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Assessment of Language of Igue Festival in Ika Land of Delta State Nigeria: Cultural and Semantic Implications

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Abstract

This work, Cultural and Semantic Implications of the language of the Igue Festival in Ika Land; is aimed at bringing out the detailed account of the Igue festival showcasing the Ika culture and tradition as well as x-raying the activities performed during the festival and the role played by some specific persons in the community. This became necessary due to the fact that, there is a decline in the understanding and use of traditional ritual expressions there by threatening the preservation of indigenous knowledge and oral traditions. Furthermore, there is relatively no study on how language conveys meaning during the Igue festival and how these meanings reflect the cultural values of Ika people, this gap creates the need for this research. In carrying out this research, the method will be anchored on interview and close reading of relevant texts. To achieve this, the researcher adopts the Saphir-Whoorfian's theory of language. This is relevant to this study because it not only see language as socially bounded but also, culturally bounded. The researcher also looked at the history and meaning of Igue festival as well its performance entailments. Furthermore, the meaning of some language/words used during the Igue festival and its cultural/semantic implications was not left out. This was done by giving both the cultural names of Igue activities as well as their English equivalents which was semantically looked at in its social and cultural context. From the findings, it was evident that the culture of the people has correlation with their language which is a true representation of the theory in use for this research work. Conclusively, we can see that language and culture are two inseparable coin as far as the Igue festival is concerned.

Keywords: Festival, Igue, Semantic, traditional rituals

Introduction

No language can be separated from its culture. Language and culture are complements of each other. To a large extent, the language of a people is determined buy their culture (Hymes 1962). He argues that understanding language requires more than analyzing grammar or vocabulary; it also requires understanding who speaks, to whom, when, where, why, and according to what cultural norms. This shows that a strong relationship abounds between culture and language. The ika people have numerous kinds of festival which they celebrate. This includes Oso-Ezi (a special visit by a sitting Obi to the place where other Obis' were buried), Iwa-gi (new yam festival), Iwa-Eke, Igbu-Nkpisin, to mention but a few; all these are organized around major events in the Ika community hence, the various festivals are celebrated at varraying times from one locality to the other. According to Ayordoh (2024), festivals in Africa are organized around major events like, the agricultural rites, episode from the history and tradition of the people around officially recognized divinities. The Igue festival is a central feature of the cultural life of the Ika people as a whole since it is a period when all members of the community, home and abroad meet to express their gratitude to God who has kept them alive throughout the year hence, it is held at the end of the year. Since language is the primary medium for cultural expressions, the world view and language are therefore inextricably interwoven. The language of Igue festival is not the normal Ika language for communication but, a special type of language coinage that brings alive and reflect the culture and belief of the Ikas' and uphold it.

Statement of the Problem

The Igue Festival in Ika Land is one of the most important traditional festivals through which the Ika people preserve their cultural heritage, religious beliefs, and communal identity. During this festival, various forms of language including ritual prayers, chants, proverbs, songs, blessings, greetings, and invocations are used to communicate symbolic meanings and perform cultural functions. However, despite the linguistic richness of these expressions, there is limited scholarly attention

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devoted to their semantic interpretation and cultural significance. Many younger generations of Ika speakers are increasingly influenced by English and other dominant languages, leading to a gradual decline in the understanding and use of traditional ritual expressions. Consequently, many symbolic meanings embedded in the language of the Igue Festival are becoming less understood, thereby threatening the preservation of indigenous knowledge and oral traditions. Furthermore, existing studies on the Igue Festival have largely focused on its historical, religious, or anthropological dimensions, with relatively little emphasis on how language conveys meaning during the festival and how these meanings reflect the cultural values of the Ika people. This gap creates the need for a semantic analysis of the language used during the Igue Festival to reveal both its literal and implied meanings as well as its cultural implications. This study therefore seeks to examine the semantic features of the language of the Igue Festival in Ika Land and to investigate how these linguistic expressions preserve cultural identity, transmit indigenous knowledge, reinforce traditional institutions, and promote social cohesion among the Ika people.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the cultural and semantic implications of the language used during the Igue Festival in Ika Land.The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the semantic meanings of the language used during the Igue Festival in Ika Land.
2. Identify the various linguistic expressions employed during the festival, such as prayers, chants, proverbs, songs, greetings, and blessings.
3. Investigate the cultural implications of the language used during the Igue Festival.
4. Examine the role of festival language in transmitting indigenous knowledge and traditional values.
5. Assess how the language of the Igue Festival promotes unity, social cohesion, and respect for traditional authority in Ika society.

The Origin/Historical Background of The Igue Festival

The beginning of Igue festival is traced from the immigration of Owa to Idu, Benin-City during the great migration witnessed in the reign of Oba Ewuare at about 1440 A.D benin history. According to Chief J.O. Obadaigie, oral history supports the theory that the first festival dates back to the reign of Oba Ewuare in 1440A.D. He was a powerful oba who fought against his enemies and captured two hundred and one (201) towns therefore, the performance of the Igue festival in Ika land is traced to the Edo Culture this is because Owa Kingdom; Ika land are migrants of the Benin kingdom who later settled in the East from where they finally left for their original home where they are now settled hence, traces of Benin culture is still much evident among the Ika people. Those days, thick forests housing different animals exists. One of the little children who went to fetch fire wood from the forest was caught and eaten up by one of these animals in the forest which they reported on getting home. On their return back to the forest, a hunter called ***Ewere*** went with them. On arrival, he hid himself while the children went in search of firewood then came the animal again to attack the children but their shout alerted the hunter who shot and killed the animal. The animal was left there as they went to inform the elders who followed them to see the animal which has been a threat to them but, no one was able to identify the animal with its name then it was called a *'big thing: ohiohio'* the animal was taken home and slaughtered, all in the village eat of it. One of the soothsayers; oheren' who ate the meat advised that the head be buried in the cementary. They were asked to carry along sticks, guns to be used to shoot the evils the animal has brought to the land, some dressed in a funny looking attire while others disguise themselves 'odin'. They make use of the 'aza' which dancers tie on their ankles while dancing and the clapperless bell 'Ekpiri'. The eldest son will now lead them with guns and other dangerous weapons to the cementary. When they get there, they will throw all the materials used, including the head of the animal and render songs and dance there. The elders who have their gun will now shoot their guns to destroy the animals like the hunter did in the forest. The women and little children will dance from there to the eldest man's house with the 'Ibiewere leaf' (good luck leaf) wishing themselves good luck with the 'good luck leaf' on behalf of all those in the land.

The Igue festival was carried out from the account stated above especially in ika land where the Obi and his people celebrate in a most colourful manner. In recent times, the origin of this festival is associated with a great warrior with mystic powers called ODOGWN who was the founder of Owa clan. This man was said to have wielded great power and influence over

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the people and protected them against external aggression during those days of inter-clan and inter-tribal wars. The man so endeared himself to the clan that he managed the affairs of the people and instilled in them a sense of belonging and common destiny as a result of which, when he died, the people decided to honour him annually with the Igue festival.

The preparation process and organization of Igue festival in Ika Land.

In ika land, fourteen days to this event is used for the clearing and elaborate preparations. These take the form of clearing of streets and paths, repairs and renovation of dwelling houses, market places and shrines, the Obi holds series of meetings with the various classes of his subjects including the elders, chiefs, women groups, the olotus, the native doctors and 'otu-omu' (women leaders). Each class performs specific duties in the overall interest and success of the festival to begin which is usually on the last EKEN market day of the year. Ighile (2013) explains that the Igue Festival is not merely a day of celebration but a carefully organized cultural and religious event. Before the festival begins, participants undergo ritual preparations, community mobilization, rehearsals of traditional songs, and the gathering of symbolic materials. These preparatory activities preserve cultural identity and ensure that the festival achieves its spiritual and social objectives. In Ika communities, elders, traditional priests, title holders, youth groups, and women begin preparations several weeks before the festival. Ritual objects are assembled, shrines are cleaned, masquerade costumes are repaired, and traditional chants are rehearsed. The announcement is given to each town/quarter through the AGHARA (provost) deciding the various activities to be performed. The native doctors prepare certain charms to ward off evil spirits as well to keep the town peaceful. The women make arrangements for other social activities such as dancing etc while the women leaders 'the Otu-Omu' will now prepare other types of concoctions to protect the towns from evil spirits and wicked people. According to Ukwandu and Izu (2016) the preparation stage reflects the organizational strength of traditional institutions. Chiefs, elders, age grades, musicians, dancers, and families are assigned responsibilities before the festival begins. Music, dance, costumes, and rituals are rehearsed to ensure a successful celebration.

The Obi now pronounces the date to his subjects through their elders and chiefs who then send same to their various communities to enable them plan their homage to the palace with items like cocoa-nuts, goat, tubers of yam and kola-nuts. The Igue festival starts on the fifteenth day and lasts through the next seven days. The vigil of the real Igue day is always on 'Nkwo' native market day. On this day, at about 6.00pm the Obi, his Alasi (most senior wife), elders and chiefs offer one female cow. one female goat, one cock, 60 kolanuts, a plate of coconuts, a little quantity of palm oil and some native chalk "Nzun" in the Obi's palace before the chief priest of a shrine called "Aruru" and the other most elderly men in the town known as "Ihama". Another senior chief, the Elewu, the Obi's wives and all members of the royal family must be present. The Ihama blesses the Obi, while the Aruru then blesses the others. The cow, goat and other animals are then slaughtered before the "Aja" and "Odun-Uku" (a deity in the land). Certain preparations are further made. The head of each family (the eldest man in the house, assembles all his family members in his courtyard (Ogwa). They have to provide a coconut, a little water in a container and some native chalk inside the water container. He breaks the coconut, pour its water into a plate and a little salt is added to it. The head of the family takes the mixed coconut water for blessing and pours it on the head of every member of the family. He thanks God for bringing them safe, sound and alive to the end of the year and also prays that God would continue to keep, provide and protect every one of them in the new year. The pouring of the liquid and coconut content symbolizes the ushering of love, peace and harmony in the forth coming year, for the progress of the people. After the chanting of some incantations by the eldest man, every member of the family in attendance answers "Ise" meaning "may it be so". A gun shot is fired by the eldest or anybody he authorizes to do so, this marks the celebration of the "Igwor-Isi-Igue". On the real Igue festival day which is on the 'Eke' market day, every family will slaughter any animal live animal of their choice, such as goat, sheep, chicken, and prepare food for themselves to eat and make merriment. In eating, it is the custom of the Ikas' to gather again in their respective families to share what they have together. Children offer wine and other presents to their well wishers and parents. Friends exchange visits, with friends. The Obi is not left out, he also kills more cows one for the Chiefs, one for the elders and another for the entire community. In the afternoon of the second day, after the feeding, an official called "Aghara" (Provost) invites men, women, boys and girls of different age groups from twelve years of age. These persons are told to go and perform an act known as "Ulu Ubiri". Each of them holding a stick carved from coconut branches, some would put on dirty and worn-out clothes, paint their faces with different

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colours and begin to act as spirits, thereby making children to be afraid. At about 1pm they use the carved coconut branches to beat the ground at specified rhythm which is usually accompanied with singing, chantings and dancing during the "Ilu Ubiri" dance, the youths and even the aged, dressed in masquerades called "Ekpo" and "Odin" to perform customary rally all over the town, singing and dancing merrily in their disguised attires, while some people go round the town praying and some pretend to be native doctors, healing people of their diseases. In this great dramatization, they are sometimes offered gifts. At about 2.00pm, all the quarters in the villages start from their houses to do what is called "Ilu Ubiri" and the first quarters in the village to arrive the Obi's palace, beats the coconut branches round the whole palace, as it is believed that all the evil spirits are hanging around the palace. They wait for the other quarters and together will all move to the cemetery "Ikpekpe", to discharge everything used by the people, hoping that all the evil spirit in the land have been cast away. Also all their enemies, all the epidemics in the land which makes people sick are also wiped away. The masqueraders and the trumpeters are not left out in this "Ilu Ubiri" exercise, they weave the palm fronds into a fearful looking structure known as "Iken Odin", with which they dance to amuse their audience. They also carve some objects they call their enemies "Ndi Iwe', which they also dump at the cemetery. After the dumping of these debris, they will return with leaves known as "Ibie Ewere" and they hand them to the Obi who in turn, hands a piece of native chalk to the people as a symbol of his royal blessings for the new year. As they put some of these leaves on their foreheads, they hold some which they would share with one another, their elders and parents. This is usually accompanied with singing and dancing. As they sing these songs, they dance to the house of the most elderly man and woman, offering them the "Ibiewere" leave, even to anybody they meet on their way. After this, they visit friends, well-wishers, parents and chiefs, in whose houses they dance and they are entertained with food and cash gifts.

The last part of the festival involves a general visitation of the Obi to the Village heads and chiefs who welcomes him with gifts of various descriptions. The Obi is usually dressed in his full royal regalia or white flowing robes and beads with his sword of office, 'Adan' attended by two boys. He lead the dance as he is followed by a royal traditional orchestra. At about 5.00pm the Obi will be seated in his palace, while various groups come to entertain him with their dances, after which, everybody moves home to make resolutions for the New Year. Before they depart, the shooting of gun is organized by every quarter in the village. This is to certify that the celebration has come to an end; all the youths participate in the canon shooting. Individuals also join in the shooting of guns saying that the evils of the land have been eliminated with the passing year. In the last night of the celebration, the Obi, his wives, the elders and chiefs, will visit the "Oseh" shrine where they offer sacrifices to the god of their ancestors asking for their help and protection in the New Year and also to thank him for enabling them survive the past years. More so, customary ceremonies are performed by a traditional chief known as the "Oweh". During this occasion, the Obi who is flanked by his chiefs wears a special attire which is usually decorated with beads and made up of white wrappers, his body decorated with native chalk. Although, this ritual virtually marks the formal end of the festival, the youths of the town still continue with the dancing and merriment till late. Finally, at mid-night, some selected young men move from one house to the other, collecting food item, which is said to be the remnant of the festival. It is a special task which nobody comes out to look to witness because they assume them to be spirits. Hence, they are called "Umu Nmo". The passage of time appears to have brought some form of modification in the celebration of this festival. Igue essentially still retains its original spirits as a tribute to a great hero, Odogwu, who contributed very immensely to the welfare and progress of his people and it is only fitting and proper that his own people today still associate his epoch-making regime of war and peace with the end of a year and the beginning of another.

Summary from the preparation stages of the Igue Festival in Ika land, it's obviously seen that the stages cuts across:

1. Spiritual purification and ritual cleansing.
2. Meetings of elders, traditional rulers, and family heads.
3. Preparation of shrines and sacred objects.
4. Rehearsal of traditional songs, chants, dances, and praise poetry.
5. Mobilization of age grades, women, and youth groups.
6. Collection of ritual materials and festival costumes.
7. Teaching younger generations the language, customs, and symbolism of the festival.

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Theoretical Framework

This research is hinged on Sapir–Whorfian's Theory of language (1921 and 1956). This theory posites that, the language people speak influences, and may shape, the way they perceive, think about, and understand the world around them. Different languages organize reality in different ways, so speakers of different languages may experience or interpret the same phenomenon differently. People can only think about concepts that their language allows them to express. Language influences thought and perception but does not completely determine them as different languages encourage different ways of thinking and categorizing experience as language reflects culture. In many Nigerian cultures, there are numerous greetings for different situations (morning, evening, festivals, elders, ceremonies). These expressions reflect the cultural importance of respect and social relationships. Likewise, the specialized language used during the Igue Festival in Ika land carries meanings that express identity, spirituality, authority, and cultural values. For this research, " Cultural and Semantic Implications of the Language of the Igue Festival in Ika Land," the Sapir–Whorf Theory is highly relevant because it explains how festival language reflects the worldview of the Ika people, preserves cultural beliefs and traditions, conveys meanings that may not have exact equivalents in other languages, and demonstrates the relationship between language, culture, and meaning. During this festival, prayers, blessings, proverbs, songs, greetings, royal proclamations and ritual chant derive their meanings from the cultural context in which they are performed. This theory helps explain how these speech forms express respect for traditional authority, reinforce communal identity, preserve cultural heritage and communicate values such as peace, unity, prosperity and ancestral reverence.

Conceptual Framework

This explains in clear terms the key concepts used in this research work and shows how they are closely related. For the topic under research, "cultural and semantic implications of the language of igue festival in ika land" the conceptual frame work has this to say on the major concepts.

Language:

This is a systemic means of communication through which ideas, beliefs and emotions are expressed using spoken, written or signed symbols. Ofoegbu (2008) defines language as a human system of communication. It is a means by which humans alone communicate. Language is man; man is language. Man uses language for his everyday interaction. Saphir (1921) sees language as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. In line with this research work, language can be refered to the prayers, songs, greetings, proverbs, blessings, chants and ritual utterances used during the Igue festival.

Semantics:

Contemporary linguists have defined semantics as the study of meaning in language while emphasizing different aspects of how meaning is represented and interpreted. Semantics is the meaning communicated through language, Saeed (2016). He explains that semantics investigates how words, phrases and sentences espress meaning and how speakers understand those meanings. On the other hand, Ronnie and Elspeth (2009) describe semantics as the study of the conventional meaning encoded in words and sentences, distinguishing it from pragmatics which studies meaning in context. Saeed (2016) defined semantics as the study of the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences, examining how language users interpret linguistic expressions in different contexts. Cann (1993) explained that semantics investigates the literal meaning encoded in language and the principles governing how meanings are composed from smaller linguistic units. Huddleston and Pullum (2002) viewed semantics as the component of grammar that interprets the meanings of words, phrases, and sentences within the overall structure of language. In this study, semantics focuses on the meanings of the expression used during the Igue festival and the symbolic ideas they communicate such as purification, prosperity, unity, protection and fetility.

Culture:

This refers to the beliefs, customs, traditions, values, norms and ways of life shared by members of a society. According to Gary and Susan (2018) culture is seen as a shared system of values, beliefs, customs, behaviours and material objects that members of a society use to cope with their world and with one another. Kottak (2020) on the other hand defines culture as the tradition and customes transmitted through learning that govern the beliefs and behavior of the members of a society. He emphasizes that culture is learned, shared, symbolic, adaptive and transmitted accros generations. In this

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study we can see culture as traditions, beliefs, rituals, social practices and values of the Ika people as expressed through the Igue festival.

Festival:

According to Jane (2010), festival is defined as a celebration, memory-making or a feast day. A festival may be purely speculative like sports festival or purely religious like the esther festival. The encyclopeadia britennica sees festival as the commemoration of the re-enactment of events or seasons that give meaning and cohesion to an individual on his religious, political or his social-economic aspirations. According to the same source, festivals often includes the dramatical, dancing, athletics and all forms of joyous festivity and memory-making. During festivals, ethnic groups meet to remind themselves of historical episodes which could be illustrated amoung other things: coming of age, harvesting of crops, and appeasement of various gods for protection against enemies, evil, epidemic, diseases, etc.

Igue Festival:

This is a traditional annual celebration among the Ika people symbolizing spiritual purification, gratitude, thanksgiving, renewal, prayers for prosperity serving as an important avenue for preserving indigenous traditions and strengthening communal identity. Ighile (2013) describes the Igue Festival as one of the most important cultural festivals of the Ika people. According to him, the festival marks the traditional New Year and is characterized by rituals such as the royal "head washing" ceremony and the use of Ewere leaves. He further argues that the songs performed during the festival embody the history, beliefs, aesthetics, and cultural identity of the Ika Kingdom. Osarumwense (2014) views the Igue Festival as a sacred annual ceremony of spiritual purification during which the Obi offers prayers for the peace, protection, and prosperity of the kingdom. He also explains that the British attempt to enter Ika during the festival contributed to the events that culminated in the 1897 British invasion. Ukwandu and Izu (2016) argue that the Igue Festival is a major expression of ancient Ika culture. They maintain that its music, dances, rituals, and ceremonies preserve the historical memory, customs, and values of the people while strengthening cultural identity across generations. In another vein, Osatohanmwen (2024) explains that the Igue Festival is both a religious and cultural institution that promotes peace, strengthens the spiritual heritage of the Ika Kingdom, and supports cultural tourism. He emphasizes that the festival serves as a medium for preserving indigenous traditions. The above conceptual framework sees language as the medium through which the Igue Festival expresses its cultural values. Semantics helps explain the meanings embedded in the festival's linguistic expressions while, culture provides the social and traditional context that gives those expressions their significance thus, the language of the Igue festival reflects both the semantic meanings and the cultural identity of the Ika people.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to examine and interpret the meanings, cultural values, and semantic implications embedded in the language of the Igue Festival in Ika Land. The methodology allows the researcher to collect data through observation, interviews, on festival performances, thereby revealing how language reflects the worldview, beliefs, customs, and identity of the Ika people.

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive research design. This is appropriate because it seeks to describe and explain the features and cultural meanings of the language used during the Igue Festival. This approach enables the researcher to study language within its social and cultural environment by observing participants, documenting verbal expressions, and interpreting the meanings attached to them by members of the Ika community. This design is suitable because it provides an authentic understanding of the relationship between language, culture, and communication during the festival.

Area of the Study

The study is conducted in Ika Land, Delta State, Nigeria, comprising Ika North-East Local Government Area with its headquarters at Boji-Boji Owa and Ika South Local Government Area with its headquarters at Agbor. The area is predominantly inhabited by the Ika people, who speak the Ika dialect and celebrate the Igue Festival as one of their major traditional festivals. The festival serves important religious, cultural, and social functions and provides a rich source of

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linguistic expressions, ritual speeches, chants, songs, greetings, blessings, and prayers that are suitable for semantic and cultural analysis.

Sources of Data

The study relies on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data are obtained directly from the field through participants' observation during the Igue Festival. Oral interviews with traditional rulers, chiefs, elders, priests, festival organizers, performers, and knowledgeable members of the Ika community. Such Chiefs like:

Chief Promise Ehiobu (Ihaza of Owa Kingdom)
Chief I. I. Erigbuem (Konyerinieze)
Chief I .S. Agidi (Oduri)
Chief Ifeanyi M. Anuonuihia (Ekpetin of Owa Kingdom)
Chief E. C. Nwaebo (Akpara)

Furthermore, field notes of festival speeches, prayers, chants, songs, greetings, proverbs, blessings, and ritual expressions. Secondary data are obtained from books on semantics, linguistics, culture, and African festivals as well as scholarly journals, dissertations, thesis, conference papers, and research reports. Also, relevant archival materials and credible online academic resources relating to the Igue Festival, Ika language, and semantic studies were used.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected for this study are analyzed using qualitative semantic content analysis. The Igue festival expressions are transcribed in the Ika language and translated into English where necessary. The researcher identifies some key lexical items, idiomatic expressions, proverbs, chants, prayers, greetings, and ritual utterances and groups them according to their semantic and cultural functions. These expressions are examined to determine their literal meaning, contextual meaning, symbolic significance, and cultural implication. The analysis is guided by the objectives of the study and interpreted using the adopted theoretical framework to demonstrate how language communicates cultural beliefs, values, traditions, identity, and social relationships during the Igue Festival in Ika Land.

Semantic Analysis of the Language of the Igue Festival

The Igue festival is a characteristic effect of the Ika culture. The use of language according to Saphir-Whoorfian in his hypothesis sharpens the actions and thoughts of individuals as relates to the Igue festival.

These languages used during the Igue Festival is part of the activities marking the Igue festival celebration. They include the following:

1) iken-ọdin
2) ilụ-ụbiri (Ụbirio, Rio-Rio (2x)
3) Ụlọrọ pu obodo
4) Ẹnwẹrẹ-Ẹnwẹrẹ gbe ọhịọ-hịọ
5) Ẹnyị bia re ri gbama wọi-wọi
6) nyem ọkpu-kpu itahọdu

a) Iken-ọdin**:** This is the dressing of people with palm fronts all around them. These palm fronts are used as clothes round the body/waist. Some build a mini house with the palm front, enter into it and carry it alone waling in the streets from quarter to quarter. It can only accommodate one person at a time meaning no accommodation for evil doers by semantic implications. At the end, all these will be thrown into the evil forest.

b) Ilụ-ụbiri: This is the use of specially carved palm branches to hit the ground continually while they chant the song "Ubi-rio, rio, rio". This is done round about houses, the streets and the whole environment. It continues until the whole community is covered. It is majorly done by the youths.It is assumed that as this is done, problems, troubles, sickness and diseases hiding anywhere has been killed.

Ubirio - Troubles, problems, evils
Rio-Rio - Good bye, come and die
This action semantically means the end of troubles, problems and the enemies in our land.

c) **"Ụloro-Pu Obodo"**
Ụloro --Trouble

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Pu -- leave

Obodo -- Our land (Trouble leave our land): It's a major Igue festival chant song it calls trouble to give way in the land. This is centrally done almost by all during the festival. The song call for any form of trouble associated with the land to leave and give way to peace. As this is done, various incantations, rituals, cultural demonstrations will follow e.g. splashing of white chalk soaked in water (Odon). This signifies the use of songs to cleanse the land from evil by semantic implication.

d) **Ẹnwẹrẹ-Ẹnwẹrẹ gbe ọhiọ-hiọ:** This is a Benin language meaning "Enwere has killed **Ohio-hio".**

"Enwere - A name of a person;

"Gbe – Killed

"Ohio-hio - Something big

After they dumped the materials for the celebration at the cemetery, the Ibi-Ewere leaves are distributed as they return back home in dances. Some of these leaves are placed on their forehead signifying joyful mood and the successful elimination of that big thing (animal) that has no name which has been troubling the land. It semantically means the success of the celebration generally heralding the successful elimination of the enemy and the peaceful coming of the New Year. It's a dance of joy!

e). Ẹnyị bia re ri gbama wọi-wọi" -

Ẹnyị -- We

bia -- Came

re ri -- To eat

gbama --Together

wọi-wọ -- Sumptuously

"We have come to enjoy ourselves": This is another festival song that comes up after the celebration as people return to their houses for merriment and reception of friends and visitors. They sing because of the death of their enemies and struggles in the just concluded year. It's like a survival party from the ills they have passed through from the wicked ones during the outgoing year with the hope of a coming year of good health, peace, good luck, new children and all round progress.

J) nyem ọkpu-kpu itahọdu

nyem -- Give me

ọkpu-kpu --The bones

itahọdu --You remained

"Give me the left over': This is another festival song to mark the final Igue festival celebrations. After the activities in the day, at night, people dressed like spirits not meant to be seen will move round houses in every quarter to collect the left-over of the food that was eaten in the day during the celebration proper. This is thrown to the people through the doors or windows as they are not to be seen.

This by implication semantically signifies the fact that the celebration of the Igue festivals has the ancestors and our forefathers in participation as it is assumed they are the once collecting these left-over as a form of participation since they can't be seen with the naked eyes.

The Language of the Igue Festival

The language of the Igue Festival can be interpreted and seen thus from the English perspective to cut across the following:

1. Ritual prayers and invocations
2. Traditional greetings
3. Royal pronouncements
4. Blessings
5. Proverbs
6. Songs
7. Praise chants
8. Libations

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9. Symbolic expressions

Many of these expressions are performed in the Ika dialect and possess meanings that cannot be fully understood through literal translation.

Semantic Implications

1. Purification: Many ritual expressions signify cleansing from evil, misfortune, and spiritual impurity. Although the words may literally refer to washing or removing dirt but semantically they symbolize spiritual renewal and cleansing.
2. Prosperity: Blessings pronounced during the festival invoke wealth, abundant harvests, successful businesses, good health, and progress for the coming year.
3. Fertility: Expressions directed toward families often symbolize fruitfulness, healthy children, and agricultural abundance.
4. Protection: Invocations request divine and ancestral protection against enemies, diseases, accidents, and evil spirits in the coming year.
5. Unity: Communal greetings and collective chants express solidarity and reinforce the communal nature of Ika society.
6. Respect and Authority: Special honorific expressions directed to traditional rulers and elders communicate respect, legitimacy, and social hierarchy.
7. Continuity: References to ancestors emphasize the continuity of tradition across generations and affirm the relationship between the living and the departed.

Cultural Implications

Preservation of Cultural Identity

The language preserves indigenous vocabulary, expressions, and oral traditions unique to the Ika people.

Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge

Proverbs, chants, and ritual utterances educate younger generations about customs, history, morality, and acceptable social behavior.

Religious Beliefs

The language reflects the coexistence of belief in God, ancestral reverence, and traditional spirituality.

Social Cohesion

Shared participation in festival songs and prayers strengthens community bonds and collective identity.

Political Legitimacy

Royal speeches and ceremonial greetings reinforce the authority of traditional institutions.

Moral Instruction

Many proverbs and songs promote virtues such as honesty, hard work, respect for elders, peace, and communal responsibility.

Linguistic Preservation

The festival provides a platform for the continued use of the Ika dialect, helping to preserve it amid increasing influence from English and other dominant languages.

Summary of the Cultural and Semantic Implications:

The language of the Igue Festival conveys meanings beyond their literal interpretations. Semantically, the expressions symbolize purification, blessing, prosperity, fertility, protection, peace, continuity, and communal solidarity. Many ritual utterances are performative, meaning that speaking them performs actions such as blessing, invoking protection, or declaring communal renewal.The language used during the Igue Festival reflects and preserves the cultural heritage of Ika Land. It reinforces traditional authority, transmits indigenous knowledge, strengthens communal unity, preserves oral traditions, promotes moral values, and ensures continuity between generations. Through ritual language, the festival serves as an important medium for safeguarding the culture of the people.

Findings

The outcome of this research "Cultural and Semantic Implications of the Language of the Igue Festival in Ika land" shows that language has been employed to showcase the culture of the Ika land through the Igue festival. From the language use, the culture of the people has been mirrored. Past ills and happenings of the evil ones has been x-rayed as well as cleansing

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the land with the use of language. It was also noticed that there was the use of language to usher in the coming year which signifies peace, health, progress, etc. Such language use as 'Ẹnwẹrẹ-Ẹnwẹrẹ gbe ọhiọ-hiọ.' The fact that the Igue festival is a community based celebration where the land is cleansed and made ready for the good tidings of the upcoming year at the end of every year was not left out. The participation of the whole community, their leaders, especially traditional heads was also seen as everyone turned out enmass to see to the end of their enemies in the land with a strong traditional backings. It was discovered also that, like in most African festivities, Igue festival revolves around a programme of music, dance and other activities which is a way of preserving and reviving the cultural heritage of Ika land. It is one of the most ancient and cherished festivals of the people of Ika land. The language of the Igue Festival is highly symbolic. The study shows that many expressions used during the festival have meanings that go beyond their literal interpretation. These meanings are understood only within the cultural and ritual context of the Ika people. Festival language reflects the cultural identity of the Ika people. The research reveal that the language used during the festival reinforces the history, customs, beliefs, worldview, and collective identity of the Ika community as the meanings of many festival expressions are context-dependent. The study shows that semantic interpretation depends on the speaker, audience, occasion, ritual performance, and shared cultural knowledge rather than on dictionary meanings alone.

The language serves important social and religious functions. It was clearly seen that festival expressions are used to invoke blessings, offer prayers, confer titles, promote peace, settle disputes, honour ancestors, and strengthen communal unity. Oral literary devices are widely employed throughout the research. The study employed frequent use of proverbs, idioms, metaphors, symbolism, repetition, praise names, chants, and ritual formulae, all of which enrich meaning and enhance cultural communication. It was discovered that there is a strong relationship between language and culture supporting the view that language is a repository of culture and that the meanings of Igue Festival expressions cannot be fully understood without knowledge of Ika cultural practices. Also, it was noticed that the festival language promotes moral values and social cohesion as can be seen that many expressions encourage respect for elders, honesty, unity, hard work, peace, and communal responsibility. Following the fact that traditional custodians possess deeper semantic knowledge than younger participants. The study fills a gap in linguistic scholarship. The research has established that there is limited documented work on the semantics of the Igue Festival language in Ika Land, making the study a valuable contribution to indigenous language documentation and semantic research.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that language and culture cannot be separated. Festivals on the other hand cannot be separated from the culture of any community. Igue festival is a great unifying symbol for peace, unity and progress of the people of Ika in the New Year. It is the belief of the people's attitude to life that makes the festival to attract many admirers from both home and abroad. During this festival, cultural ties are renewed with friends, relations and well wishers from neighbouring villages. It also provides a unique opportunity for the exhibition of traditional dances by groups, especially in the teaching of the "IIu Ubiri" dance steps to the entire community. It also offers the local people the wonderful opportunity of exhibiting their rich cultural heritage in art and craft, for which they are noted. Through festivals, the people of Ika remember their past leaders and ask for their help and protection. Another social importance of Igue festival to the people of Ika is that it gives expression to the people's happiness or otherwise. Hence at the celebration of the festival, nobody is expected to die but if it happens, the deceased is then classified as an evil doer and his burial is accompanied with diabolical performances without honour. Also worthy of note is, the musical organization where everybody is involved irrespective of their ages. Fighting during the festive period is highly prohibited and any form of immorality is forbidden, as such offenders are taken to the Obi's palace and are made to serve as his servants as a form of punishment. The instruments and materials for dressing, add colour to the cultural values of the people of Ika as a whole. The festival manifestations fulfill the function of social and moral control, as well as provide entertainment and diversion because of its traditional and cultural beliefs, ideologies and material subject and the people way of life is embedded inside it. Furthermore, it has shown, for example that in Ika land, the celebration of the Igue festival marks the end of a successful year which directly or indirectly might have been characterized by so many ill-fated happenings. The ushering of another year of peace, and prosperity with high hopes to the people that the coming year will be full of all round goodness.

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Recommendations:

1) Traditional rulers, festival organizers, and community elders should document the language, chants, proverbs, prayers, and symbolic expressions used during the Igue Festival to prevent their extinction and preserve them for future generations.
2) Linguists and cultural scholars should carry out further studies on other traditional festivals in Ika Land and neighbouring communities to expand knowledge on indigenous festival discourse and semantics.
3) Educational institutions should incorporate aspects of Ika language and cultural festivals into language and cultural studies curricula to promote indigenous language preservation.
4) Government agencies and cultural organizations should support the documentation, digitization, and publication of Ika oral traditions, particularly the linguistic expressions associated with the Igue Festival.
5) Younger generations of the Ika community should be encouraged to participate actively in the festival to ensure the intergenerational transmission of its language and cultural values.
6) Researchers should adopt interdisciplinary approaches that combine semantics, pragmatics, ethnography, and sociolinguistics in studying indigenous festival language.

Contributions to Knowledge:

1. This study provides one of the few comprehensive semantic analyses of the language used during the Igue Festival in Ika Land.
2. Furthermore, it demonstrates how linguistic expressions used during the festival communicate cultural beliefs, traditional values, identity, authority, and social relationships.
3. It also enriches existing literature on African indigenous languages by documenting previously under-researched Ika festival expressions.
4. It further bridges the gap between semantics and cultural studies by showing that meaning in festival language extends beyond literal interpretation to include symbolic, contextual, and cultural meanings.
5. The study will serve as a valuable reference for scholars in linguistics, semantics, anthropology, cultural studies, folklore, and African language research.
6. Finally, the documented festival expressions will be a resource for future studies on the Ika language and oral traditions.

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