INTRODUCTION
The traditional Igbo world is a world of forces. There is a variety of forces in Igbo world-view. Every being is a force. Just as there is hierarchy of beings in traditional Igbo world-view, there is also hierarchy of forces. The Supreme being is the first in the hierarchy of forces, followed by spirits and then human beings as well as other things. According to Ogbukagu (1997):

The ontological concepts of supernatural forces as accepted by the Igbo world in their hierarchical order be God, major and minor divinities, and spirits/ancestors. These forces are led and directed by God who created the world, and the overall controller of the universe.(Ogbukagu, 1997:257)

There are powers associated with these forces as well as beings. It is obvious from the above citation that the Supreme Being is the highest in the hierarchy of forces, followed by minor divinities as well as spirits and ancestors. Human beings are also forces. Just as there are powers associated with every being, traditional Igbos believe that there is mystical power in words. Hence, words spoken by human beings have mystical and spiritual powers. The fundamental philosophical questions that readily come to mind are: ‘Do words actually have magical powers? What is the logical connection between a spoken word and the claimed spiritual effect of such spoken word? Can a word spoken by a particular person have effect on another person. These questions border on the issue of power of word. Hence, this study focuses on philosophical evaluation of the force and mystical power of word in Igbo world-view. However, before we delve into such discourse, it is pertinent to firstly analyse the basic concepts that are necessary for proper appreciation of the discourse in this study.
Philosophical Evaluation of the Force and Mystical Power of ‘Word’ in Traditional Igbo World-View

THE CONCEPT OF ‘FORCE’ IN IGBO WORLD-VIEW

As was earlier pointed out in this study, the Igbo world is a world of forces. Thus, it becomes very necessary to examine the concept of force in Igbo world-view. However, the fundamental question that quickly comes to mind is this: ‘what is world-view’? A brief clarification of the meaning of the afore-mentioned concept enables one to appreciate the discourse in this section of the study better. This is as a result of the fact that the concept of force is being discussed in the context of Igbo world-view. World-view could be said to be one’s conception of the world. Every group of people has a world-view which is peculiar to them. It implies the way or ways an individual or a group of people conceives the world and its events. Thus, it has to do with how people explain their world, and this orders the people’s conception of the world as well as their basic assumptions about the world. More often than not, world-view is equated with the beliefs and concepts an individual or a group of people upholds. However, Mbaegbu (2012) argues that it is more than that because it involves the whole life of every group of people. In his words,

World view is not only the sum total of a people’s beliefs, concepts, laws, customs, tradition and attitudes of a people but embraces the underlying thought-link or logic which holds them together. World view in effect is the whole life of a people in its social context.(Mbaegbu, 2012:104)

From this perspective, world-view could be said to embrace every aspect of life of a particular group of people. Wikipedia (2015) has a similar description of world-view. It states that world-view is “...the fundamental cognitive orientation of an individual or society encompassing the entirety of the individual or society’s knowledge and point of view...A world view can include natural philosophy; fundamental, existential, and normative postulates; or themes, values, emotions and ethics.” It thus becomes obvious that a group of people sharing the same world view has very similar orientations. The fundamental question is: ‘what is Igbo world-view’? Analysing what world-view is all about with particular reference to the Igbos, Mbaegbu (2012) states:

The one that is peculiar to the Igbo comprising their beliefs, attitudes, origin, their nature, structures of organization and interaction in the world is known as Igbo world view. It is the Igbo conception of the world, physical and metaphysical which is both natural and coeval with the Igbo man as a “being-in-the-world.” Its essential horizon is limited to the experiences of the Igbo. It can be briefly defined as the collective uncritical view or views of the Igbo, their outlook in life. This type of outlook is as old as the Igbo themselves and is passed on to generations yet unborn and therefore will continue to exist with the Igbo as other people co-exist with their own world-views.(Mbaegbu, 2012: 105)

It becomes obvious from the foregoing that worldview is the overall thought-pattern of an individual or a group of people. Every group of people has a world-view peculiar to such group. It could be argued that there is a world-view that could be identified with the Igbo people. In this section of the study, effort is geared towards examining Igbo world-view with particular reference to the issue of force.

An essential aspect of Igbo world-view is the idea of ‘force’. Igbo people believe that every being is a force and that there is hierarchy of forces, starting from the Supreme Being down to inanimate beings. Force is the propelling principle in Igbo ideology. Njoku (2002:130) states that “...force, taken in the sense that some spiritual powers whether demonic or good and their effects are experienced as acting on human condition, is real in the African’s belief system.” Obviously, ‘force’ is very central in Igbo idea of being. Hence, force becomes the essence of being in Igbo world-view. Analysing George E. Ekwuru’s idea of force as articulated in his The Pangs of an African Culture in Travail, Njoku (2002) further states:

What is this understanding of force as employed by Ekwuru? He asserts that force is the essence of being for the Igbo. Force, he speculates, has a ‘two-ness’ principle, since it embodies “a paradigmatic duality of complementarity.”... He writes: “The polarity of ‘force’ as the essential characteristic of being is not seen to be contradictory but complementary.” The polarity of force is not shown, although it seemed that the concept of duality that is invoked refers to being. Then immediately Ekwuru subsumes force and being as exemplifying complementarity which is a “dualism in diachronic open-minded substratum of natures.”...There is a
sense in which the so-called complementary dualities could be described as a stylistic expression of language. (Njoku, 2002:194)

Force then remains at the centre of being for Igbes. This is as a result of the fact that every being is considered as a force. Man occupies a central position in Igbo idea of force. Hence, man can influence the force of his fellow human beings and that of other things. Man can increase or diminish the force of another human being through the use of appropriate words. Explaining Igbo’s concept of force further, Nze (1986) maintains:

The Igbo believe that man is a composite of vital forces; he is a force, and he is dynamic. This vital force that is in man, and is man, can be increased as it can be decreased or restored by certain happenings around man. Man is a being which is capable of growth and diminution, a force that can exercise a direct influence on other forces as they can in turn exercise their own influence on him. By his positive and or negative deeds he can decrease, increase or simply restore his vital force. This restitution is vital for the existence of the Igbo man... (Nze, 1986:29)

It becomes obvious in Igbo world-view that man is a force. Other things such as animal, water, mineral etc. are forces. There is also force that accompanies spoken words. A more detailed attention would be given to this in the later part of this study.

THE CONCEPT OF ‘WORD’

The concept ‘word’ appears to be a very simple one, but it is not as simple as it seems to be. It exists in every language of the world. Thus, it is not a monopoly of any particular group of people or any particular culture of the world. Every group of people makes use of words. Word is a very complex concept because it has varied meaning, usage and application. According to Wikipedia (2015), “The term word may refer to a spoken word or to a written word, or sometimes to the abstract concept behind either. Spoken words are made up of units of sound called phonemes, and written words of symbols called graphemes...” Wikipedia (2015) goes further to describe ‘word’ from linguistic point of view, and technically distinguishes it from morpheme thus:

In linguistic a word is the smallest element that may be uttered in isolation with semantic or pragmatic content (with literal or practical meaning). This contrasts deeply with a morpheme, which is the smallest unit of meaning but will not necessarily stand on its own. A word may consist of a single morpheme (for example: oh, rock, red, quick, run, expect), or several (rocks, redness, quickly, running, unexpected), whereas a morpheme may not be able to stand on its own as a word (in the words just mentioned, these are –s, -ness, -ly, -ing, un-, -ed). A complex word will typically include a root and one or more affixes (rocks, redness, quick-ly, run-ning, un-expect-ed), or more than one root in a compound (black-board, rat-race)

It becomes obvious that word, unlike morpheme, can stand on its own. Byron cited in Butler (2012) has a special conception of word. He sees word as a small drop of ink that falls like dew upon a thought, and produces that which makes millions of people think. George Byron is a poet, and thus, his description of word is very poetic. It is obvious that his description of word refers only to written words. But there are also spoken words; and Igbes believe that spoken words have mystical powers. It could be said that Byron’s description of word is rather one sided.

Basically, ‘word’ enables us to communicate our ideas to others, and thus helps people in the same language group to engage in meaningful discussion. In this context, words can be written or spoken. People make use of words to express themselves. Human beings cannot do without words. Hence, words are indispensable in our daily living and interaction. In every aspect of human endeavour, we make use of words. In the domain of religion, words play indispensable role. People interact with the Divine Being through the use of words enshrined in acts of worship and prayer. People articulate their intentions and prayers to the Supreme Being using appropriate words. In the domain of education, it is difficult for teaching and learning to go on without the use of words. Teachers and educators impart knowledge and inculcate good values as well as ideas to the learners through the use of appropriate words. In the area of business transactions, one cannot do without words. Traders make use of words to persuade customers to buy commodities from them. Words can be used to evoke different feelings and emotions from people. Words can make someone happy or sad. It thus becomes obvious that human beings cannot do without words.
Philosophical Evaluation of the Force and Mystical Power of ‘Word’ in Traditional Igbo World-View

However, it is obvious that words are not just for communication. Its function and how it is used vary from culture to culture. In Igbo world-view, words are not just used for communication. Igbos believe that words have magical and mystical powers. It is a ‘force’ which can be used to vivify and harness the hidden powers of nature. Words have a lot of influences on human beings, either positively or negatively. It is this mystical power of word in Igbo world-view that forms the major thrust of this study.

WORD: A POTENT TOOL IN TRADITIONAL IGBO WORLD-VIEW

At this juncture, let us examine the power of word in Igbo traditional world-view in order to drive home the point we have been trying to make in this study. Before we delve into this, there is need to address firstly the fundamental issue, and this borders on the identity of the Igbo people. What and who are the Igbos? The term ‘Igbo’ refers to a particular language group and a particular group of people located around River Niger in southern Nigeria. In the attempt to describe the Igbo people, Wikipedia (2015) states:

The Igbo people, historically spelled ‘Ibo’, are an ethnic group of south eastern Nigeria. They speak Igbo, which includes various Igboid languages and dialects. Igbo people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa. In rural Nigeria, Igbo people work mostly as craftsmen, farmers and traders.

It doesn’t seem to the researcher that Igbos work mostly only as craftsmen, farmers and traders. Today, many Igbos are serious intellectuals and academics who work in different institutions of learning. The term ‘Igbo’ refers to both a language and a particular group of people. Attesting to this, Nwoye (2011:309) states that “…the term Igbo is used as a double signifier. On the one hand, it refers to one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. On the other hand, it is used to designate the language of this group, the Igbo people of Nigeria.” Mbaegbu (2012) has a similar view. He observes some ambiguities and controversies on the concept ‘Igbo.’ According to him,

There are still opinions about the meaning and origin of the word “Igbo”. To pinpoint its exact meaning or connotation is not easy. But a good number of scholars are of the opinion that the term “Igbo” may stand for a collection of a people; or connote a language. So that the people are “Igbo”, their land is “Ani” or “Ana Igbo” (Igbo land or country) and their language is “Igbo”. Igbo is therefore both the language and the name used to refer to the Igbo-speaking people of Nigeria. (Mbaegbu, 2012:90)

In Nigeria, the Igbos occupy Enugu, Imo, Anambra, Ebonyi and Abia states. They also occupy some parts of Delta, Rivers and Akwa-Ibom states. Just like every other culture, Igbo people have a world-view that is peculiar to them.

Having briefly analysed the identity of the Igbo people, let us now examine the force and mystical power of ‘word’ in Igbo world-view. The Igbos believe that there are hidden forces and powers in things. Hence, man can harness the frozen forces in animals, plants and minerals to manipulate the supernatural resources of the world. Such dormant powers in things can be harnessed through words. In Igbo world-view, words are not just for communication of ideas and expression of inner feelings, but have magical and mystical powers. Most Igbos do not question the power of word or ask how word can produce the said effect. Word is a special type of ‘force’ which has spiritual power. Hence, traditional Igbos do not use words carelessly. This is as a result of the fact that word is a ‘force’. In traditional Igbo society, the belief that there is power in words is very obvious. The magical power of word is obvious in prayers and incantations of traditional Igbo man. Medicine men, priests, sorcerers etc. can harness the forces in things through the use of appropriate words. Njoku (2002) maintains that:

In Igbo tradition, medicine men, sorcerers, priests, magicians have ike (power or force) which can be sent to act or influence people from a distance. Divinities or deities also have force and they can manipulate or influence people either for good or bad, materially or spiritually. It is not impossible to encounter individuals who behave as though their life had been a battle ground for reception of forces, or people who live as though they are pawns in the hand of evil men. (Njoku, 2002:129)

It is believed by the Igbos that there are magical powers in the words used in prayers, incantations, invocations and sacrifices. It is word that makes medicines effective. The words of prayers, invocations and incantations activate the hidden forces in things. Attesting to these, Mbaegbu (2012: 160) states:
For the traditional Igbo, no medicine, magical and mystical or mixture of herbs and roots (ogwu Igbo) not even poison are effective without the word. The word includes the incantations, innovations, the songs and gesticulations of the traditional medicine man etc. These are not only important but indispensable in the making of Igbo traditional medicine, more so in the production of ogwu (mystical and magical objects). The incantations exploit the power of the spoken word, the vibrating fibre of existence. The power of the spoken word gives meaning, status and designation to “things”. The word employed during invocation frees the frozen forces in things by conferring life-force, power and identity to the many active elements or objects used in traditional medicine. Okwu or umendu (the breath of life) issues from the mouth in the form of water and heat and without it things are not activated. It is the principle of activity in things.

From the foregoing, it becomes obvious that in Igbo traditional worldview, medicines are powerless without the word. It is only words that can make them powerful when spoken by the appropriate person. Such words manipulate the forces in the universe. Nwala (1985: 92) observes that in Igbo traditional worldview, things “like rivers, trees, bushes etc. are invested with certain powers and regarded as the abode of certain spirits and deities.” Such powers are frozen powers. It is only through the use of proper words by proper person that the frozen powers in such trees, rivers and bushes can be harnessed. This is specifically the work of medicine men, dibias, and diviners because the Igbos believe that such people can manipulate the frozen forces in things by using appropriate words. Medicine men heal different ailments with herbs and words.

It seems that the conception of the power of word in Igbo traditional world-view can be generalized to the whole of Africa. The findings of Janheinz Jahn bears eloquent testimony to this. Jahn (1961) brought out very clearly the power of word in African worldview. In his words,

Thus all the activities of men, and all the movements in nature, rest on the word, on the productive power of the word, which is water and heat and seed and Nommo, that is, life force itself. The word frees the ‘frozen’ forces of minerals, brings activity to plants and animals, and so guides bintu, ‘the things’ to meaningful behaviour. The word of the muntu—and ‘muntu’, once more, includes living men and the dead and the gods—is an active force which causes and maintains all movements of ‘things’. (Jahn, 1961:126)

This goes a long way to demonstrate that most Africans do not seem to inquire or seek to know the logical connection between a particular word and the effect the word is said to produce. Turaki (2000) attests to this when he upholds that mystical and spiritual control of the powers in the universe can be exercised through the power of words. It becomes obvious that in African world-view, ‘word’ is believed to be a force which is associated with mystical and mysterious powers. Turaki (2000) further notes that the use of impersonal powers are related to the practices of medicine men, diviners and seers who make use of words and natural objects for medicine, magic, charms and amulets. Words can bring forth evil or good fortune. This involves the use of impersonal powers made possible by the power of the word. Man conquers the world of things through word, and uses such to change the world. From the foregoing, it is very clear that the conception of the mystical power of word is not a monopoly of the Igbos.

**PHILOSOPHICAL EVALUATION**

This study tries to examine the power of word in Igbo traditional world-view. It is obvious from the discussion that the traditional Igbos believe that there is mystical power in words. Philosophy is a critical and reflective inquiry into all aspects of reality. The philosophical questions that quickly come to mind are: ‘Do words actually have magical powers? What is the logical connection between a spoken word and the claimed effect of such spoken word? Can a word spoken by a particular person have spiritual effect on another person? It could be argued that most issues in Igbo traditional world-view are based on assumptions that were not proved. This may be as a result of the fact that most of them are not empirical. It is not fashionable for the traditional Igbos to subject such assumptions to critical scrutiny. Thus, it could be argued that Igbo traditional world-view is fundamentally mythical, non-scientific, non-critical, non-systematic and extremely dogmatic.
Philosophical Evaluation of the Force and Mystical Power of ‘Word’ in Traditional Igbo World-View

When such belief is brought to the tribunal of reason, one quickly discovers that such belief fails the test of reason. The reason for such failure is not far-fetched because the domain of reason is quite different from the domain of belief or mere faith.

At this juncture, one recalls the extreme empiricism of David Hume. Hume denied the existence of things that are not empirically verifiable. His extreme empiricism and scepticism led him to deny causality. Employing David Hume’s critique of causality, one can argue that there is no necessary connection between cause and effect because such is not given in experience. In his book, An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Hume (1955:74) argues:

> When we look about us toward external objects and consider the operation of causes, we are never able, in a single instance, to discover any power or necessary connection, any quality which binds effect to the cause and renders the one an infallible consequence of the other. We only find that the one actually in fact follows the other.

The necessary connection between spoken words and some external effects are not given in experience. Thus, from philosophical perspective, one can argue that there is no necessary connection between mere spoken words and some external effects. However, it ought to be noted that such attachment to the power of word is not within the empirical realm. Thus, it is beyond the realm within which human reason can attain objective knowledge. It is within the domain of belief and not within the domain of reason. Hence, such connection between spoken words and some effects may be possible in the spiritual domain but not in the rational domain. Immanuel Kant, in his very influential book Critique of Pure Reason properly distinguished the domain of reason from the domain of faith, and argued consistently that human reason can only attain objective knowledge only within the empirical realm. The researcher quite agrees with Kant’s demarcation. The domain of mystical and spiritual power of word seems not to be within the bounds of empirical realm, and seems not to be within the domain within which human reason can attain objective knowledge. Hence, the issue of attaching spiritual and mystical power to some spoken words is a matter of belief. Subjecting such to the tribunal of human reason may not yield positive result. Human rationality may not be able to establish convincingly the reality or non-reality of the mystical power of words in traditional Igbo world-view.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious from the study that the ‘traditional Igbo world’ is a world of spiritual forces. The study makes it very clear that, in traditional Igbo world-view, ‘word’ has mystical power. The concept of ‘force’ is a fundamental aspect of traditional Igbo world-view. Every being is a ‘force’; and force is the essence of being. In the idea of force, man occupies a central position. This is as a result of the fact that man, through the use of words, can influence the life-force of other things. Thus, the practice of magic among the traditional Igbos involves the use of word ‘force’. No medicine is effective without ‘words’. It becomes obvious from the discussion that, in traditional Igbo world-view, words are not just for communication. It is a ‘force’ which man uses to activate and harness the latent and frozen powers in things. This explains why words have magical and mystical powers. Most Igbos do not subject the belief in mystical power of word to critical evaluation. Thus, this study subjected the claims of the Igbos to philosophical scrutiny. It discovers that, from philosophical perspective, it is fashionable to argue that there is no necessary connection between spoken words and the claimed effect of such words. However, the study concludes that the belief in mystical power of ‘word’ is not within the empirical realm, and so, human reason may not be able to obtain certain knowledge in that realm. Igbos have firm belief in the existence of such spiritual and mystical power of word, and such is very fundamental in understanding the Igbo conception of the world.

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International Journal of Arts, Culture and Sustainable Development, Volume 5, Number 2, 2015


