

## ANAGRAMS AS A LITERARY DEVICE: THE IGBO EXAMPLE.

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### **Abstract**

Language users do great things with the words of their language inspite of the fact that language is highly systematized. The beauty of creative writing lies in the ability of individual writers to fashion particular words in a given system in such a way that particular effects are produced. The present paper seeks to establish that anagrams exist in Igbo and that they could be used not only as a literary device in Igbo literature but also as a language game if properly understood. The paper has four main parts namely: the introduction which defines anagrams, a randomly selected list of anagrams in Igbo, discussion of the selected anagrams, a short creative rendition of Igbo anagrams and the conclusion.

### **0. Introduction**

Interpersonal communication among humans is effected through verbal and non-verbal means. Whereas both humans and animals share in common the ability to communicate with one other by non-verbal means, humans only enjoy the privilege of passing an information to one another through the spoken and the written word. No matter the level of advancement or backwardness of a given linguistic community, they are often able not only to use their language to pass information from one person to the other, but they are equally able to use words creatively or imaginatively. Creativity is defined in the *Microsoft Encarta English Dictionary* (2009) as ‘the ability to use the imagination to develop new and original ideas or things especially in an artistic manner.’ It is this idea of creativity by native speakers that lies at the root of Chomsky’s Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) as expounded in *Aspects* (1965). Though language creativity could be misconstrued to apply essentially to poets, novelists or dramatists, in this study creativity would be used in a general sense to mean the ability of language users to create pleasure and amusement through the imaginative use of words.

Language users do several things with words which are often investigated by various specialists such as linguists, philosophers, philologists, anthropologists, sociologists, critics and literary artists. Until a language develops a standard orthography, its ingenuity may be limited to its speakers. Indo-European languages like English, Spanish and French which are world languages today all have long written history. The focus of the study is on Igbo anagrams. Igbo language is a developing language whose written history is traced to the late 19th century as recorded by Williamson (1987:9). Efforts are still being made to make its spelling standard as could be seen in Emenanjo’s expression of his ‘dissatisfaction with the many ‘spelling books’ now in popular use’ (1996:1). Orthography issues are still recurrent in Igbo Studies as could be seen in Agbedo (2007:135) who talks of ‘...the consistent inconsistencies and the ensuing confusion that have tended to characterize current spelling convention’. Though Igbo language is encompassed with the usual problems of a developing language, its global impact is gradually increasing as a modern language as evidenced

in recent studies such as Iwunze and Eke (2013:59), in which the wisdom in Igbo proverbs is highlighted in a discourse on HIV /AIDS. The paper would study Igbo anagrams as a literary device thereby highlighting the creative potentials of Igbo and other African languages.

*Encarta English Dictionary* defines an anagram as a word rearranged to form another word or phrase that contains all the letters of another word or phrase in a different order. ‘Astronomer’ is an anagram of ‘no more stars’. *Le petit Robert* (2008), a French dictionary, gives a similar definition with the example ‘Marie-aimer.’ In the example ‘Marie-aimer’, the letters of the proper noun, Marie (Mary) is reordered to create the French verb ‘aimer’ (to love). Anagram would be conceived in this study as a figure of speech since according to Adindu (1999:186) ‘figures of speech like figurative expressions are language patterns devised to task the intellect and at the same breath create perspicuity and luster in the mind of the reader’. Again, Chapman (1973:173) observes that “the quality of imagination” is one of the distinguishing marks of literature.

Having chosen to treat anagram as a figure of speech, it would be necessary at this juncture to explain what kind of figure of speech we consider it to be given that several classifications of figures of speech abound. Chapman (1973:75-79) recognizes two types of figures of speech namely tropes and schemes based on paradigmatic and systematic relationship respectively. According to him schemes make the foregrounding effect through development of normal syntactic patterns by repetition and juxtaposition while tropes, or the familiar textbook figures of speech, which include all lexical deviations, are richly varied and unpredictable in the items which they include. We therefore take anagram to belong to the group of schemes.

It is noteworthy that though anagram, pun and palindrome are closely related they are not identical. *Websters New Collegiate Dictionary* (1981), *The Complete English Language Companion* (2007) and *Microsoft Encarta English Dictionary* (2009), indicate that whereas new words with different meanings are derived from the rearrangement of the letters of a word in the case of an anagram, whereas words remain constant when read backwards or forwards in the case of palindromes as seen in the examples below:

- a) Astronomers (an anagram of ‘no more stars’).
- b) Am mad (an anagram of madam).
- c) ‘Level’ or ‘madam’ (palindrome).

Furthermore, Onukawa (1996:193-195) notes that ‘Palindromes constitute a variety of Anagrams i.e. words or phrases made by transposing the letters of another word or phrase.’ His examples read from left to right and right to left include:

- a) aja                      sand
- b) isi                      head
- c) emume                event

Although anagram and palindrome are related to pun in that they all have to do with sounds, pun creates confusion through the use of words that have the same sound pattern but different meanings, that is, homonyms. ‘I am a mender of bad soles’ is an example of a pun.

### 3. Language and Literary Creativity

Whereas both verbal and non-verbal means are involved for communication, our discussion on language and literary creativity would focus on verbal communication. Okpara (2008: 285) opines:

The Arts philosophy comes from all creative sources that people have turned to for enlightenment, entertainment and knowledge for thousands of years now. Creative consciousness is dominant in every one's mind and when one comes in contact with art practitioners it is awakened.

The above implies that any activity that involves the mind is geared towards creativity. Since humans express most of their thoughts through the spoken or the written word, it then means that language use embodies a measure of creativity. Kwofie (2002:162) writing on the novel as a genre describes the novel as 'a product of the creative ability or will of the writer'. Again, Johnson (2002:197) opines:

The recognized genres, namely prose, poetry and drama, do not reflect writings and creativity in the entire world and at all times. The Folklore genres that still subsist in rural Africa are good examples.

#### 1.1 Sound and Literary Creativity

Every language has its own creative means. Okonkwo (1979: 116) indicates that Igbo riddles 'have great educational values, for they sharpen the imagination, help to develop keen sense of observation and sometimes have such impressive literary beauty as found in poems'. Sound occupies a significant position in literary creativity. Ohumann (1973: 112) points out that 'the study of sound, especially of rhythm' is a well-known approach in stylistics. In addition, Ike (2005:186) notes that literary art is not only a pattern of meaning but also a pattern of sound' while Ogbulogo (2005: 77) writes that 'the sounds of different words can be used to achieve particular effects in any literary work'.

Maduka-Durunze's study on 'Igbo Phonoaesthetics' (1997: 39) highlights the hidden beauty in Igbo sounds while Mbah (2005: 273) shows that a measure of musicality is created through the repetition of the sound 'kp' in the following words:

- |              |                  |
|--------------|------------------|
| a) [ɔkpa]    | leg              |
| b) [ɔkpakpa] | groundnut        |
| c) [kɪtɪkpa] | pox              |
| d) [ɔkpala]  | first male child |

## 2. Selected Anagrams in Igbo

What is presented hereafter is the writer's attempt to assemble few anagrams in Igbo based on personal study. The selection is done randomly.

	Igbo word	Part of Speech	English Equivalent	Igbo Anagram	Part of Speech	English Equivalent
1.	Abụ	Noun	Song	Bụa	Verb	Sing
2.	Asị	Noun	Hatred	Isa	Verb	To wash
3	Akpa	Noun	Bag	Kpaa	Verb	Weave
4.	Akpị	Noun	Scorpion	Ikpa	Noun	Forest
5	Anya	Noun	Eye	Nyaa	Verb	Drive
6	Ede	Noun	Cocoyam	Dee	Verb	Write
7	Eri	Noun	Thread	Rie	Verb	Eat
8	Egwu	Noun	Fear	Gwue	Verb	Dig
9	Elu	Noun	Top	Ule	Noun	Examination
10	Enyo	Noun	Mirror	Onye	Pronoun	Who
11	Enyi	Noun	Friend	Inye	Verb	to give
12	Gwuo	Verb	Dig	Ọgwu	Noun	Thorn
13	Ire	Noun	Tongue	Rie	Verb	Eat
14	Ise	Adjective	Five	Sie	Verb	Cook
15	Ibu	Adjective	Big	Ubi	Noun	Farm
16	Ihe	Noun	Light	Ehi	Noun	Cow
17	Ịchọ	Verb	To seek	Ọchi	Noun	Laughter
18	Kaa	Verb	Draw	Aka	Noun	Hand
19	Kee	Verb	Share	Eke	Noun	Python
20	Kụọ	Verb	Knock clap, beat	Ọkụ	Noun	Fire
21	Laa	Verb	Go	Ala	Noun	Land
22	Lụọ	Verb	Marry	Ọlụ	Noun	Work
23	Lee	Verb	Look	Ele	Noun	Animal
24	Anyị	Pronoun	We	Inya	Verb	To drive
25	Otu	Adjective	One	Uto	Noun	Growth
26	Ọgbọ	Noun	Generation	Gbọọ	Verb	Vomit, boil
27	Ọzọ	Adverb	Again	Zoo	Verb	Contest
28	Sie	Verb	Cook	Ise	Adjective	Five
29	Saa	Verb	Wash	Asa	Noun	Type of fish
30	Sụọ	Verb	Pound	Ọsụ	Noun	Sigh
31	Taa	Verb	Chew	Ata	Noun	Weed
32	Uri	Noun	Song	Iru	Noun	Face, front
33	Ụgwọ	Noun	Debt	Ọgwụ	Noun	Drug
34	Ụlọ	Noun	House	Ọlụ	Noun	Work

## 3. Discussion

The above table shows vividly that an Igbo speaker could by anagram produce another Igbo word which could change or retain its grammatical category thereby giving rise to multiple grammatical relationships. Below is an outline of seven of such relationships represented in the table.

a) Noun/Noun;

S/No. 4 akpị (scorpion) and ikpa (forest)

Other words in the table that belong to this category include serial numbers 9, 16, 32, 33 and 34 being six out of the total of 34 words.

b) Noun/Verb

S/No. 5 – anya (eye) and nyaa (drive).

Serial number Noun / Verb 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13 and 26 also belong to this category. Hence, 11 words out of the total of 34 belong to this group.

c) Verb / Noun

S/No 12 -- gwuo (dig) and ogwu (thorn)

Serial Numbers 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 29, 30 and 31 belong to this group. Hence, 10 words out of the total of 34 words belong to this category.

d) Noun / Pronoun:

S/No 10 enyo (mirror) and onye (who).

Only this serial number belongs to this category.

e) Adjective / Noun

S/No. 15 ibu (big) and ubi (farm).

S/No 25 otu (one) / uto (growth)

f) Adjective/Verb

S/No. 14 – ise (five) and sie (cook)

This category is represented only by this number.

g) Verb / Adjective

S/No. 28 – sie (cook) and ise (five).

This category is represented only by this number.

h) Pronoun /Verb

S/No. 24 – anyị (we) and ịnya (to drive).

Only this serial number belongs to this category.

i) Adverb /Verb

S/No. 27 – ọzọ (again) and zọọ (contest)

This category is represented only by this number.

The above depict that the Noun/Verb category is predominant being 11 out of the 34 words followed by the Noun / Noun category being 10 out of the 34 words selected while the other categories are quite minimal.

### 3.1 A Proposed play of Anagrams between Ezinwa and Ezinne

Ezinwa: Lee ewu

Ezinne, Lee uwe

Ezinwa: Dee aha gị

Ezinne: Ede dị n'ụlọ

Ezinwa: Mazị Ọta na-abia

Ezinne: Obi n'atọ m uto

Ezinwa: Enyi gị na-abịa

Ezinne: Inye m ike m gaa zute ya

Ezinwa: Sie ji ahu ngwangwa

Ezinne: Ji ise ahu agaghị ezuru anyị

Ezinwa: I maara ihe bụ akpị?

Ezinne: A maa m na akpị na-ebi n' ịkpa

#### 4. Conclusion

The potentials of language are inexhaustible and it is only the astute user of language that would benefit most from it. Although figures of speech have been studied over the years, they are so numerous that few have been studied extensively at the expense of others. Anagram could be used as a literary device in Igbo especially where phonic effects are desired. They could also help in the learning of Igbo vocabulary when used as a language game. It would require a measure of mental effort to win a game of Igbo anagrams since it implies movement from one grammatical category to the other. For instance, the Noun / Verb category shown to be predominant in this study would be less tasking than the other categories. The creative minds of Igbo children would be highly activated if they are introduced early to use anagrams as a linguistic device as well as a language game. It is hoped that as Jackson (1998:171) is able to cite S.C. Hunter's Dictionary of Anagrams in English that in the very near future; we would be able to cite dictionaries of Anagrams in Igbo Language.

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