

ỌNỤỌHA: THE SOCIO-LINGUISTICS OF CENTRALITY AND EQUAL-VALIDITY IN IGBO LANGUAGE SETTING

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Abstract

Ọnụọha (the people's mouth) is a common Igbo concept and name which simply means the voice of the people. Igbo language, like any other language, is a human tool in the semantic space for integration, interpretation, and internalization of conventions of the states of affairs of the sociality of its users. *Ọnụọha* as *Oluọha* (people's language), is seen in other world languages which presupposes that all languages are linguistically alike and equal. *Ọnụọha* and *Oluọha* command the commonness of an Igbo consensual vehicle (gateway) of ostensive propositional power of Igbo knowledge, perception, identity, phenomena, socio- and meta- physics, history, etc, just as is obtained in the world-hood of other languages. This paper therefore presents the concept *Ọnụọha* as the language of the people (*Oluọha*) which is a fixate canon for the possibilities of communal assessment of human knowledge. Through open ended oral interview with some elders in Igbo land, information was got on the oral performances which are represented in a chart. With the chart on Igbo oral performances, the paper concludes that there is not a one and only privileged way of seeing and developing the world as has been projected in the case of the mentality of the colonized. The paper ends with a call for rethink in the ways for strengthening and empowering the *qha* of the Igbo communities.

Keywords: Igbo language, Centrality, Equal Validity, Folk media, *Qhaka*, *Qnxqha*.

Introduction

A common Igbo philosophy, as Nwadike (2008:43) puts it is "*Onye Aghala Nwanne Ya*" which depicts togetherness and communalism. It is in this sense that *qha* or *qra* is at the center and supremacy of the Igbo world. This concept informs Igbo names (even when they are wrongly spelt in writing) like: *Obiọha* (*Obiọra*) (the mind of the people), *Nwọha* (the child of the people), *Ikeọha* (*Ikeọra*) (the power of the people), *Qhaajunwa* (the people do not reject [a] child), *Qhakim* (*Qraekie*) (my portion[share] comes from the people), *Qhabuike* (the people is strength/power), *Qhagwu* (the people cannot end), *Qhakwe* (if the people agree), *Qrabueze* (the people is king), *Qhaka* (the people is supreme), etc. Suffice it to add that though the different dialects of Igbo may have /r/ or other phonemes in place of /h/, we shall maintain the use of /h/ in this paper as the Standard Igbo form in the spirit of *Qhaka*, (a concept that depicts the supremacy of the people).

The configurations of these names, and many more, portray the centrality of *oha* in Igbo society as the custodian of checks and balances for the preservation, maintenance, development, and improvement of life. Life here stands for the lives of the individual members of the society, and the society as a unit. In this sense, the moral life of every member of the society concerns all others, and vice versa, even without any documented rules, laws, decrees, or constitutions. As a matter of fact, it was when these documented laws came to be that our societies became disorganized; things fell apart, and the centre seized to hold, a challenge on the validity of *Ohaka*. The undocumented laws made one accountable to *oha* for all of one's deeds – an unwritten constitution that dates back to time immemorial. It may not be wrong therefore to state that the cone of all aspects of Igbo philosophy is *oha*, as supreme, providers of social goods/services, providers of social respect/identity pride, guarantors of equity/justice for all, last arbiter/arbitrator in propositions and promulgations (thus representing God). This explains also why the reality of most Igbo names lead to one another.

Ọnụọha can be seen as an 'interventionist' concept for the study of Igbo language and society. It offers the most outstanding understanding of the nature and relationship between language and society from a sociolinguistic perspective. It is on the grounds of this that the distinction found in Trudgill (1978: 1-11) between language and society as forms and perspectives of sociolinguistics cannot be supported here because an expression has meaning only in a stream of life of the language users. This fact is best understood with Frege (1980, x) who maintains that we should never look for the meaning of a word in isolation, but only in the context of a life. The meaning of the concept (word) *Ọnụọha* emerges only from the Igbo context of 'use' or 'language game' within Igbo life. This word cannot be separated from its placement within Igbo form of life. Wittgenstein (PI#43) would remind us that the meaning of a word is its use in the language, while Bell (1978:130) states as follows:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'Real World' is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group... We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation.

In other words, words are deeds (active) and signify the users' worldhood and environ-mentality. It is not a kind of seeing, on our part; it is our acting, which lies at

the bottom of the language-game. What *Ndi Igbo* speak, live-in and which is the meaning of Igbo language and Igbo life is *onuoha* as *onuoha/oluoha*.

Methodology: An in-depth interview method was used to carry out the research which was based on oral interview of some elders in Igbo land. This was done through open ended questions to illicit information on the oral performances (as the folk-media) as reflected in a chart. A descriptive approach was used in the analysis of the data collected.

***Onuoha* and Equal-validity**

A dimension of this paper we need introduce here is that all languages are equal and have equal validity. The values of every language are centered on the tripartite functions of language according to Obuasi (2011: 104) as follows:

- (a) The centrality function as tool for community relationship and communication – a communicative function;
- (b) The centrality function as tool for the interpretation of the common symbolic forms of the real worldhood (of *ndi Igbo*) – a thought function;
- (c) The centrality function of ontological relationship and association – a social identity function.

Seeing *oluoha* as *onuoha* from these perspectives, it will be easier to share the competences and performances of Igbo mutual intelligibility, knowledge and development manifest in their artistic expressions as would be illustrated later with a diagramme. Though there are varieties of techniques and methods for the acquisition of knowledge, no particular language does it best. Every language (no matter which) needs to be facilitated to accommodate development (no matter what is meant by development). Prah (2009: 157) believes that it is possible to develop through, with and in African languages, after all, “No language is from Adam designated or blessed with science and technology”, the so called development.

In other societies and languages of the world, the concept of *Onuoha* exists, but the degrees of authority differ from place to place. Within Nigeria, tribes like Gwong that speaks Jyong (Northern part of Nigeria) has *rhaik* as *Onuoha*; the Hausas would have *al-ada* and *Muryar talakawa* as *Onuoha*. The English man would say in common parlance or it is “the custom” of the people because that is what it is; while the Germans would say *volksmund* – the voice of the people. The *oha* has a final say in many matters in many world societies. Example, in the Jewish society, a woman was to be stoned to death for an adultery she didn't commit alone, just because the people or *oha* said so, (Jhn 8, 1-11).

The concept of equal validity is generally known through the ordinary modes of seeking and delivering knowledge and its contents. It gives credence to all languages as capable of bringing information and knowledge into the world - that there is no privileged and all-encompassing prime and credible source of knowledge. Equal-validity has come to quieten all science wars and establish the fact that every

knowledge is expected to respect and recognize what this paper would call “geo-mental-epistemic independence” and all possibilities of inter-dependence. There can only be varieties of techniques and methods of the acquisition of knowledge/development. Knowledge and development can therefore come from *onuoha* in *onuoha/oluoha*, no matter which. On this note, *Onuoha* is an important Igbo social consciousness for Igbo social construction of knowledge on an equal validity footstep with any world language setting. The fact here in the Igbo setting is that the effectiveness of *Onuoha* is based on some rule-following structures for recognitions and organizations in the Igbo society. This would be better explained under the following:

i ***Onuoha* as the form of existential reality:** This is to say that words and ideas take their names and meanings with the state of affairs of the users of the language, here Igbo. In other words objects and ideas in nature have forms that are traceable to Igbo state of affairs. In effect *Onuoha* functions here as the useful tool for the comprehension of Igbo social life. In support of this, Kishik (2008: 24) adds:

I want to suggest that the notion of form may enable us to imagine a shared life - a community (Igbo speech community) . . . that is not based on the possession of a certain property or a common denominator and has therefore nothing to do with the participation in a class. We can live together not because we all possess something, or some fact, but because we share a space of possibilities.

Onuoha in this capacity can be described as the Igbo social emphasis on the role of Igbo language and the kind of life the Igbo people lead in handing down traditions, in united actions and feelings of social intimacies etc. It is therefore the essence and destiny of Igbo reality which is a ‘language-bound-bond’.

ii ***Onuoha* as the Grammar for the Expression of Essence:** Any expression or utterance is an expression of the world of the speaker. Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Remarks* (PR, 85), according to Rhees, Hargreaves & White (1980) states:

But the essence of language is a picture of the essence of the world; and philosophy as custodian...of grammar can in fact grasp the essence of the world, only not in the propositions of language but in the rules for this language which exclude nonsensical combinations of signs.

Onuoha is the rule that guide the art and use of language (*oluoha/onuoha*). From sociolinguistics and philosophy of language, we know that the ‘rule-governed’ nature of every natural human language is indicative of how this same language and the games of this same language have permeated the social life and activities in sociality. Grammar can be called here the grammar of Igbo life because it is constructed and socially constituted for the regularization of social activities, knowledge, behaviour, etc. This is further supported by Kishik (2008: 89) who states that:

If you follow certain rules, then you play in the community of those who also play the same language game, who share the same form of life, who inhabit the same world that you inhabit. If you do not play according to certain rules, then you simply do not communicate with those who do follow the rules; you lack this common ground with them and you remain, to this particular extent, in a state of infancy.

The point here is that as long as *Ọnuọha* stands as the regularization mode in the Igbo sociality as realized in Igbo language and grammar, if it is not well utilized, it will continue to be a thread in the weave of Igbo life. This will surely be noticed through the fabrics of Igbo life and style as a paradigmatic social force. *Ọnuọha* stands also within the conclaves of rules and regulations for the formation, creation and sustenance of Igbo language through grammar. Grammar is therefore the rule that guides the art and use of language. To this, Achebe (1989: 145) adds:

Life is short and art is long, said the scientist. We can mitigate the brevity of the one with the longevity of the other. This is why human societies have always attempted to sustain their cultural values by carefully preserved oral or written literatures which provide for them and their posterity a short cut now and again to the benefits of actual experience. What about history, you might ask, does it not vouchsafe the same enlightenment? The lessons of history are important, of course. But think how many aeons of history will be needed to distil the wisdom of Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

The essence of what Achebe is saying here is that the total matrix of the people is preserved in *onuọha* especially in their arts – written and unwritten, which is the manifestation of the art of their grammar.

iii ***Ọnuọha* as the picture for the sketches of social landscape:** As Achebe above depicts, the people's grammar is exposed in the art of their language that sustains their cultural values exposed in the art of their literature (oral or written). But we shall discuss *onuọha* here as the people's picture of the sketches of their social landscape (politics, economy, religion etc) that concatenates fundamental issues through which the Igbo personality is identified as an integral and inherent framework of *Ọha* property. *Ọha* (the people) whose mouth (*Ọnu*) speaks such social commands, signifies the structural designation that predicates the Igbo human existential stigma and blue-print.

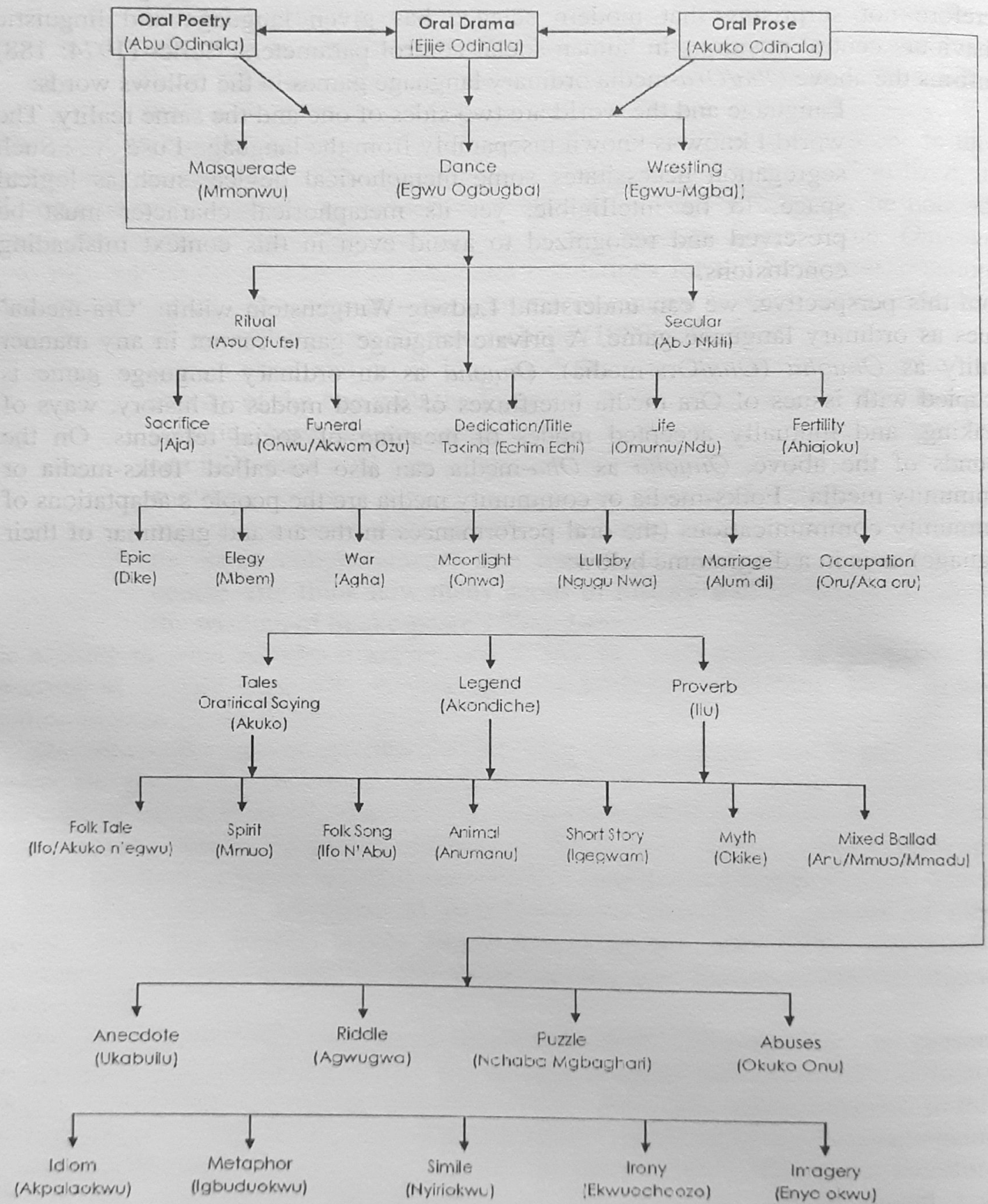
From the sociolinguistic components of *Ọnuọha* as the '*Ọha*-medium', we present here the traces of the relationship of the socially accepted and constituted ordinary language use and social cohesion (Okonkwo 2002: 451). The social cohesion in this aspect accounts for the *Ọha/Ọra* as the Oral-media composer of the language-game for common and ordinary use in the society, (Okonkwo, 1986). This paper therefore also presents *Ọnuọha* as '*Ọha*-media' that determine the organizational and communicative conduct of Igbo speech community. Everything about a speech

community is ọnụọha-dependent, including science and technology. Thus, civilization of any type can be traced through the themes of language use. It is therefore not surprising that modern science has given language and linguistic behaviours central positions in human social control parameters. Sefler (1974: 188) confirms the above Ọha/Ora-media ordinary language games in the follows words:

Language and the world are two sides of one and the same reality. The world I know is known inseparably from the language I use Such segregation necessitates some metaphorical device, such as logical space, to be intelligible, yet its metaphorical character must be preserved and recognized to avoid even in this context misleading conclusions.

From this perspective, we can understand Ludwig Wittgenstein within 'Ora-media' issues as ordinary language game. A private language game cannot in any manner qualify as Ọnụọha (Ọha/Ora-media). Ọnụọha as an ordinary language game is occupied with issues of Ora-media interfluxes of shared modes of history, ways of speaking, and mutually accepted modes of meaning of social referents. On the grounds of the above, Ọnụọha as Ọha-media can also be called 'folks-media or community media'. Folks-media or community media are the people's adaptations of community communications (the oral performances in the art and grammar of their language) as is in a diagramme below:

Igbo Oral Performances (Folks media)



Culled from late Prof. Ezikeojiaku's unpublished document with modifications
From this diagramme, we can deduce the advantages and characteristics of ọnụọha as
ora(l)-media as following:

- a) They are simple in form and available to all members;
- b) They are functional and utilitarian;
- c) They provide ways for teaching, instruction, initiation as well as imparting traditional aesthetic, historical, technical, social, ethical, religious values etc though folk ways;
- d) They provide legal codes of sorts which rest on stories and proverbs generated through the spoken word;
- e) They reduce the private to the public, and the individual to the communal, as such unite the people and guarantee social cohesion;
- f) They serve as appeals to social consciousness and conscience;
- g) They guarantee the social machinations of 'rule-following';
- h) They provide the ideals of common identity and collective essences as metaphors of the body politic;
- i) They provide the genres of 'family resemblances' etc.

From the above characteristic constellations of Ọnụọha as Ọha-media or folks media', it becomes very easy to appreciate the above concept as Igbo social constitution of linguistic institutions. Ọnụọha is in this context, an Igbo relevant and favourable constituter of social necessity. What people have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge, common understanding or like-mindedness as the sociologists would say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another, like bricks; they cannot be shared as persons would share a piece of pie by dividing it into physical pieces (this suggests strong bond). Ọnụọha is the Igbo people's media that ensures participation in a common and central understanding, as one which secures similar emotional and intellectual dispositions. It is an Igbo concept that reflects Igbo life-form and stands in the middle of Igbo life. In this very context, it is therefore, a symbolic form and the summation of Igbo sociolinguistics.

iv **Ọnụọha as the Meaning of the Expression of Social Life:** The word meaning in this case is the presentation and elucidation of hidden essences whereby sense is given to the processes of social and community/communal knowledge. Meaning makes sense possible only within the practical and concrete life of the people in their communication situations. To communicate (the expression of social life) is to extend an intended meaning as Obuasi (2010: 315) puts it. Meanings intended are dependent on some language variables which different philosophers refer to in different nomenclatures, e.g. Wardhaugh (2006) calls them felicity conditions, while Grice (1985) calls them conversational implicature maxims. These variables are necessary language dependent conditions embedded in the grammar of the language for the

realization of meaning. Meaning is therefore *oha*-dependent, because the meaning of an expression is the meaning of the constituent components of the expression and the environment.

We are also aware that how one speaks and lives is the very meaning of one's life and language, as Kishik (2008: 61) would add:

Meaning, however, is neither the fuel of the engine nor the destination of the vehicle, but it is the very movement, work, or activity, while the engine is in gear. In this way, meaning is taken... to be inseparable from the use of language.

It is not surprising to note too, that a knowledgeable Igbo person cannot speak without frequent usages of proverbs, aphorisms, imageries, and revelations in the courses of the expression of phenomenal and concrete extended meanings. This determines how one is respected in the society and Achebe (1989:131) adds:

... When a man addresses his fellows they know already what kind of person he is, whether (as Igbo people would put it) he is one with whose words something can be done; or else one who, if he tells you to stand, you know you must immediately flee!

Based on the facts above, speaking Igbo language (*Onuoha*) means speaking a worldhood, which in itself is the facticity of human community-social-construction of their knowledge, packaged in and through the necessary contingencies of fixed 'forms' (*ihe oha* - the people's property) and the totality of their facts.

v ***Onuoha* as the World and Worldhood of the Totality of Facts:** The truth of the fact here is that *onuoha* is the determiner of the people's world. This world, on the other hand, is the signification and symbolization of the totality matrixes of their universe as *Xwa Nd[Igbo*. And the world of the Igbo people is not separable from their *Chi* and religion, as they would always refer to *Xwa m na Chi m* (my world and my God). Okonkwo (2012: 53) affirms this by adding that "For *Ndi* Igbo, the world, destiny, and life are in one block an existential bulk which Sartre calls 'responsibility'. Adibe (2009:15) decried this as follows:

Traditional Religion was the bedrock of Igbo 'communa' life. But the modern pluralistic community orientation with divergent religious worldview devalued the Igbo communal [sic] life. . . . They uphold the need for maintenance of proper links of relationship in human kinship as well as relationship between man, nature and the ancestral spirits.

Onuoha in this context has the basic task to engage the human persons (the Igbo Persons) in a creative mode of being-in-the-world of *Ndi* Igbo. It stands therefore, in the middle of all and for all as the people's mouth (as their speech and speech acts) for knowing and reflecting the Igbo worldhood. *Onuoha* speaks (reflects) the people's mind, language, philosophy, religion etc. and provides fixate cannons for other social compartments for sharing life in the Igbo world. It is not surprising, therefore, that

Ọnụọha is the name of a god among the Obowo people of Igbo land that serves for central civic unity, and consortium.

Centrality as Social Implications of Ọha-cracy (Ọha-kara-sị)

No person is above being educated. Every adult is a teacher of knowledge and morals. Every child is a community pupil. . . . He is skilled on labour and important Igbo traditions and custom, as one evil act from one person could bring doom to all the community.... Culprits...are punished as a means of educating others.... Igbo Traditional...is community oriented and so is skill acquisition....Thus, the society had cohesiveness within its common culture and norms, that were serene living without much conflict and bitterness.

(Adibe 2009: 27)

This quotation states it all. It is only in the then Igbo community setting can one find this level of communal common togetherness (ọha-cracy), which is all about the maintenance of human beingness in serene living. This is what gives language essence, and in this regard Okonkwo (2012: 4) adds that ọha-cracy “is all about the inversion of language for the all-encompassing agenda-setting in humanity”. Ọnụọha as ọha-cracy/ọha-kara-sị gains expressions and recognitions through the symbolic forms in the society like proverbs, dancing and all we have in the diagramme above, decorations, religious traditions revolving round the market days - *Izu Igbo (Eke, Ori, Afo, Nkwọ)*, etc.

From the above, Igbo language shows the central share of common competences and performances of Igbo mutual intelligibility and knowledge that are made manifest in the forms of artistic expressions, verbal arts, dialogue etc in their setting. These are conventional instruments of *Ndi* Igbo from their book of heritage (history) which are beyond individual tools, but are rather global and central tool-boxes of Igbo social dealing from nature. These central Igbo cultural heritages form traditional skills for training and education in social participations, decision-making and other aspects of Igbo life as in the quotations from Adibe and Okonkwo above. Ọnụọha on this note signifies community based institutions of social control, social legacy, communal leadership polity, community identity, integrative association, etc charged with the following obligations:

- i. To serve as a uniting force: It is the duty of ọha to state and maintain the principles and social mechanisms that propel the society (ora(l) traditions). Ọha also serves in the promotion of the collective actions of the people, as the consensus of the people is their action plan as in the maintenance of roads and market places, defense and security against neighbours, etc.
- ii. To serve as custodian and guarantor of justice (fair or not) as well stand as a social institution and social arrangement for the smooth running of the society with fairness. We need to note here that fairness is relative. In Igbo setting, justice and fairness are symbolized in ọfo (a short consecrated

stick from the *ofọ* tree as a kind of staff kept by every family head and *ozo* titled men in Igbo setting), and *ogu* (the symbolic and mystic power behind the *ofọ*, which can be represented with many symbolic items). Thus, the *ofọ-na-ogu* (as they always go together) are invoked at every decision taking, covenant taking, affirmations, seals as the consensus, conscientious consent of the people. Any decision taken with the invocation of *ofọ-na-ogu* is unquestionably credible.

Again, in community issues, even the gods obey *oha* (the people). An Igbo adage affirms this as in *onu mmadu bu onu Chukwu* (the voice of the people is the voice of God; *vox populi vox Dei* = Latin). In some parts of Igbo land (Nsukka Area), a woman who commits adultery is punished (inflicted with mental sickness) by the gods, while the man of the action is free and never mentioned. The gods are only implementing the decision (fair or not) of *oha* (the people). Even among the Jews, (John 19: 1-16), the king could not stop *onuoha* (the decision of the people) when Pilate found no reason to condemn Jesus; Jesus was crucified still because the people insisted on “Crucify Him”.

- iii. To serve as facilitators of competitive and co-operative resources as in the display of wrestling matches, and masquerades; as in the ownership of palm trees and lands acquired from wars.
- iv. To serve as fosterer and safeguard of social respect, and community identity-pride. A disregard or disrespect to an elder, or titled man (as representative of *oha*) is seen as disrespect to the whole community. As such, every man strives to live according to the dictates of *oha* to be able to attain such level of recognition.

Onuoha is from the above formations the Igbo translation of what may be called here the Igbo ‘Stuff for Use’; as the Igbo ontological world-space for referential matrixes for the individual in Igbo society to involve the self in a circumspective common concern. It is, thus a constitutive assignment as is supported by the ideas of Magda (1964: 73) who says that:

...Man alone is so, that he fore-goingly, a priori, understands his own being in a relational- whole, in which and from which he can meet other beings and understand them in their being.

The fact of the matter is that every language stands out as the true configuration, as well as the machination of the people’s history. Every natural human language like Igbo has also the functional dealing of concatenating the applications of the people’s real worldhood. The implication here is that every people who use a language as their natural heritage by the nature of the ‘language use’ assert imperative possibilities and registers to be known by the realities of that same language. *Onuoha* as the Igbo people’s mouth (opinion), language, and speech community functions through a tripartite consequential dimension as discussed above.

This section has exposed *Ọnụọha* as the hallmark of Igbo 'concillium'; an *Ọha*-cracy that heralds the true understanding and attribute of democratization. It is the Igbo traditional identifiable sign of good governance. It is also the sociology of effective commonness with common good at the center (centrality), where all citizens are empowered with an all-encompassing and including unity of action as stakeholders in political and communal virtues.

The Worries

Based on the discussions so far, language has to be taken as a holistic process that gives to the user the gateway to the world of which he or she is part of. From this vintage point, all human progress is expected to open up and widen to concretize experiences expected to enrich language, and not destroy. More so, the eagerness and enthusiasm to speak or talk in any language should not just be seen to have originated out of the mere desire for naming of concepts and learning the environment, but rather should be seen as the desire that marks the true beginnings for the detection and conquest of an objective world and the consciousness of the imbued environmentalities. The world here should not be seen as just the world of the language, but the human world. Thus all languages should be working together (not at the expense of any) to make the human world a serene place.

As such, the structures and linguistic components of the ideas of equal validity and centrality will manifest itself. Langer S.K (2011) downloaded 12/5/2011 revalidates the above position in line with Ernst Cassirer's theory on language as follows:

Any campaign to discard tradition for the sake of novelty as such, without specific reason in each case to break through a certain convention of thought, leads to diletantism, whether it is in philosophy, in art, or in social and moral institutions. As every person has his mother tongue in terms of which he cannot help thinking his earliest thoughts, so every scholar has a philosophical mother tongue, which colors his natural 'Weltanschauung'. He may have been nurtured in a particular school of thought, or his heritage may be the less conscious one of 'common sense', the popular metaphysic of his generation; but he speaks some intellectual language that has been bestowed on him, with its whole cargo of preconceptions, distinctions, and evaluations, by his official and unofficial teacher.

On account of the above, we have to note that the virtues behind equal validity conception are the facts that their effectiveness is based on *ọnụọha* as rule-following structures for recognitions and organizations to maintain centrality. *ỌNXỌHA* is therefore the sociolinguistics of the centrality and equal-validity of Igbo language in the Igbo language setting.

Is this case of *Ọnụọha* still same in the case of *Ndi* Igbo today? The problem of using Igbo Language on the basis of large demographic variables arise only because there is not enough cooperation between *Ndi* Igbo on this issue, or better still *Ndi*

Igbo are yet to be sufficiently convinced that unless they use their own language the development wished as modernity and for maintenance of Igbo language may be unattainable. Thanks to all stake holders in the promotion of Igbo language though, but more efforts need be put up in beefing up the standard Igbo through borrowing from the dialects, as well as other languages, to sustain our culture, tradition and values, lest we continue to have a number of issues to decry.

A common characteristic of every language is dynamism symbolized in growth. Growth does not entail shift. A great causative factor today in the devaluing of *onuoha* is language shift – a sociolinguistic process of reduction of a language in the interest of a dominant one. The worries of this paper hinge on the effects that language shifts have brought through colonialism that has resulted to apathy on our language.

The Issues:

- Individualism as a result of civilization, formal education, and Christianity is now against communalism. The different Christian religious groups with their different doctrines and teachings have destroyed the Igbo socio-religious value system with their multiple worldviews and values. The custodians of culture and traditions are now regarded as ‘fetish’ in the misled worldviews that have devoid the people of cohesiveness. *Ohaneze*, the first word of any greeting at Igbo gathering has no value anymore. The *oha-* in the *ohaneze* is now subdued with the multiplicity of *eze* (*ndi-eze*) that doesn’t represent the *oha* anymore. *Oha* has also been erased from *onuoha*, as only *onu* now exists in form of *ekwurekwu* (where *Ndi* Igbo now talk, talk, and talk without much action), except individual actions for personal gains. Festivals that strengthened communalism, that brought neighbourhood towns some communal relaxation and added life to the people’s spirits are now termed ‘fetish’. These have destroyed *oha-kara-si*, the bases of *oha*-cracy.
- Advancements, job opportunities and creations have taken the Igbo man out of his language setting - away from the surveillance and watchful eyes of the (people’s) *oha* sacred solidarity. Even studies in Igbo language are now regarded as “best done” at Harvard University and the likes, instead of at the Universities in Igbo land, because we do not see our efforts as good enough. Agriculture, craft and trade which gave the joy noted in the face of every Igbo man, is now lost to seeking wealth by all means that taking titles is no more on merit, but by bribery and affluence.
- The written laws, decrees, constitutions, socio-political changes with their institutions have deprived the Igbo world of her peaceful, respectful polity for a situation of political rancor and acrimony. The different macro institutions that made up the *oha* are losing their grips of the Igbo political

values with the introduction of town unions, *igwe* in council, local government authority, etc. The communal political principles that were initially based on the family (held by the spirit of *umunne*, *umunna*, *ama*, and *obodo*) have given way to written laws and constitutions copied from other lands.

- The written laws and constitutions instituted forces. Such forces meant to protect, defend, and maintain law and order are now armed with guns and tear gas to disorganize peace, as against the efforts of the traditional age grades, *umuada*, titled men and masquerades in maintaining social, political, and religious discipline. The powerless oaths of office (with the new words like embezzlement, corruption, etc) have overtaken the *ọfọ-na-ogu* mystical powers that maintained good governance, to which Adibe (2009: 31) adds:

Equally, these politicians make undisclosed prayer requests from their religious leaders and donate generously to their religious affiliations that God may shield them and give them hidden haven from their political crimes, which could be in any area: murder, rigging, lies.... These crimes could not be thought of in primordial traditional Igbo politics where the fear of retribution is supreme.

These have deprived *Ọnụọha* of its validity and decentralized the *Ọhaka*-ness in Igbo worldhood.

Call for Rethink:

It is a fact that we cannot reverse most of the issues mentioned above, as the only constant thing is change. We appreciate the efforts of Universities in Igbo land that have Centers for Igbo Studies (even when they are not functional), also the efforts of Igbo men and women in Diaspora, the efforts of *Ọhaneze Ndi Igbo*, and the other groups interested in revitalizing Igbo heritages, traditions, and history. We call for a rethink on ways and means to strengthen and empower the *ọha* (the rallying point) of *Ndi Igbo* in the various communities to begin to give essence to our God-given empowerment in *Ọhaka*.

Igbo Leaders of Thoughts should rethink *cor unum et anima una* (one mind and one soul) for which *Ndi Igbo* is known - be it politics or any other Igbo state of affairs. The industriousness (*njiri mara Ndi Igbo*) should not be sacrificed at the altar of money politics, *ịma mmadu*, and individualism.

Most importantly this paper recommends compulsory studies of Igbo language in all primary and secondary schools in Igbo land, and the caveat that a credit in Igbo language should be a condition for admission into, at least, all Universities in Igbo land.

If there had been a single rallying point, it would have been easier to encourage and sponsor graduate/post graduate studies in Igbo Philosophy, History, Arts,

Archeology, Religion, while the Centers for Igbo Studies open up achieves to house useful findings of such researches for easy access, so that together we can revitalize our heritage.

Conclusion

On the grounds of the above, *Ọnuọha* as an aspect of the superior, central and equal validity programmes of the Igbo people in matters that concern their sociality (*Ọhaka*), is an Igbo 'cursus' as well as Igbo 'excursus' in linguistic and sociolinguistic games. *Ọnuọha* is the Igbo task of prioritization of the prerogatives of community, sociality and citizenry. It is the sure prove of the Igbo *Ọha*-cratic superiority and centrality in the promulgation of incentives and alternatives of self-consciousness, awareness and reflexive 'Igbo-insiderness' within the matters of collective, implicit and explicit modes of dialogue for the constructions of Igbo knowledge and meaning. *Onye Aghala Nwanne Ya!*

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