

ANIMALS OVER PLANTS AND TREES: WELLERISMS IN THE IGBO CULTURAL ATTRIBUTION

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Abstract

Wellerisms constitute an interesting distinct genre in the corpus of Igbo verbal art, as they are statements attributed to humans, (lower) animals, plants/trees and other natural objects. However, with regard to animals and plants/trees, evidence shows that wellerisms are attributed more to animals than to plants/trees. This study investigates the possible reasons for associating most wellerisms to animals than to plants/trees in the Igbo culture. The study adopted qualitative methodological design, involving semi-structured interviews with some Igbo elders drawn from various culture areas of Igboland, to collect data which were subjected to descriptive and interpretive analyses. Introspection also featured in data collection and analyses as the researchers are Igbo natives, born and bred in Igboland. This study discovered that the functions, qualities, characteristics, mannerism etc of animals that earn them a high hierarchical placement over plants/trees in the Igbo traditional worldview, result in the crediting of most wellerisms to animals than to plants/trees. The study concluded that the crediting of most wellerisms to animals than to plants is a guide to the understanding of the ontological hierarchies which, among other issues, strengthen the Igbo worldview.

Key words: Wellerism; Igbo; culture; animal; plant/tree.

Introduction

Wellerism is a rhetorical device that uses a well-known quotation followed by a humorous explanation. It is a type of humorous saying that is attributed to a specific entity/object or to a situation in a way that creates a comedic effect. Wellerisms are often used to poke fun by showing that they are not always true especially when taken literally. As much we are aware, analysts associate the term wellerism with Sam Weller, the character created by Charles Dickens in his novel, the Pickwick Papers.

Arora (1996) points out that wellerism is connected with Sam Weller of Dicken's Pickwick papers, for his marked fondness for the genre (shared also by his father, Tony Weller) and this caused his name to be bestowed upon it; and that the bestowing of wellerism upon Sam Weller was initially done by the readers and the popular press, and not by the scholars. She further observes that a typical wellerism consists of three parts: a quotation (often a pre-existing phrase, proverb, cliché etc), a speaker, who may or may not be identified by name, sex, occupation, ethnic origin or other

characteristics, and a situation that is incongruous in terms of the usual meaning or application of the quotation.

Wikipedia (2024) has it that, “the term *wellerism* comes from the character, Sam Weller in Charles Dickens’ *The Pickwick Paper*. *Wellerisms* are typically made up of three parts: a prover or saying, a speaker, and a humorous explanation, for example, English “I see said the blind carpenter as he picked up his hammer and saw.” The three-part constituent of *wellerism* seems to be peculiar to Western conception of *wellerism*.

Further to the (general) definitions and explanations on *wellerism*, we present some of the basic facts of *wellerism* in Igbo drawn from our data and extant literature as available to us. In the Igbo language, *wellerism* is referred to as *Asinilu*. This term is derived from the expression *A si (ri) n’ilu* “Someone/Something/A persona, said in/within the (context of) proverb”; that is “A saying by someone/something/persona that is in/ within the (context of) a proverb.”

Emenanjo (1989) discusses Igbo *wellerisms* in some detail and uses some structural evidence to show that they are different from proverbs and other genres. According to him,

The (Igbo) *wellerism* is usually one sentence long. It resembles the riddle in being made up of two mutually-complementary parts. In the case of the *wellerism*, the two parts of the utterance are the matrix sentence and the noun phrase complement. Both parts of the *wellerisms* are so closely knit that the *raison d’etre*, meaning, humour, etc of any given *wellerism* derive from both parts (p.66)... The matrix is the “speaker” or persona drawn from the wide gamut of Igbo cultural experience. It is such an essential and integral part of *wellerisms* that once deleted the *wellerism* no longer holds together (p.68)... The noun complement is the part that carries the information content. It is the interplay of this part with the apocryphal speaker in the matrix sentence which creates the picturesque observation of life within the Igbo culture area (p.71)... Igbo *wellerisms* constitute a genre of Igbo verbal art *sui generis*. Indigenous like all genres of verbal art, they are gnomic in motif like proverbs (p.73)... In conclusion, we would like to say that *wellerisms* are not quite proverbs... (p.74).

Okebalama (2003) discusses *wellerism* based on its meaning as generated by a combination of the head of the matrix (“speaker”) and the sentential complement. He states that (We present as it is in Igbo and follow up with English translation):

Asinilu ji ememmadu kwara ngwa oru. Ka o si ekwuputa “si” na “sirị”, na-ada ka a ga-asị na o bu eziokwu. O na-adị ka ihe a sirị na o si kwuru ihe ahụ n’eziokwu. A si na enwe sirị..... o di ka o bu eziokwu na enwe sirị. Ihe obula a si na o si na-ada n’ime nti anyi ka o bu eziokwu na ihe ahụ kwuru ya. N’ihi na asinilu na-eyi eziokwu, a na-ekweta na o mere eme, mmadu obula anaghi agbagha ya agbagha. Onye ji asinilu ekwu okwu, maobu na-akọ akuko zoro n’ime ihe o sirị kwuru okwu ahụ, ekwu uche nke onwe ya.....

- a) Enwe sirị na ya agaghị agotara nwa ya kwọ n’azụ ma o ghọrọ ụtụ ma o ghoghị
- b) Udele sirị kedụ nke ya na ndị baaba
- c) Onye ara sirị na ara ka mma n’okorobia (p.93)

(*Wellerism* functions with human instrumentation. The use of “says” and “said” sound as if the statement is true. It appears as if what is claimed to have “said” something actually said the thing.

If it is claimed that “the monkey said...” it appears as if the monkey actually said it. Whatever is claimed to have said a thing, simply sounds that the statement credited to that thing is true. Wellerisms appear to be true, people believe that it truly occurred, and thus regard it as incontestable. Anyone that uses wellerism in his/her speech, conceals himself/herself in the claimed speaker to express his/her thought).

- a) The monkey says he is not going to stand as a witness for the child strapped to his back whether or not he plucked the ụtụ fruit.
- b) The vulture says what is his business with barbers?
- c) The mad man says that madness is better in youth.

For some time now we have developed some interest in wellerism and Igbo wellerism in particular, among other genres of Igbo verbal art: proverbs folktales, anecdotes, riddles, tonal puns. The said interest is based mostly on the Igbo verb *-si (ri)* (say) as an exclusive complementizer-content of the obligatory matrix component of the wellerism, even where the nominal heads of the matrix sentences (the claimed speakers), are non-humans, and thus fictitious speakers; and the humorous information generated by a combination of the matrixes and the noun phrase complements.

In furtherance to this interest, we have been listening to some Igbo elders use wellerisms in their speeches, we have collected and studied three hundred (300) Igbo wellerisms, credited to various arrays of elements of Igbo cultural experience. While doing this, we have observed that “the Igbo wellerisms are so seriously conceived and constructed that in them can be found both physical and spiritual considerations about the characters that speak them” (Obika, 2020). We have also been reading some available literature on Igbo wellerisms, for example, Emenanjo (1989), Okebalama (2003), Ofomata, (2004) and they reveal, among other issues, that “a good understanding of the Igbo wellerism would automatically lead one to an understanding of the Igbo man, his philosophy of life tradition, culture and mode of life” (Ibe & Umezi, 2022, p.1). As far as we are aware none of these works observes and discusses the fact that wellerisms are more credited to animals than to plants/trees in the Igbo culture, and the reasons for it. This gap, therefore forms the preoccupation and the thrust in this paper.

Objectives of the Study and Methodology

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. give evidence of the attribution of wellerism more to animals and less to plants/trees in the Igbo culture.
- ii. submit reasons for the attribution of more wellerisms to animals than to plants/trees in the Igbo cultures.

To achieve these objectives, we adopted the qualitative descriptive and analytical approach. For our primary source of data we adopted the key informant interview involving oral interview method of some 25 informants of 60 years and above, from various culture areas of Igboland and are believed to be knowledgeable enough as to elicit appropriate responses pertaining to wellerisms in the Igbo culture. Research assistants were also employed in collecting wellerisms. Participant observation and introspection also featured as primary sources of data collection as the researchers are Igbo natives, born and bred in Igboland. Library and internet were our secondary sources of data.

Preference of Animals to Plants/Trees in the Crediting of Wellerisms in the Igbo Culture

We submit some pieces of evidence to indicate preferences of animals to plants/trees in the crediting of wellerisms in the Igbo culture.

Evidence

Out of about three hundred (300) wellerisms we collected², two hundred and seven (207) are credited to animals while only twelve (12) are credited to plants/trees (the rest are credited to, humans and human body parts which are outside the scope of this study). It seems, therefore, that preference is given to animals than to plants/trees in the crediting of wellerisms in the Igbo culture. We give below some wellerisms credited to animals and all the wellerisms credited to plants/trees, as we collected.

Wellerisms Credited to Animals

We have, below, six classes of animals, indicating the number of wellerisms credited to animals in each class as we collected. We give only five examples of wellerisms drawn from each class. Most of other wellerisms credited to animals, as we collected, are in Appendix A.

Four-legged Domestic Animals (42)

- i. *Aturu sị na ya amaghị egwu agba, mana e buru ya bata n'obi nna ya, ya agbaghị agba, ya awuwa awuwa* (The sheep says that he does not know how to dance, but when he is brought to his father's homestead, if he does not dance he jumps).
- ii. *Ewu sị na ọ bụ aguụ mere ya jiri mụta ita ahịhịa, na ọ bughị ihe nne ya jiri zuo ya* (The goat says that it is hunger that made him to eat grass, it was not what his mother used in nurturing him).
- iii. *Mkpi sị na njepu dī mma, ya jiri jee ikwu nne ya mụta isoli onu elu* (The he goat says that travelling is good, as he travelled to his maternal home and learnt how to raise his muzzle).
- iv. *Nkita sị ka onye ya turu oche welatara ya ego ya, makana ntukwu eweela ya ahụ* (The dog says that the person he asked to buy a chair for him should return his money because he has become used to squatting).
- v. *Nkita sị na ihe ya ji eso onye afo ukwu bu ma ọ gboghị agbọ, ọ nyuo anyuo* (The dog says that the reason for which he follows someone that has fat stomach is either he/she vomits or he/she excretes).

Four-legged Wild Animals (71)

- i. *Anu ohia sị o biere ha na nkita n'oge, ọ gaghị ebiri ha na ikpo ya n'oge* (Wild animals say that if they pardon the dog soon, they will not pardon its rattle soon).
- ii. *Awọ sị ka ahapukwa etu ya tukwu, na ya abughị onye mgba* (The frog says one should not mind his posture, he is not a wrestler).
- iii. *Mbe sị na umunna ya meere ya ihe oma wee kwaara ya kootu igwe* (The tortoise says that his kinsmen did him a favour by making a suit of iron for him).
- iv. *Ewi sị na ihe osọ na-eme ya mgbe niile, ya mere ya ji biri n'onu* (The rabbit says that he is always encountered with race, that is why he lives in a hole).
- v. *Mgbada sị na onye gburu ya abughị onye gbara ya egbe, kama onye gburu ya bu onye ahụ tiri mkpu na ya agala igbapu* (The antelope says that the person who killed him was not the person who shot at him, but rather the person who raised the shout alert of its escape).

Domestic Birds (30)

- i. *Nnekwu okuko si na o buru ihe e ji eme enyi ka e ji alu di, na ya gaara iba ebe nwoke ga biri* (The hen says that if what is used in contracting friendship is same as what is used in contracting marriage, she would have gone to live with a man).
- ii. *Oke okpa si n'obodo ha a naghị eji ego alu nwaanyi, kama o bu ma ike oso o dikwa gi* (The cock says that in their community marriage does not involve money, it is a matter of whether you are fit to run around).
- iii. *Nwa okuko si na ihe kpatara ya na-añu mmiri ya ana- ele anya n'elu bu na ihe na-egbu ya si n'elu abia* (The chick says that the reason he always looks upwards when he is drinking water is that death usually comes to him out of the sky).
- iv. *Nwa okuko egbe buuru si na ya anaghị ebe ka ihe ji ya hapu ya, kama o bu ka uwa nuru olu ya* (The chick abducted by the kite, says that he is not crying for his abductor to leave him, but rather for the world to hear his voice).
- v. *Okuko si na ya anaghị alaba ura makana afo ejula ya, kama o bu makana chi ejiela* (The fowl says that he does not go to sleep because he has fed satisfactorily, but rather because it is night).

Wild Birds (38)

- i. *Enekenioba si na dinta muta agbawa atughi atu, ya amuta efewe ebeghi ebe* (Enekenioba -a type of wild bird-says if the hunter becomes accustomed to firing without aiming, he will become accustomed to flying without perching).
- ii. *Ikwighikwighi si na onye nwere abali anaghị eji ehie agba izu* (The owl says that someone that possesses the night does not hold discussions in the afternoon).
- iii. *Okwa si umu ya, ha turu akpu ha turukwa mgborogwu, ka o ga-abu onye nwe akpu buru akpu ya, ha atuwazie mgborogwu* (The partridge says to his children that as they feed on casava, let them also feed on root of trees, in case the owner of casava harvests it they now feed exclusively on roots of trees).
- iv. *Udele si na ime nwunye ya di anaghị atu ya egwu, o muo nwa ya enwee nwa, o nwuokwanu, ya enwee anu* (The vulture says that he is not perturbed by the wife's pregnancy. If she delivers successfully, he has a child, if she dies, he has some meat).
- v. *Usu si na ya maara ka ya di, wee na-efe n'abali* (The bat says he knows his condition for which he flies at night).

Crawling Animals (15)

- i. *Ejula si na ya amaghị bekee asu, ma etinye ya n'oku ya asuka ndi guru akwukwo* (The snail says he does not know how to speak English, but if he is put in the fire, he speaks better than the educated).
- ii. *Esu si na yanwa a zoro ukwu anaghị ebe akwa ma onye mmiri ya fesara ana-ebe* (The millipede says that himself who was matched upon is not crying whereas the person who was touched by his body fluid is crying).
- iii. *Nsiko si na o bu ndi nwere isi ka isi na-awa* (The crab says that it only those who have a head that suffer headache).
- iv. *Eke si na ya ga-anọ ka ya mara ihe a ga-eji ajụ ogirisi buru* (The python says he will stay to know what people will use the pad made of ogirisi plant to carry).
- v. *Nsiko si na ya egwuole mmiri ukwu gwuo nke nta, o buru n'ite ofe agadi nwaanyi ka ya migburu* (The crab says that he has swam both big and small rivers, only to drawn in the soup pot of an old woman).

Ants (11)

- i *Akika si onye kpata ya rie kama a zoọ ukwu n'ala ka ekwemnsi buru otu* (The termite says each person should consume what he acquires, but when the foot is matched on the ground let everyone nod his head in unison).
- ii *Chinchị si umu ya ha nwee ndidi na ihe di oku ga-emechaa juo oyi* (The bedbug asks his children to be patient because what is hot will later become cold).
- iii *Ebe si na o dighi mma inyupu nsi ji anyupu* (Ebe (the ant that lives in yam) says that the excrement of yam is not supposed to be dropped off).
- iv *Iji si nkapi nke a o di ndu na-esi isi kedụ ka ndi nwuru anwu n'ebe ha na-esi* (The fly says to the mole rat, as he emits offensive odour while alive, how do dead people in his area smell).
- v *Nte si umu ya, ha hu ihe anya ha ahubeghi mbu, ha gbapuo onwe ha afọ lotawa n'ala mmuo ebe ha nwere mmadu* (Nte - a type of ant) tells his children that if they see an unusual thing they should strike their stomach open and return to the land of spirits where they have relations).

Wellerisms Credited to Plants/Trees

The following eleven wellerisms are the only ones credited to plants/trees that we could lay hands on:

- i *Abirika si na ya anaghi azuru onye ozọ nwa* (The plantain says he does not train another person's child).
- ii *Akidị si na ura kwere izu aburula onwu* (The native bean says that a sleep that lasts for one week has become death).
- iii *Akidị si na ya amaghi oke ala* (The African brown bean says that he does not identify a boundary of land).
- iv *Aku bekee si na ya maara etu uwa ga-adị wee buru mmiri rịa elu* (The coconut says that knowing what the world was like he brought his own water along as he climbed up).
- v *Aku bekee si na ya na-eri na ntupe ntupe* (The coconut says that he eats in bits).
- vi *Igu nkwu si na ya echetakwala mgbe ya bu omu nkwu* (The mature palm frond says that he remembers when he was a tender shoot).
- vii *Isikara/Ijikara si na ya adighi mma n'isi onya* (Isikara/Ijikara (a type of tree) says that it is not suitable to be used for setting of trap).
- viii *Ji oko/oku si na ya maara ka uwa ga-adị mere ka ya weere mmanu banye n'ime ala* (The yellow yam/Guinea yam says that knowing what the world was like, he brought his oil into the ground).
- ix *Ukazi, juru nwaanyi na-akpa ukazi, I kpachaa m taa ubochi ozọ I ga-abiakwa kpaa* (The ukazi leave asked a woman who is cutting him up (in a vicious manner); if you take away everything today, will you come again tomorrow?).
- x *Oji si na ihe na-ewe ya iwe bu na atachaa ya asi na oji adighi* (The kolanut says that his annoyance is that after consuming it people still say that there is no kolanut).
- xi *Ube si na ya mere ihe ogaranya jiri rachaa onu* (The pear says that he made it possible for a rich man to lick his lips).
- xii *Udara si na o bughi naani ya mutara nwa a na-apiwa onu* (The African star apple says she is not the only mother with a child whose mouth has to be forced open).

Possible Reasons for Attributing Wellerisms more to Animals than to Plants/Trees

The following are some of the possible reasons why wellerisms are credited more to animals than to plants/trees in the Igbo culture.

The Igbo Attribute Human-like Qualities more to Animals than to Plants/Trees

One fact of the Igbo traditional ontological hierarchy is that the people attribute more human-like qualities to animals. On this fact, Nwala (1985, p. 34) points out that “Animals have souls like men. They also have *chi*-the god of destiny and luck. Thus, if a hunter fails to kill an animal or the animal escapes, it is said that its *chi* had saved it.” Elaborating further, Nwala (1985) states thus:

Animals occupy an important place in Igbo traditional thought. Traditional Igbo myth and folklore abound with belief that animals have souls and spirits like men, although theirs may be somewhat lower ontologically. But with regard to certain things, animals are accorded a special respect, for it is believed that they may know things that humans do not know and they see things that are not seen with ordinary human eyes.... The relationship between human beings and animals or the place of animals in the whole scheme of things has never ceased to be of deep interest to man himself. The belief that animals have mystical connection with the divine abound in legends from several parts of the world and even in Biblical stories (pp. 50-51).

The Igbo believe that animals can see spirits. This is the interpretation when, for example, a dog barks or a fowl quacks without any obvious cause. There is also the belief that animals can detect poison. There is the belief too that when a human corpse is visited by ants, it is a proof that the fellow was a witch or that he/she had committed an abomination. Again, animals are carriers of most ominous signs and events. For instance, the sudden appearance of certain animals like owl, millipede, wildcat, bush rat, bees, soldier ant, and frog, in any family or compound indicates an ominous message from any of the deities, and so diviners must be consulted to know the cause (cf. Nwala 1985; Onukawa, 2020).

The human -like qualities which the Igbo widely attribute to animals will possibly contribute to the rich Igbo collection of animal-based wellerisms and other related items. Though plants and trees also occupy an important place in Igbo philosophy, but it is with a quite limited scope in comparison with that of the animals. This, therefore, affects the number of plant/tree-based wellerisms.

Animals Exhibit Human-like Traits while Plants/Trees do not

Another possible reason is that animals exhibit certain qualities, characteristics and mannerisms which are human-like. This fact is also noted by Nwala (1985 p.50) thus: “Animals are also esteemed for their ‘personal’ qualities which the Igbo may aspire to achieve. In that case they act as foci of ambition and attitude and source of inspiration”. Though not all the traits are virtuous (as Nwala 1985) seems to generalize), but they are human-like. For instance, among the Igbo, the tortoise (mbe) has the trait of craftiness, the ram (ebule) has the trait of cleverness (nwa ebule akọ), the elephant (enyi) has the trait of leadership. The exhibition of these human-like traits by animals in the Igbo world view, possibly render them ideal for the crediting of wellerisms.

On the other hand, plants/trees are not known to exhibit human-like traits in the Igbo culture or world view. They are not widely recognized and revered like animals and thus, may not be much ideal for the crediting of wellerisms.

Animals have Greater Cultural Symbolic Significance than Plants/Trees

In the Igbo culture animals have great cultural symbolic significance. “Animals.... act (more) as agents of the spirits and gods. Their role in the preparation of medicine (ogwu), in sacrifice and religion and social festivities is very central.... Always they are the victims, the pawn in the metaphysical game” (Nwala 1985, p.50). This fact of cultural significance renders animals veritable and popular choice for wellerisms in Igbo. Though plants/trees also have some cultural significance in Igbo, this is not as widely distinguished and celebrated as that of the animals. This therefore, diminishes the possibility of crediting wellerisms to plants/trees.

Animals offer narrative potentials in the Igbo culture

In Igbo animals offer a rich narrative potential. Much of story telling, folktales, sayings, songs, and tales in Igbo are framed on animals. Nwala (1985) cites Mr Onwuejeogwu as having noted this fact in Nri Igbo. He states:

Mr Onwuejeogwu has noted the occurrence of idioms, folktales, songs and sayings in Nri which refer metaphysically to the chief characteristics of flies, snails, and tortoise, and the political and ritual significance of the ideology of ‘headship’ and ‘leadership’ symbolically represented by life leopard and elephant (p.50).

Since wellerisms seem to rely on story telling techniques, it is thus natural for animals to fit in more in the crediting of wellerisms in Igbo. On the other hand, plants/trees possibly do not largely offer themes of narratives in Igbo as compared to animals. This thus makes it difficult for much wellerisms to be credited to plants/trees in Igbo.

Conclusion

It has been shown in this study, that wellerism, one of the sub-genres of verbal art, are credited to both animals and plants/trees in the apprehension of the world. Whereas both animal-based and plant-based wellerisms occur in the Igbo culture, there is sufficient evidence to show that wellerisms are credited mostly to animals than to plants/trees. This paper has attempted to offer some possible reasons for this, namely that: Animals occupy more obvious positions in the Igbo traditional thought than plants do. The Igbo are greatly fascinated with animals and thus, attribute human qualities more to them. This is not quite same with plants/trees. Animals exhibit certain qualities, characteristics and mannerisms that are analogous to those of the human. This is not the case with plants/trees. Animals are of greater cultural symbolic significance than plants/trees in the Igbo culture. Animals have very rich narrative potentials in the Igbo culture, while plants do not have.

Our assessment of the biological data available to us on the differences between animals and plants is that the major difference centres on irritability, that is, their abilities to respond to stimuli in various dimensions. In particular, animals have specialized sensory organs (eyes, ears, skin, nose, mouth) that detect stimuli. They also have a central nervous system that processes information, and allows them to respond quickly, voluntarily and consciously to a wide range of complex stimuli. On the contrary, plants lack sensory organs and a central nervous system. Their response to stimuli is slow and simple. This higher degree of irritability in animals, we believe, is the basic reason for which animal-based wellerisms greatly outnumber the plant-based ones. (It seems that the plant-based wellerisms are even totally non-existent in some cultures, since out of about 148 English

wellerisms we examined in Mieder (1997), and about same number in Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales, as contained in Williams (2010) we could not find any wellerism that is plant-based).

This study concludes that the Igbo traditional world-view of animals for which they (the Igbo) credit more wellerisms to them (animals) is drawn from the (biological) irritability factor. Again, crediting of wellerisms more to animals than to plants in the Igbo culture shows that while animism (the belief that all natural objects have spiritual quality) exists in the Igbo traditional thought, it is ontologically higher in some natural objects and lower in others.

Note:

1. In this paper, the term, “Animal” refers exclusively to the lower animals (non-humans), as the paper is basically an examination of the higher animal’s -humans (the Igbo) conception of the lower animals, and plants/trees.
2. We are very grateful to our colleagues in Abia State University, our informants from various culture areas of Igboland, and our post graduate students for their assistance on this article (We present them in Appendix B).

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APPENDIX A

More of animal-based Wellerisms in the Igbo culture, collected by the researchers.

Four-legged domestic animals

1. *Aturu si na o ka mma igba agba buru n'afọ maka na onwu ebule anaghị ara ahụ* (The sheep says that it is better to conceive ahead of time because the ram dies quite easily).
2. *Aturu si na o dighi ihe kariri idi na-ele ihe anya* (The sheep says that nothing surpasses to keep on observing things).
3. *Ebule si na ya agaghị ebre nwoke ibe ya akwa* (The ram says that he will not cry for his fellow man).
4. *Ebule si na o bu maka ya bu eze kpatara ya anaghị eji ukwu ya aga ebe eze* (The ram says that he does not trek to the residence of a king because he is also a king).
5. *Ehi si ka e mee ya ihe e mere ndi ozo, ma ka a ghara ihu ya n'oku* (The cow says that he should be treated like others but he should not be roasted).
6. *Ehi si na ya ga-azogbu ahijia, ma ahijia si na yanwa gakwanu aku ehi ogiga ogiga* (The cow says that he will trample upon the grass, but the grass says himself will inflict “continuous walking” on the cow).
7. *Ewu si na onye na-ataghari onu, aguo anaghị egbu ya* (The goat says that anyone that chews gum does not starve to death).
8. *Ewu si na ya maara ihe di icha na mma e ji egbu ya na mma e ji egbutere ya nri* (The goat says that he knows the difference between the knife with which to slaughter him and the knife with which to fetch food for him).
9. *Ewu si na o bu naani onye ya tara mgburigbo ji ya ka ya maara bu diji* (The goat says that it is only someone whose yam peels he has eaten that he rates as great yam farmer).
10. *Mkpi si ka a hapu igbara ya afa uto, kama ka a gbaara ya afa ndu n'ihu na onye di ndu ga-eto uto* (The he goat says that people should not pray for his growth, but rather pray for his life, because anyone who is alive must grow).
11. *Mkpi si na ndi mmadu elekwala ka ya na-achughari nne ya, na ihe na-adọ ya si ya n'akwara* (The he goat says that people should not mind him as he pursues his mother around, that what induces him is in his arteries).
12. *Nkita si na anu ya na-achu gbanahu ya, ya emee ka ya anaghị eri anu ahụ* (The dog says that if his prey out-runs him, he pretends that it is not among the ones he consumes).
13. *Nkita si na ihe ya ji eri nri ele anya n'elu bu kama nri ga-adapu n'ala, ka o daba ya n'onu* (The dog says that the reason why he looks up while eating is that instead of the food to drop on the ground it should drop in his mouth).
14. *Nkita si na ya maaara na ahijia na-atọ uto, kama ya tawa ahijia a ga-eche na ya bu ewu* (The dog says that he is aware that grass is delicious, but if he begins to eat grass he would be mistaken for the goat).
15. *Nkita si na ndi nwere ike amaghị ka e si anọ odu* (The dog says that those who have buttocks do not know how to sit down).
16. *Nkita si na ya nọ na nnukwu echiche ndi mmadu asi na ya nọ n'ura* (The dog says that if he stays in deep thought, people would say that he has fallen asleep).
17. *Nkita na-agbo uja si na ya na-azo ndu onye nwe ya, na-azokwa ndu nke onwe ya* (A barking dog says that he is concerned about the life of his master and also concerned about his own life).

18. *Nkita si na o bu onye na-eri nri ka ya na-asọ anya, o bughị anụ dī n'ofe ya* (The dog says that he is respecting the person who is eating but not the meat in his soup).
19. *Nkita si na o bu anya ka ya ji eri aja a churu n'elu* (The dog says that it is with the eyes that he consumes a sacrifice that is placed at the top).
20. *Nkita si na o nweghi onye no na-ele anya n'ebe a na-eri ihe a hapu inyetu ya* (The dog says that there is no one who watches where people are eating and the person is not given some).
21. *Nwaologbo si na ihe mere ya nyuọ nsị ya ekpogide ya aja bu ka ihe mmadu ghara igho nke onye ozọ* (The pussycat says that he covers his excrement with sand to avoid one's property becoming another person's).
22. *Oke gwara ibi ka o hapu ina emenye ya ujo, maka na o haghị ka ebele ya na-akwuwa n'uko* (The rat told hernia not to frighten him because it is not up to the calabash he breaks in the kitchen stand).
23. *Oke si na o bu yanwa bi n'onu kwesiri ihu ndi mmuo, ma o bughị ikwighikwighi bi n'elu osisi* (The rat says that it is himself who lives in the hole that should see the spirits and not the owl that lives on top of the tree).
24. *Oke juru onye na-aku ya isi n'ala ma o nwere mgbe ya kwuru na ya bu onye mgbā* (The rat asks the who is hitting his head on the ground, if he ever said that he is a wrestler).

Four-legged Wild Animals

25. *Atari si na onye amaghi ka orja ya rjara ha, ya lee ikwighikwighi fuuru ya oku ka anya ya ha* (Atara (a bulky-eyed animal) says that anyone who does not know the severity of his ill-health should take a look at the size of the eyes of the owl who blew the fire for him).
26. *Ataru si na o bughị isaghesi anya ike bu ihu uto* (Atari says that the budding of the eyes does not translate to clarity of vision).
27. *Atari si na ya kuchi nkwu ya uto ka ya nwee ike na-anu ndumodu ndi nne na nna na-enye umu ha, maka na ndi nke ya anwuchaala* (Atari says that he planted his oil palm tree by the side of the road to enable him listen to the piece of advice which parents give to their children, because his own parents are dead).
28. *Awọ si na ya ka tukwuru na-eche onye ya turu oche* (The frog says that he is still squatting waiting for the fellow he asked to buy him a chair).
29. *Awọ si na mgbe obula ya huru ndi mmadu ya na-agba oso ka ukwu ya ha makana ihe e ji nnu na ose eri kacha ha mma n'onu* (The frog says that whenever he sights the humans he runs as much as his feet can cope because the consumables with salt and pepper are more preferable to them).
30. *Awọ si na ya anaghi agbara agwo oso ka ya gbanahu ya, kama o bu ka ya gbaruo n'ihu umunna ya* (The frog says that he is not running to out-run the snake, but rather he is running to appear before his own kinsmen).
31. *Awọ si na o bu naani onye rijuru afo na-ekwe woo woo* (The frog says that it is only someone who has eaten to satisfaction that resonates, woo woo).
32. *Awọ si na ihe mere ya ji akwo nwunye ya n'azu bu makana o naghị ara ahụ ihe mmadu aghoo ihe onye ozọ* (The frog says that he carries his wife at the back because before one may realize the goings on, one's property may become another person's).
33. *Awọ si na ya woro onye woro ya ndi mmadu akpowa ya awo, kama na ezigbo aha ya bu onyeemegbuleibeya* (The frog says that he denied those that denied him, and for this people called him Awọ, whereas his real name is Onyeemegbuleibeya "Don't cheat your fellow").

34. *Awọ sị na onye ukwu mkpumkpụ na-ama ụzọ njem* (The frog that someone that has short legs takes off a journey early).
35. *Ebiogwu sị na ya fuchara ogwu n'ahụ ya ma chefuo ihaputụ ebe umunna ya ga-ejide ya aka mee ya ogwu mgbe orịa bịa ya* (The Ebiogwu says that he grew thorns all over his body and forgot to leave a space where his kinsmen will hold him and apply some medication when he falls sick).
36. *Enwe sị na ọ fọdurụ nwa ntakiri ka iku ruo ya ihu* (The monkey says that it remained a little for the eyelids to spoil his face).
37. *Enwe sị na ya ma ihe ma ya na-echefu na ya gba otọ* (The monkey says that he is knowledgeable, but he forgets that he is naked).
38. *Enwe siri ọsa, ebe ọ bu imaghari n'elu osisi ka ya mma, na yanwa dikwa na njikere* (The monkey said to the squirrel that since he prefers flying across on trees, he is much prepared for it).
39. *Enwe si, ebe ya nwere anya abuo, onye nwe oka enwee anya abuo, kedukwanu etu ọ ga-eji zunahu ya oka* (The monkey says since he has two eyes and the owner of the corn also has two eyes, how can he conceal the corn from him).
40. *Ewi sị na kama isi ya ga-akwa n'ite ofe ya kwaa n'osisi maka na isi kwara n'ite ofe bu eze mmadu nwe ya* (The rabbit says instead of his head to knock in the pot of soup let it knock on the tree because any head that knocks in the pot of soup is owned by the human teeth).
41. *Ewi sị na kama isi ya ga-akwu anwuru oku, ka oso gbuo ya na dinta* (The rabbit says that instead of smoke to suffocate him/his head let him and the hunter sort it out in a race).
42. *Ewi sị na mgbe ya bi n'ebe di anya n'ukwu ugba, ugba ana agbabatara ya n'onu ya, ma ugba a ya bizi n'ukwu ugba o nwekwaghi ugba na-agbabatara ya* (The rabbit says that when he was leaving far from the oil bean tree, the seeds were entering his hole, but now that he is residing under the oil bean tree, the seed no longer enters his hole).
43. *Mbe sị na mgbe ya ji mata na mmiri di ụzọ abuo bu mgbe ya si na mmiri oyi makpuo na mmiri oku* (The tortoise says that when he realized that there are two types of water was when he jumped from cold water into hot water).
44. *Mbe sị na e burugodu ya n'isi na ya ga-amata ubi nwatakiri korọ* (The tortoise says that even if he is carried on the head he will recognize the farm cultivated by a young fellow).
45. *Mbe sị na chi ya rịo ya oru, ogo ya ariọ ya, ya agawara ogo ya makana ogo onye bu chi ya.* (The tortoise says that if his in-law asks for his service and his destiny also asks for his service, he will prefer to serve his in-law because one's in-law is his destiny).
46. *Mbe sị na iku ekwe na-agu ya kama aka mkpumkpụ ya ekweghi ya* (The tortoise says that he wants to beat the wooden drum, but he is constrained by his short hands).
47. *Mbe sị na ya nwuo ka e jiri ehi kwaa ya, ma a si ka a tuo utu e ji azuta ehi, onye akpola ya aha* (The tortoise said that when he dies his funeral should be celebrated with a cow, but when it comes to the contribution of money for the buying of the cow, his name should not be mentioned).
48. *Mbe sị na ihe na-ewutekari ya bu na ya anaghi ezute ndi ogo ya n'ubochi ya yi uwe ogaranya ya, karikwaa n'ubochi ya yi uwe oru ubi ya.* (The tortoise said that what demoralizes him more is that he does not meet his in-laws when he is putting on his expensive attire, only when is putting on his attire for farming).

49. *Mbe si ka e kwee ya ọnu ahia etu e kwere ibe ya, ma ree ya ihe ahia nyere* (The tortoise said that they should evaluate him in price just like others, but sell him for whatever the market determines).
50. *Mbe si na ọ burugodi na ya etoghi ogologo na ya ka ejula n'ogologo* (The tortoise says that even if he is not tall, he is taller than the snail).
51. *Mgbada si na ihe na-chu ya anaghi ekwe ya jide ihe ya na-achu* (The antelope says that what is pursuing him is not allowing him to catch what he is pursuing).
52. *Ngwere si n'elu daa si na ma ndi ozo etoghi ya, ya etoo onwe ya makana o nweghi onye nwere ike isi n'elu daa, gbawa oso* (The lizard that falls down says that if no one else congratulates him he congratulates himself because no one else falls down and begins to run).
53. *Ngwere si na etu umuaka si lee ya anya ka ya ga- esi mata nke ga-atu ya nkume* (The lizard says that it is from the way children look at him that he will identify the one that would throw pebbles at him).
54. *Nkapi si na ihe obula nwere mgbe ya. Mgbe isi ya esie isi mgbe pii pii, ya ebee* (The mole rat says that there is everything. Time for emitting offensive odour and time for releasing the pii pii sound).
55. *Nkapi si na ihe mere ya na-egbu opi ma ya na-aga bu maka ndi achoghi inu isi* (The mole rat says that the reason for which he blows a trumpet while moving is in the interest of those who do not like offensive odour).
56. *Nkapi si, nke a ijiji bu okenye ma hara etu a, kedukwanu ka umuaka ga-aha n'ebe ha* (The mole rat says that as the fly is old and of this size, what then would be the size of younger ones at their place).
57. *Nnanwirinwaede si na ọ sokwa ulo ya di oke anya, ihe kacha mkpa bu ka ya rute, buru okuko laa* (The wild cat says that notwithstanding the distance of the homestead, the most important thing is for him to get there, capture a fowl and return).
58. *Ogwumagala si nay a agaghi eji makana oku na-agba hapu iga ije nganga e ji mara ya* (The chameleon says that he will not consider the fire outbreak to suspend the distinguished style of walking for which he is known).

Domestic Birds

59. *Obogwu si na etu ya si aga ije ahughi nke onye na-aga ida ada, kama ọ bu nke onye ihe uwa na-esiri ike* (The duck says that his pattern of walking does not suggest he is going to fall, but rather it shows one who is unfairly treated by nature).
60. *Nnekwu okuko si okeokpa na ya ekwetala isakpuru ala kama ka o kwe ka abuba fodu ya n'isi* (The hen says to the cock that she has agreed to squat, but let him allow some feather to still remain on her head).
61. *Okuko si na ya chere na ọ bu egwu ka a na-egwusi ya, ihe ya huziri bu mma agaa ya n'olu* (The fowl says he thought the people were playing with him, the next he experienced was a knife on his throat).
62. *Okuko si na ihe gosiri na ya bu eze bu na a na-ebu ya n'isi aga njem* (The fowl says that the indication that he is king is that he is carried on the head while making a journey).
63. *Okuko si na ya maara ka e si akpata eju, kama na o nweghi onye ga-ejidere ya ekete* (The fowl says that he knows how to harvest the snail but that there no one to position the basket for him).
64. *Okuko si na ọ bu naani ndi isi ha kara aka na-alu ogu mkpara* (The fowl says that it is only those whose heads are strong that go for a fight that involves the use of the walking stick).

- 65 *Nnekwu okuko si na ya kugbuwe onwe ya ka onwu nwa si anwu ya na uru ahụ agaghị afo n'ahụ ya* (The hen says that if she hits herself at the rate which she loses her chicks, flesh will not remain on her body).
66. *Okuko si na ya na-ajugbucha ihe ajugbu tupu ya eloo maka na ya enweghi aka ya ga-eji doputa ihe ma o gbado ya n'akpiri* (The fowl says he destroys his prey sufficiently before swallowing because he does not have a hand with which to pull it out if he gets suffocated by it).
67. *Okuko si o bughi naani onwu ike ya na-anwu anwu na-ewute ya kama e mechaa umuaka ataa isi ya* (The fowl says that it does not pain him only because he dies with difficulty, but after which children will eat his head).
- 68 *Okuko bu mmiri na-akpa nri si kama afo ya ga-ere ka nku ya ree* (The fowl that scouts for food under the rain says that instead of his stomach to decay let his wings decay).
69. *Nnekwu okuko si na ubara umu ekweghi ya mara nke bu ada n'ime ha* (The Hen says that the plentifulness of her chicks does not allow her to identify which one is the first daughter amongst them).
- 70 *Okuko si na egwuregwu buru nke iwela olu ya azu ka ahapu igwusa ya* (The Fowl says that if a play involves bending his neck backwards, let the play not get to him).

Wild Birds

71. *Egbe si n'agbanyeghi na ya enweghi egbe, ya bu onye nta* (The kite says that notwithstanding the fact that he does not own a gun, he is a hunter).
72. *Ikwighikwighi si na o buru na a na-ege nti n'ihe ya na-ekwu na mmadu agaghị anwu* (The owl says that if people do listen to what he says, human beings will not be die).
- 73 *Ikwighikwighi si na egwu arute na nke nchakasi any ana umu ya gaghi amatakwa ya* (The owl says that when the music gets to the point of bulging out the eyes, his children will no longer recognize him).
- 74 *Kpalakwukwu si na ya chọchara onye ga-akpo ya oku ya ahughi ya ejizie aka ya kpowa onnwe ya oku, kpalakwukwu, kpalakwukwu.* (The pigeon says he looked for who will call him but he did not see, he decided to call himself, kpalakwukwu, kpalakwukwu).
74. *Nduri si na o bu ebe ala juru oyi ka na-ebere* (The dove says that he perches on a cool spot)
- 75 *Nduri si na ihe mere ha ji na-adi abuo na-aga n'ubi bu, ihe onye ahughi ibe ya ahụ ya* (The dove says that reason for which they move in pairs in the farm is that, what one does not see, his fellow will see it).
- 75 *Nkelu si na ya na ndi okenye bu ogbo kama na o bu oria obi mere ya ji di ntakiri* (Nkelu (a type of bird) says that the elders are his mates but it is the heart ailment that caused his small stature).
- 76 *Nkelu si na onye na-achu nnunu kpoo ya aha ka yanwa ghara igbagbu onwe ya n'oso* (Nkelu says that anyone going after a bird should name it, for him not to embark on much race).
77. *Nza si n'agbanyeghi na ya di nta, ya na-achọ onye ga-enwe ike bulie ya elu* (The wren says that notwithstanding his smallish stature, he looking for who will be able to lift him up)
78. *Nza si mgbe ya ahughi nwanne ya n'ubi ghughi ya na nkwu ka ya maara na aka ejidele ya* (The wren says that as he cannot find his sibling in the farm and on the oil palm tree, it is clear to him that he has been captured).
- 79 *Obu si na ike di n'udi, n'udi nke mere na Agu na-egbu mmadu ma yanwa na-egbu Agu* (Obu says that strength is of various kinds, for which the leopard kills the human, whereas he kills the leopard).

80. *Qgankwọ sị na egbe bunwuo nne okukọ na yanwa ga-eburu mmadu* (The hawk says that if the kite abducts a hen that he will abduct a human being).
81. *Okwa sị na ma o bughị na ya bu onye wara anya, agu owuru gaara akpu ya isi erughị eru* (The partridge says that if not because he is wise agu owuru would have delt with him severely)
82. *Okwa sị etu obula ya sila pee mpe, ya ga-ezu otu ite ofe* (The partridge says that no matter how smallish he is in stature, he will be sufficient for a pot of soup).
83. *Oturukpokpo sị na ya ga-atuji apu ma nne ya na nna ya nwuo; ma mgbe ha nwuru etuto etoo ya n'onu* (The woodpecker said that he would peck his way right through the trunk of the silk cotton tree when his mother and father died; but when they died, he had a boil on his beak).
84. *Udele sị na mmiri amaka ya n'afọ a, afọ ozo ya ga-aruta ulo* (The vulture says that the rain has beaten him sufficiently this year, next year he will build a house).
85. *Udele sị ka ndi mmuo nwee ndidi na ya ka no n'ahia na achọ ihe ha turu ya* (The vulture says that the spirits should be patient as he is still in the market searching for what they asked him to buy).
86. *Udele sị ka ndi okenye ghara inwucha ka ha na-agwa umuntakiri na ya abughị anu oriri* (The vulture says that the elders should not be exterminated for them to continue to tell the young ones that he is not edible).
87. *Udele sị na a sị na ya enweghi ndi iro, kedukwanu maka ndi ahụ bu ozu, ma jide ogu* (The vulture says that people claim that he does not have enemies, what about those people who are bearing a corpse and also bearing a hoe ?).
88. *Udele sị ka ozu nwuwa ka yanwa biawa ulo akwa* (The vulture says let death continue to occur and let him continue to attend funeral).
89. *Ugoloma sị na ihe kpatara ya ji ebe n'ukwu osisi kporo nku bu maka mma ha abuo mgbe osisi ahụ di ndu* (Ugoloma says that he perches on a dried tree because of his friendliness with tree when it was fresh).
90. *Usu sị na ihe e ji ama onye toro ibe ya bu onye okpukpu ya kacha sie ike* (The bat says that the measure of seniority is the one whose bone is stronger).
91. *Usu sị ihe ya kachaa umu nnunu ndi ozo bu na ya rigoro n'elu osisi ya akpoda isi n'ala* (The bat says that what makes him greater than other birds is that he gets to the top of a tree and points his head downwards).

Crawling Animals

92. *Ejula sị na umu mmadu sị na ya adighi ike, ma o nwebeghi onye ujo kwere si n'ihu jide ya* (The snail says that people say he is not strong, but no one is courageous enough to catch him through his front).
93. *Nsiko sị na ihe ya ji enwe obi utọ ma e buru ya gaa ahia bu na ya na-amu anya na-anu ego ole a na-ekwe ya* (The crab says that what make him happy when he is taken to the market is that he stays awake to hear how much they offer on him).
94. *Nsiko sị nna ya ka o were ihe o ga-eji zutara ya nti zutara ya anya makana ihe anya huru ama anaghi agba ya* (The crab says that his father should use the funds meant for the procurement of ear for him to rather procure eyes for him because whatever the eye sees does not need any confirmation).
95. *Nsiko sị na ya nwere isi abuo ka onwu ghara igbu ya, mana onwu biaziri site n'etiti gbuo ya* (The crab says that he developed two heads to scare off death, but death rather struck him at the middle).

96. *Nsịkọ sị ụmụnna ya na egwuregwu rute nke ikela aka azụ onye akpọkwala ya* (The crab informs his kinsmen that if the play gets to the point of tying the hand at the back, they should not invite him).

Ants

97. *Ahụhụ sị na ya maara ka ọ ga-adị ya n'udummiri ma kpara nri ya n'okochi* (The ant says that he knows what will befall him during the rainy season and decided to acquire his food during the dry season).
98. *Ahụhụ ojii sị na kama ya ga-ahapụ ihe ya ji ka isi ya kwopu* (The black ant says that instead of him to lose grip of what he is holding, let his head beak off).
99. *Ijiji sị n'agbanyeghi na ụmụnna ya na-anwu ọnwụ ike na ya ga-ajụ onye ọnya bara ihe mere ya* (The fly says that notwithstanding the fact that his kinsmen die prematurely he will still ask someone with a sore what happened to him).
100. *Okpụadansị sị na ihe ya jiri mara na ụwa na-atughari atughari bu mgbe ya bukatara nsị, nsị ebuwazie ya* (Okpụadansị (The ant that molds and feeds on human excrement) says that what makes him to understand that the world turns around is when after molding and pushing the excrement, the excrement reverses to push him).

APPENDIX B

i Colleagues in the Abia State University, Uturu who assisted us in various ways.

S/N	Name	Department	Remark
1	Prof. G.I. N. Emezue	English Lang & Lit	He rephrased the title, and suggested some reasons for which wellerisms are attributed more to animals. His suggestions guided us in determining the possible situation in the Igbo culture
2	Pro. J.O.J Nwachukwu-Agbada	English Lang & Lit	Provided us with soft copies of the journal, Proverbium
3	Dr (Mrs) C. A. Nwizu	English Lang & Lit.	Drew our attention to an example of plant-based wellerism, which reversed our earlier view on this subject
4	Prof. (Mrs) M. Iwuagwu	Plant Sc & Bio Tech	Provided us with some biological differences between animals and plants

ii Some of our informants. They supplied us with some wellerism on interview.

S/N	Name	Age	Place/State	Occupation	Date of interview
1	Mrs Nwanyịmma Obioha	65 years	Umuahia/Abia State	Trader	April 2021
2	Mr Edwin Nwigwe	60 years	Egbema/Rivers State	Artisan	June 2021

3	Mr Augustine Anyalewechi	68years	Uturu/Abia State	Retired civil servant	October 2021
4	Mr Ejindu Okere	60 years	Ngor Okpala/Imo State	Artisan	January 2022
5	Mr Uchenna Obijiaku	66 years	Uga/Anambra State	Trader	April 2022
6	Mr Daniel Nwazue	70 years	Umuahia/Abia State	Farmer	May 2022
7	Mr Okoye Ugwu	67 years	Nkanu/Enugu State	Trader	July 2022
8	Mrs Grace Nkama	61 years	Afikpo/Ebonyi State	Trader	February 2023
9	Mr Magnus Anyanwu	60	Mbaise/Imo State	School teacher	March 2023
10	Mrs Nkolika Onyebuchi	67 years	Idemili/Anambra State	Retired Civil servant	October 2023
11	Mr Oko Aja	71 years	Uburu/Ebonyi State	Farmer	February 2024
12	Mr Benard Ilo	66 years	Oji River/ Enugu State	Trader	April 2024
13	Mr Alfred Nweze	65 years	Uturu/Abia State	Farmer	June 2024
14	Mr Edwin Amajo	64 years	Umuahia/Abia State	Retired teacher	August, 2024

iii. Field Assistants: All are post graduate students in Igbo, in the Department of Linguistics, Communication Studies/Igbo, Abia State University, Uturu

- 1 Mrs Uzoma Okpo from Eda, Ebonyi State
- 2 Mr Linus Okereke from Lokpa, Abia State
- 3 Mr Andrew Mgborogwu from Ohaji, Imo State
- 4 Mr Obinna Akaniru from Ezinnachi, Imo state