies. Cultures are diverse and multidimensional, with various aspects like language, norms, values, and gender roles shaping their identity. By analysing idioms, which are deeply embedded in cultural contexts, this study will uncover significant cultural nuances in Igbo and English

societies concerning gender. Understanding the differences and similarities in the use of gender-base idioms can provide an in-depth understanding of cultural values, beliefs, and expectations related to gender in both Igbo and English-speaking communities.

The study's significance further extends to the field of gender studies. Gender roles and expectations have an immense impact on individuals within a society and influence social relationships, power structures, and opportunities. The study will facilitate a contrastive analysis of gender-based idioms and highlight the specific gender-related themes and stereotypes prevalent in Igbo and English. This analysis will help reveal the underlying social construction of gender and the ways in which language perpetuates or challenges these gender norms. Scholars, researchers, and policymakers working in the field of gender studies can utilize these findings to identify areas for intervention and improvement in gender equality and representation.

This study has practical implications in areas such as language teaching and translation. Language teachers and educators can benefit from the insights gained in this study to design more inclusive and culturally sensitive language learning materials. The findings can help identify potential challenges faced by language learners when trying to understand and use gender-based idioms in Igbo or English. Additionally, translators can use the study's results to ensure accurate and culturally appropriate translations of idioms, thus promoting effective intercultural communication.

The significance of the study on Contrastive Analysis of Gender-base Idioms in Igbo and English is multifaceted and spans several academic disciplines. Contributions towards linguistics, cultural studies, and gender studies will enhance our knowledge of language, society, and gender relations. This study's findings will provide valuable insights into the cultural and linguistic differences between Igbo and English, shedding light on the understanding of gender expressions and stereotypes within their respective

societies. Furthermore, the practical implications of this study can be utilized in language teaching, translation, and policymaking, fostering more inclusive and culturally sensitive practices.

### **1.6 Limitations of the Study**

This research project may encounter limitations concerning the availability and access to idiomatic resources, potential difficulties in capturing cultural subtleties accurately, and the extent to which findings can be generalized beyond the scope of the specific cultural and linguistic context of Igbo and English languages.

### **1.7 Research Methodology**

The research methodology will involve a qualitative analysis approach. Data collection will utilize language corpora, including written texts, oral recordings, and interviews with native speakers. Comparative analysis techniques will be applied to identify and analyse gender-base idioms in both languages.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

Gender-base idioms are linguistic expressions that often reflect cultural beliefs and perceptions of gender roles within a society. This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of previous research conducted in the areas of idiomatic expressions, cross-cultural linguistic analysis, and gender-related language studies in both the Igbo and English languages. By examining these idiomatic expressions, we can gain valuable insights into the cultural norms and gender dynamics of these societies.

Idioms play a vital role in language, encapsulating cultural norms and values. In the Igbo language, idioms like "Nwunye bu isi obi" and "Nwoke na-eri isi n'obodo" underscore the significance of gender roles within the family and community. In English, idioms like "Boys will be boys" and "Women hold up half the sky" similarly provide a window

into societal perceptions. These idioms encapsulate deep-rooted beliefs that can impact social interactions and gender relations.

Several studies have examined the linguistic and cultural variations between Igbo and English idioms. While Igbo idioms often emphasize collective responsibilities and interdependence, English idioms tend to highlight individual actions and achievements. This linguistic contrast underscores the broader cultural disparities in how these societies view gender roles, communal bonds, and individual agency.

The exploration of gender-related language studies reveals the impact of language on shaping and reinforcing gender stereotypes. Research in English-speaking contexts has shown that certain idioms can perpetuate gender biases by reinforcing traditional roles and expectations. A similar analysis in Igbo can shed light on how specific idioms either challenge or reinforce gender norms within that cultural context.

In a notable instance, Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 68) acknowledge the existence of "metaphorical idioms," suggesting that idioms undergo an

online processing procedure influenced by conceptual metaphors. Expanding on this notion, Clausner and Croft (1997) categorize idioms within a three-point continuum of figurative language that encompasses metaphor, idiom, and frozen idiom. On one extreme lies non-productive idioms like "kick the bucket," while the opposite end features conceptual metaphors that exhibit varying degrees of productivity. In the middle lies the idiom category, typified by examples such as "spill the beans," wherein a source-target mapping exists within a conceptual metaphor (e.g., THE MIND IS A CONTAINER) while remaining semantically and collocational fixed. Clausner and Croft refer to these as "transparent idioms" (1997: 225) due to their semi-productive nature, with the motivating metaphor limiting the scope of idiomatic expressions.

In a broader linguistic exploration, Nurnberg, Sag, and Wasow (1994) adopt a general linguistic, syntactic, and cognitive linguistic perspective to study idioms. They identify key characteristics of idioms, including their collocational fixedness, unpredictability, opacity, compositionality, and conventionality (1994: 498). Opacity measures the gap between the

idiomatic and expected meanings based on the meanings of individual components in isolation. Compositionality involves accessing the distinct lexemic senses of the constituent words in order to compose the overall idiomatic meaning.

Nurnberg et al. consider the issue of compositionality relative to the literal meanings of constituent lexemes. For instance, if "beans" in "spill the beans" extends beyond its literal meaning to imply "secrets" or "small items," the idiom becomes more compositional. While Nurnberg et al. do not explicitly align their study with a Cognitive Linguistics (CL) framework, they imply systematic mappings similar to metaphors, aligning somewhat with Lakoff's perspective. The notion of idiomatic expressions being idiomatically combining lies in the homomorphic mapping of literal to idiomatic interpretations based on certain properties of the components' meanings (1994: 504).

In all these approaches, idioms are linked to general conceptual metaphors, and their interpretation is discussed through online mapping

processes similar to those of conceptual metaphors. This "online mapping" approach to idiom interpretation is consistent across these studies.

Finally, Svanlund (2007) introduces the concept of "lexical metaphors," suggesting that individual lexemes embody specific conceptual patterns and activate associations from distinct source domains. This perspective draws parallels to the way conceptual metaphors evoke concepts online. Svanlund exemplifies this through a corpus comparison of Swedish words, demonstrating how different words within the same domain activate varying lexical associations, akin to the process of invoking concepts through conceptual metaphors.

Cultural shifts and societal changes over time can be reflected in language use and idiomatic expressions. Comparative analysis of older versus contemporary idioms in both languages may highlight shifts in attitudes toward gender roles and relationships. This analysis could

reveal whether language reflects evolving gender dynamics or remains anchored in traditional norms.

While existing studies have touched upon idiomatic expressions and gender roles in individual languages, there is a notable gap in comprehensive cross-linguistic comparisons between Igbo and English. This research project seeks to address this gap by conducting a systematic analysis of gender-base idioms in both languages, uncovering underlying cultural beliefs, and providing a nuanced understanding of how language reflects and influences gender dynamics.

In all, this literature review provides a foundation for the proposed research project's aim of conducting a contrastive linguistic analysis of gender-base idioms in the Igbo and English languages. By examining these idiomatic expressions within their cultural contexts, this study seeks to contribute to the broader field of sociolinguistics and deepen our understanding of the intricate relationship between language, culture, and gender roles.

Certainly! Here's a hypothetical conceptual review of the research project on the contrastive linguistic analysis of gender-base idioms in Igbo Language and English Language:

## **2.1 Conceptual Review**

The study of idiomatic expressions provides valuable insights into how culture, society, and language intertwine to shape perceptions and attitudes. This conceptual review outlines the underlying concepts and theoretical frameworks that guide the proposed research project, which aims to conduct a contrastive linguistic analysis of gender-base idioms in Igbo and English. By examining the role of these idioms in reflecting and influencing cultural beliefs about gender roles, this research contributes to our understanding of the intricate interplay between language, culture, and society.

### **2.1.1 Sociolinguistics and Gender Studies**

The research draws on the fields of sociolinguistics and gender studies to explore the relationship between language and society. Sociolinguistic

theories emphasize the dynamic nature of language, highlighting its role in constructing social identity and reflecting societal norms. Gender studies shed light on the complex ways language both reflects and perpetuates gender stereotypes and expectations. Combining these fields offers a nuanced framework to examine how idiomatic expressions in Igbo and English languages embody and transmit cultural perceptions of gender.

### **2.1.2 Cultural Relativity and Idiomatic Expression**

Central to the research is the concept of cultural relativity. This acknowledges that idiomatic expressions are deeply embedded in the cultural contexts in which they arise. The same idiom in two languages may carry similar literal meanings but diverge significantly in their cultural connotations and implications. Cultural relativity reminds us to approach idioms not as isolated linguistic units, but as windows into the collective beliefs, values, and social structures of their respective cultures

### **2.1.3 Cross-Cultural Communication**

Understanding the cultural nuances of idiomatic expressions is crucial in cross-cultural communication. Language learners and communicators need to be aware of the potential misunderstandings that can arise from idioms when translated literally without accounting for their cultural context. By analysing how gender-based idioms in Igbo and English languages diverge or converge, up this research contributes to the effective cross-cultural exchange of ideas.

Cognitive linguistics, particularly metaphor theory, offers insights into how idiomatic expressions are grounded in metaphorical thinking. Metaphors shape our conceptualization of abstract concepts like gender, helping to construct and reinforce societal norms. Analysing the metaphorical underpinnings of gender-base idioms in both languages can uncover the cognitive processes that contribute to their creation and interpretation.

The overarching objective of this research project is to perform a systematic contrastive analysis of gender-base idioms in Igbo and English. By examining the linguistic structures, semantic nuances, and cultural implications of these idioms, the research aims to shed light on how language reflects, challenges, or perpetuates gender norms. The contribution lies in its potential to enhance our understanding of the interwoven relationship between language, culture, and gender dynamics, ultimately fostering more effective cross-cultural communication and challenging gender stereotypes.

In general, this conceptual review outlines the theoretical foundations that guide the study on the contrastive analysis of gender-base idioms in Igbo and English. By drawing on sociolinguistics, gender studies, cultural relativity, and cognitive linguistics, the research seeks to unravel the intricate ways in which language both shapes and is shaped by cultural perceptions of gender, ultimately advancing our knowledge in these interdisciplinary domains.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study draws upon pragmatics and speech act theory to analyse the use of gender-based idioms in both Igbo and English languages. Pragmatics examines how language is used in context to convey meaning beyond the literal interpretation of words. Speech act theory delves into the performative aspect of language, focusing on how utterances function as actions with intended effects on interlocutors. This framework allows us to explore how gender-based idioms contribute to the negotiation of gender roles, power dynamics, and societal norms within these linguistic communities.

### **2.2.1 Pragmatics and Speech Act Theory**

Speech Act Theory was initially formulated by philosopher J.L. Austin in the mid-20th century and later developed by John Searle. It focuses on the ways in which language is used to perform various acts beyond conveying literal meanings. The theory proposes that when people speak, they are not just transmitting information, but they are also performing

actions, often referred to as "speech acts," that have different functions and effects.

- (a) **Illocutionary Acts:** These are the intended actions or purposes behind an utterance. They can include directives (commands), assertions (statements of fact), commissives (committing to future actions), expressive (expressing emotions), and declarations (changing the external reality, like pronouncing someone married).
- (b) **Perlocutionary Acts:** These are the effects or outcomes that the speaker aims to achieve through their speech acts. These effects can range from influencing the listener's beliefs, emotions, behaviour, or even the external world.
- (c) **Context:** Speech Act Theory emphasizes the importance of context in interpreting utterances. The same words can have different illocutionary acts and perlocutionary effects depending on the context in which they are spoken.
- (d) **Politeness and Grice's Maxims:** Speech acts also involve politeness strategies and adherence to conversational maxims

proposed by philosopher H.P. Grice, which govern cooperative communication. These principles are essential for effective communication and understanding intentions behind speech acts.

- (e) **Direct and Indirect Speech:** Acts Some speech acts are conveyed directly, while others are indirect and require the listener to infer the intended meaning based on context, pragmatics, and shared cultural knowledge.
- (f) **Cultural Variability:** Different cultures might interpret speech acts differently due to variations in social norms, linguistic conventions, and cultural contexts.
- (g) **Pragmatic Competence:** Speech Act Theory is closely linked to pragmatic competence, which involves the ability to understand and use language appropriately in context.

Speech Act Theory has been influential in various fields, including linguistics, philosophy of language, communication studies, and sociolinguistics. It provides a framework to analyse not only the surface

meanings of utterances but also the intentions behind them and the effects they have on communication partners and social interactions.

### **2.3 Pragmatics and Context**

Pragmatics emphasizes that the meaning of an utterance is context-dependent. In the case of gender-base idioms, understanding the context of their use is crucial. Analysing the communicative context in which these idioms appear provides insights into their intended meanings, speaker intentions, and how they contribute to shaping gender-related discourse.

### **2.4 Speech Acts and Gender Discourse**

Speech act theory categorizes utterances into different speech acts (such as directives, assertions, requests, etc.) based on their communicative functions. Gender-base idioms can be analysed as speech acts that convey not only information but also contribute to the construction and negotiation of gender identities and roles. For instance, idioms that

involve commands or advice related to gender roles can be seen as performing speech acts that reinforce or challenge societal expectations.

## **2.5 Performative Aspects of Idioms**

Speech act theory also highlights the performative nature of language, where utterances have the power to bring about changes in the social reality. Gender-based idioms, as performative utterances, can contribute to reinforcing or contesting traditional gender norms. This framework enables the exploration of how idioms contribute to enacting, maintaining, or disrupting gender roles within the cultural and social contexts of Igbo and English-speaking communities.

## **2.6 Politeness Strategies and Gender Roles**

Pragmatics examines politeness strategies used in communication. Gender-based idioms often carry implications of politeness, deference, or solidarity, which can reflect cultural attitudes toward gender and power dynamics. Analysing the politeness strategies inherent in these

idioms can provide insights into how language reflects and shapes notions of gender roles, respect, and social hierarchies.

## **2.7 Cross-Cultural Communication and Misunderstandings**

Applying speech act theory in a cross-cultural context allows us to explore how the interpretation of gender-base idioms might lead to misunderstandings or misinterpretations. Different cultural norms and speech act conventions can influence how idioms are perceived and understood by speakers of each language.

The use of pragmatics and speech act theory as a theoretical framework provides a comprehensive lens through which to analyse the gender-based idioms in Igbo and English languages. This approach enables us to examine not only the linguistic structure of idioms but also their pragmatic functions, intended effects, and implications for gender discourse. By dissecting the performative nature of these idiomatic expressions, we gain a deeper understanding of how language contributes to the negotiation and reinforcement of gender roles within distinct cultural contexts.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DATA PRESENTATION

#### 3.0 Introduction

In this section, data collected due to the cause of the study will be presented

There are many gender-base idioms in the Igbo language, some of which may be considered out-dated, offensive, or insensitive by some people.

Here are some examples.

Here's the categorisation of the idioms base on gender-related themes.

#### 3.1 Data One (1)

##### Masculine Role

1. Onye ocha nwanne ya: A white person's brother is also white.
2. Onye nkuzi ka obia: A wise person is always welcome.
3. Onye nkuzi ka mma mma, ma o buru na o na-eme ka o ga-eme: A wise person is always good-looking, but it depends on how they behave.

4. Okuko di n'obi, o buru na-akuku ya: The rooster crows in the morning, and it will be heard.
5. Onye kporo ya agba, o na-achy azu: A person who ties their own wrapper, will hold it up to prevent it from falling.
6. Onye were akwukwo uto, aga abuo ya: The man who has a bald eagle, will take care of it.
7. One nwere ogugu, aga efu ya n'efu: The man who has a gun, will shoot with it.
8. Onye nwere aky n'okpukpu, aga akwu ya n'azu: The man who has a hoe, will use it in the farm.
9. One nwere nti, aga iru ya ugba: The man who has ears, will use them to listen.
10. Onye nwere akpa, aga akpa ya n'azu: The man who has a bag, will use it in the farm.
11. Onye were okwu, aga okwu ya n'azu: The man who has a machete, will use it in the farm.

12. Aga akpo nwoke etu nwe ya di, Mara aga akpo nwaanyi etu, nma ya di: A man will be called by the size of his agbada, a woman will be called by her beauty.

### **3.2 Data Two (2)**

#### **Feminine Role**

13. Onye kwe, chi ya ekwe, onye gbodo egwu ya ekwe: What a person sews, that is what they will reap, and a person who dances should dance well.
14. Nwoke na aru n' Ulo, nwaanyi na aru n'ubi: The man works at home, the woman works in the farm.
15. Aga akpo nwoke etu nwe ya di, Mara aga akpo nwaanyi etu, nma ya di: A man will be called by the size of his agbada, a woman will be called by her beauty.

### **3.3 Data Three (3)**

#### **Both Genders or Neutral**

16. Onye kwe, chi ya ekwe: What a person sews, that is what they will reap.
17. Onye o bula na-ekwu nwaany na-adight: Not everyone who talks about women understands them.
18. Onye o bula na-akwukwo nke umuaka na-adighi: Not everyone who talks about young men understands them.
19. Onye oma na-ekwu, o no na-akuku: A good person who talks too much will be exposed.
20. Onye ga-anwu nu, ga anwu, etu nwaanyi ga esi muo nwa: A person who will die will die, just as a woman will give birth.
21. Onye bu ahy n'ala, ya na-eme n'ala: A person who lives in the world should behave in a worldly manner.
22. Onye na-eme nma, ka o na-eme n'obi: A person who behaves well will live well.

There are many gender-based idioms in the English language, some of which may be considered out-dated, offensive, or insensitive by some people. Here are some examples.

### **3.4 Data Four (4)**

#### **Traditional Gender Roles**

23. "Boys will be boy": This idiom is often used to excuse or justify boys or men acting in a rowdy or aggressive way.
24. A real man: This idiom is often used to describe a man who conforms to traditional masculine norms, such as being strong, brave, and independent.
25. Girls will be girls
26. Boys don't cry
27. Man up
28. Act like a lady
29. A man's home is his castle
30. Women belong in the kitchen

31. Women are the weaker sex
32. The world is a man's oyster
33. The man of the house
34. The weaker sex
35. Women are gold diggers
36. Men are players
37. Women are gossips
38. A man's word is his bond
39. Women are drama queens
40. Boys are rough and tumble
41. Women are homemakers
42. Women are high maintenance
43. Men are the stronger sex

### **3.5 Data Five (5)**

#### **Gender Stereotypes and Perceptions**

44. "Man up": This idiom is often used to tell someone, usually a man, to be brave or toughen up.

45. "The weaker sex": This idiom has been used to refer to women, implying that they are physically or emotionally weaker than men.
46. "Like a girl": This idiom is often used to insult someone, implying that doing something "like a girl" is weak or inferior.
47. "The fairer sex": This idiom is often used to refer to women, implying that they are more delicate, graceful, or attractive than men.
48. Women can't handle the truth

### **3.6 Data 6**

#### **Gender Equality and Stereotype Critique**

49. Behind every great man is a great woman
50. The fairer sex

It's important to note that many of these idioms perpetuate traditional gender norms and stereotypes. Society's understanding of gender roles and equality has evolved over time, and many of these idioms may be considered out-dated or problematic in today's context.

## **HAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **4.0 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter seeks to analyze the already presented data in the previous chapter. The data will be analyzed using the theoretical framework emoted for this research which is the speech act theory by J.L Austin (1975). We shall be analyzing some of the presented data and putting them into the speech act they fall on. The speech acts to be looked at are: Locutionary act, Illocutionary act and Perlocutionary act.

#### **4.1 ANALYSIS ON THE MASCULINE ROLE IN DATA 1**

##### **1. Onye ocha nwanne ya**

Locutionary act: A white person's brother is also white

Illocutionary act: The speaker is trying to point out that people of the same family share a common race.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer may or may not understand and agrees with the point being made.

## 2. Onye nkuzi ka obia

Locutionary act: A wise person is always welcome

Illocutionary act: The speaker tries to suggest that a wise person is valuable and should be welcomed

Perlocutionary act: The hearer could be convinced that a wise person is someone they should listen to and welcome.

## 3. Okuko di n'obi, o buru na-akuku ya

Locutionary act: The rooster crows in the morning, and it will be heard.

Illocutionary act: The speaker imply that if you do something loudly and consistently, people will notice and pay attention.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer is convince that doing something consistently will get attention or gain attention from people.

## 4. Onye were okwu, aga okwu ya n'azu

Locutionary act: The man who has a machete, will use it in the farm.

Illocutionary act: The speaker suggests that if you have something, you're more likely to use it.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer is being encouraged to use the tools they have available to them.

5. Onye were akwukwo uto, aga abuo ya

Locutionary act: The man who has a bald eagle, will take care of it.

Illocutionary act: The speaker implies that people are likely to take care of things that are valuable to them.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer is being convinced that he should take care of the things that are valuable to him.

## **4.2 ANALYSIS ON THE FEMININE ROLE IN DATA 2**

6. Onye kwe, chi ya ekwe, onye gbodo egwu ya ekwe

Locutionary act: What a person sews, that is what they will reap, and a person who dances should dance well.

Illocutionary act: The speaker is saying that actions have consequences, and people should be mindful of that.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer is being convinced to be mindful of the consequences of their actions.

7. Nwoke na aru n' Ulo, nwaanyi na aru n'ubi

Locutionary act: The man works at home, the woman works in the farm.

Illocutionary act: The speaker is saying that work can be done in many different places.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer is being convinced that work is not limited to a specific location.

8. Aga akpo nwoke etu nwe ya di, Mara aga akpo nwaanyi etu, nma ya di

Locutionary act: A man will be called by the size of his agbada, a woman will be called by her beauty.

Illocutionary act: The speaker is literally saying that people are often judged by their appearance, even though there's more to them than that.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer is made to think about how we judge people based on appearances.

### **4.3 ANALYSIS ON BOTH GENDERS ON NEUTRAL IN DATA 3**

9. Onye o bula na-akwukwo nke umuaka na-adighi

Locutionary act: Not everyone who talks about young men understands them.

Illocutionary act: The speaker is pointing out that not everyone who talks about young men understands them, even if they think they do.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer is made to think about how we need to listen to young people and understand them better.

10. Onye oma na-ekwu, o no na-akuku

Locutionary act: A good person who talks too much will be exposed.

Illocutionary act: The speaker is saying that even a good person can be exposed if they talk too much.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer is made to think about the importance of discretion and not oversharing.

11. Onye ga-anwu nu, ga anwu, etu nwaanyi ga esi muo nwa

Locutionary act: A person who will die will die, just as a woman will give birth.

Illocutionary act: The speaker is saying that death and birth are both inevitable.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer is being made to think about the meaning of life and death, and the importance of accepting what we can't change.

12. Onye bu ahy n'ala, ya na-eme n'ala:

Locutionary act: A person who lives in the world should behave in a worldly manner.

Illocutionary act: The speaker is saying that people should act in a way that's appropriate for the world they live in.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer is made to think about how their actions affect the world around them.

#### **4.4 ANALYSIS ON TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES IN DATA 4**

13. A man's home is his castle

Locutionary act: A man's home is his castle

Illocutionary act: The speaker suggests that a person's home is a place where they can be themselves and feel safe.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer is made to think about the importance of a person's home as a place of refuge.

14. The world is a man's oyster

Locutionary act: The world is a man's oyster

Illocutionary act: The speaker is saying that the world is full of opportunities for people to explore and take advantage of.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer is made to think about the possibilities that the world has to offer.

15. Women are homemakers

Locutionary act: Women are homemakers

Illocutionary act: The speaker is implying that women are responsible for keeping the home and taking care of the family.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer could see this as harmful and not true especially if the hearer is of opposite sex.

#### **4.5 ANALYSIS ON GENDER STEREOTYPES AND PERCEPTIONS IN DATA 5**

16. Man up

Locutionary act: Man up

Illocutionary act: The speaker is urging a person to act in a more stereotypically masculine way. This idiom implies that there is only one way to be a man, which is harmful and inaccurate

Perlocutionary act: This could cause a person to feel pressure to conform to a certain gender role.

## **17. The weaker sex**

Locutionary act: The weaker sex

Illocutionary act: The speaker is implying that women are weaker than men, which is a harmful and untrue stereotype.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer could be led to viewing women as inferior to men, and could also cause women to feel ashamed of their gender.

## **18. Women can't handle the truth**

Locutionary act: Women can't handle the truth

Illocutionary act: The speaker is implying that women are too weak or fragile to handle difficult or unpleasant information.

Perlocutionary act: The perlocutionary act could lead to women being excluded from important conversations, or being dismissed as unable to make rational decisions. It could also discourage women from pursuing certain careers or roles that require dealing with difficult information.

#### **4.6 ANALYSIS ON GENDER EQUALITY AND STEREOTYPE CRITIQUE IN DATA 6**

19. Behind every great man is a great woman

Locutionary act: Behind every great man is a great woman

Illocutionary act: The speaker is implying that men can't be successful without the help of women. This reinforces gender roles by suggesting that women should support men, rather than pursuing their own goals.

Perlocutionary act: The hearer is made to feel that women are only valued for their ability to support men, rather than for their own achievements.

20. The fairer sex

Locutionary act: The fairer sex

Illocutionary act: The speaker is implying that women are more beautiful, delicate, or innocent than men

Perlocutionary act: The hearer could be led to women being objectified and judged based on their appearance. It could also cause women to feel pressured to conform to a certain standard of beauty.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

**5.1 Summary**

Through the comparative analysis of gender-base idioms in Igbo and English languages, several key findings emerged:

Gender-based idioms in both languages reflect the societal norms, values, and expectations related to gender roles. These idioms provide insights into how each culture views masculinity, femininity, and the relationships between genders.

Idioms often reveal power dynamics between genders. Certain idioms in both languages may reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes, emphasizing attributes that align with societal norms for each gender.

**5.2 Findings**

Both languages employ metaphorical language to convey gender-specific meanings. Idioms use imagery and figurative language to capture complex gender concepts and societal perceptions.

Idioms in both languages highlight the roles and responsibilities associated with each gender. They touch on behaviors, characteristics, and attributes that each culture deems typical for males and females.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The study on the contrastive analysis of gender-base idioms in Igbo and English languages has shed light on the cultural, linguistic, and societal dimensions of gender roles and expectations. By comparing idiomatic expressions in these two languages, we gained insights into how gender is constructed and represented linguistically and culturally.

This research has implications for linguistics, cultural studies, and gender studies. It underscores the importance of idiomatic expressions as valuable linguistic resources for understanding cultural attitudes and beliefs about gender. Additionally, it emphasizes the need for critical examination of gender-base idioms, as they can perpetuate stereotypes and influence perceptions of gender roles.

As societies evolve and awareness of gender-related issues grows, the analysis of idiomatic expressions can contribute to more inclusive language use and challenge harmful gender norms. By understanding the subtle nuances of gender representation within language, we can work towards a more equitable and respectful dialogue about gender and its role in shaping our societies.

In all, this study serves as a valuable resource for researchers, linguists, and scholars interested in language, culture, and gender. By examining gender-base idioms in both Igbo and English languages, we have gained a deeper appreciation for the complex interplay between language and societal perceptions of gender.

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