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## USE, MEANING AND FUNCTION OF IDOMA MARITAL PROVERBS

**Abstract:** The main thrust of this paper is to analyze selected marital proverbs in Idoma. These are proverbs which relate to issues in marriage and that directly and indirectly apply to other situations in human life. It discusses the functional appreciation of each proverb and the lesson that an individual or the community stands to gain from these proverbs. Ten Idoma marital proverbs are translated and analyzed from the functional point of view. In this light, the paper examines appropriate application of the proverbs with focus on the lessons derived from each. Marital proverbs are applicable in varying situations in the family and the society in general. Such situations are in relationships between men and women, children in the family and in the community siblings, friends, relations and neighbours. This suggests therefore that marital proverbs are useful in many situations in and outside the family, as well as in the community at large and can be applied in situations of misunderstanding for amicable resolutions.

**Keywords:** African, community, culture, family, function, Idioma, meaning, marriage, situation, society, structural-functional theory, women

### **Introduction**

Idoma people are found in the lower Benue of Nigeria where they are spread in ten out of the thirty Local Government Areas which constitute Benue State. As a group which appreciates traditional norms and tradition, the proverb as a traditional oral genre is frequently employed by Idoma people in daily situations which warrant its usage. They are employed in resolving misunderstandings, quarrels and also for stressing a powerful view in whatever situation the proverb is applied. It is expected to perform some desired functions. Particular attention is hereby paid in this paper to use, meaning and functions derivable from Idoma marital proverbs whose background of coinage is the marriage institution. Marriage is an institution highly respected and held

with high degree of significance among Idoma people. Marriage promotes unity, good behaviour, sanctity, sincerity, honesty, good morals, love and care amongst others. Proverbs provide impetus to speech. The proverb is an expression clothed with deep meaning in a compressed statement. Each proverb according to Nwadike (1989:31) “has something to underscore such as caution, praise, encouragements, discussion, children’s upbringing, self-control, thrift, hard work etc”. Traditionally, a proverb is a wise saying which is not carelessly used in speech but when necessary in resolution of conflicts as well as instilling some lesson on people or correcting them in family discussions, conversations, social gathering or at cultural meetings for purpose of emphasis and to make stronger points. They make people reason with opinions of others. A proverb is formulated bearing in mind the thinking and values of the people or community from which it originates as has been acknowledged by the various definitions of the term proverb made by proverb scholars.

As a very versatile and articulate proverb scholar, Wolfgang Mieder (1985:19) defines a proverb as a:

statement of the folk which contains truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form.

The proverb is said to contain words of wisdom. These words of wisdom are put together to enhance deeper meaning and as put by Mieder above, they reflect the people’s traditional values and views which include their social life, belief, and traditional hierarchy.

Social units in Idomaland consist of the family, the lineage, the village and the district. Apart from the social units above, there are also age groups. The age groups perform functions such as promoting unity among folks, community service, projects and communal works.

In family life among the Idoma people are to be found both monogamous and polygamous homes. The practice of polygamy where a man marries more than one wife is actually not comfortable to the womenfolk. It is in fact detested by women especially those who find themselves in polygamous homes in their married lives. This is because they feel cheated by the man who has to share his love feelings amongst his wives. This feeling pushes

the womenfolk into nursing hatred against one another, they become “passive-aggressive in nature and transfer patriarchal domination onto their co-wife as a form of challenge” (Bashir & Amali:18). Sometimes there are co-wives, where the man has probably three or four wives. This results into conflict more often than not. Polygamy, though still practiced in Idomaland, is not a welcome reality by the women and they regard it as “the most glaringly inequitable and sexist feature of traditional African society” (Frank 1987:18). No woman loves polygamy, it is only tolerated where the woman finds herself entangled in it.

In all these social units in the community, proverbs are generously used in various situations in line with their societal values and norms for tailoring behaviour and checking excesses of people. A major function of proverbs is as stated by Bwala (2012:460):

One of the major functions of folklore, especially the proverb, is that it is a mirror or a reflection of the collective attitude and ideas of the people or the grammar of their values.

Societal values are encapsulated in proverbs, thereby projecting the people’s traditional ways and values. They are commonly used in discussions amongst elders of the community to drive points home and for emphasis. Omijeh (1968:40) opines that proverbs are “indispensable in conversation and discussion or in supporting one’s arguments”. This attests to the important role of the proverb in daily discussions in the traditional community. Proverbs also have “various functions as a medium of offering advice, a teaching device, insult, praise, and lament or as an allusion” (Peters 1971:98). Further to these, proverbs are employed in judgments or arguments between parties as put by Argungu (2013:33):

Nearly all dialogues, conversations or discussions in Africa whether in rural or urban settings, are replete with proverbs, almost confirming the oft-quoted Igbo saying that proverb is the palm oil with which words are eaten.

It is widely known and accepted among the Idoma people that correct application of proverbs in situations of contending issues goes a long way in resolving conflicts or offering advice. This

idea is also reflected in the proverbs analyzed in this paper. The proverb lore is an aspect of literature, and literature mirrors the societal way of life as put by Achufusi (1986:1):

African traditional literature like literatures of other countries or nationalities is a product of man's long reflections on life. It has been moulded out of personal experience in life, his struggles with the land, his movements from one part of his country to the other, conflicts...

Marital proverbs in Idoma address issues related to marriage as well as other situations outside marriage. The marriage institution, as put by Yahaya and Abdullahi (2010:25), is "one of the basic avenues through which relationship between men and women is formulated and strengthened". The value and important function of proverbs in this formulating and strengthening process cannot be overemphasized. Proverbs impart lessons, offer didactic functions, emphasize points or issues, thereby significantly adding impetus to speech in resolving conflicts or arguments. This point is affirmed by Darthorne (1966:70):

Proverbs (like all other forms of oral literature) have their didactic function, and this is to help people cope with a situation as it arises by regarding it in the light of something that has occurred before.

Further to this, Kabir (2012:526) regards proverbs to be:

An effective mode of expressions not only because of their truthfulness but also because they are philosophical in nature and tend to awaken a sense of responsibility in the speakers and the listeners.

Proverbs are regularly employed among the Idoma people in discussions because "they are a rich source of imagery and succinct expression" (Finnegan 1972:389). The proverb, apart from functioning in didactic ways and educating the people on cultural values as reflected in them, also "displays enormous potential to commenting on a situation, ridiculing the speaker, criticizing another's action or comportment" (Okoh 2008:34). We consequently present in this paper ten marital proverbs. Each of the marital proverbs is written in the Idoma language and translated

into English. The analysis cryptly presents the meaning of each proverb and appropriate context for usage as well as the function derivable from it. Like African proverbs generally, Idoma marital proverbs have important functions deriveable from their usage. Subsequently the importance and functions of Idoma marital proverbs are here analyzed. Marital proverbs as presented in this work may not necessarily be used or function in marital situations alone but are also applied to other social situations or structures which exist in the community as analyzed here. Just like folklore generally, proverbs “mirror a society’s way of life in terms of its social structure and its method of regulating social behaviour” (Yahaya 1979:1). It serves as mirror of the society’s life which is reflected in Idoma marital proverbs as presented and analyzed in this paper.

#### ***Theoretical Framework***

Various theories exist upon which analysis of proverbs or any other oral genre can be premised. This study on marital proverbs in Idomaland examines the proverbs and analyses their meanings and functions. The need therefore arises for the theory applied here in the analysis to focus on achieving the main objective of this paper, thus the adoption of the Radcliffe-Brown structural-functional theory. This theory focuses on functions as derived from the oral genre. When a proverb is said to somebody, or it is applied in discussions, the one to whom it is directed at is expected to draw meaning from it, as well as lessons learnt. Marital proverbs are therefore applied to intervene when there are misunderstandings or where certain points are expected to be strongly made for good impact. The proverb also clarifies issues with its power of language which provides deeper meaning by way of metaphorical expressions. The Radcliffe-Brown structural-functionalist theory examines the relevance, significance and function of this oral genre, the proverb lore. It focuses on social structures which moderate societal issues. It views the society as a whole and not as individuals, and focuses on functions derivable from societal elements. These relate to the people’s culture, values, tradition and their environment. Each proverb in this paper is written in Idoma, translated to English and analyzed highlighting its meaning and the functions derivable from each. The Radcliffe-Brown structural-functional theory

observes society from the functions derived from its contributions in maintaining unity and upholding their culture through harmonious living.

The analysis of the marital proverbs in this paper is therefore on the premise of this structural-functional theory. The proverbs concern women, men and family life generally. It is a fact that women in Idomaland are rated as second-class status in the family. This asserts that they have to be submissive to their husbands, a traditional position held seriously by Idoma men generally. Men are the bread winners in the family and so are armed with authority, power and control. As a result, "male power in our society is expressed in economic terms ... women's activity in the home has been undervalued, at the same time their labour has been controlled by men" (Mann 1994:42). So we may well ask, how does the proverb come to assert its role, its situation of use, and the lesson it offers? These are tenets upon which the analysis in this research work is done in order to assert the use, meaning and function of the marital proverbs presented and analyzed in the paper. This study reveals that the proverb adds impetus to speech, makes expressions more meaningful, is didactic thereby correcting societal vices, teaches morals, advises people, and it is instructive and directs the mind.

### ***Literature Review***

Various studies have been carried out by scholars globally in the area of proverbs. The African proverb has been studied and the proverb lore has enjoyed much scholarly research. Some of this work on proverbs that relates to this present study are here reviewed.

Amali (2000) portrays the image of women in traditional Idoma society as expressed through Idoma proverbs. It highlights the importance of women in the traditional society where women are seen and believed to be the heart of societal living and the society may not be able to exist without them. Some Idoma proverbs analyzed in the paper attest to this position and portray women as care givers in the family, engineers in facilitating economic, political as well as social well-being of members of her family and also facilitators of religious ideals in the society. As contained in these Idoma proverbs, the place of women in Idoma society is a significant and an appreciable one. The socie-

ty holds her in high regards and accords her such regards as exemplified in the proverbs. Amali in this paper presents and analyses twenty-six Idoma proverbs which all attest to the significance of the woman in Idoma traditional society. Each proverb highlights the meaning and context of its usage.

Angela (1998) analyses various categories of Mernyang oral literature. One of these categories is the proverb which the writer asserts to be one of the regularly used oral genres of the Mernyang people. The paper observes that the proverb is used in daily conversations and it plays several important roles, some of which are in their customary procedures during disputes and in social gatherings.

The use of proverbs in the dispensation of justice in the traditional setting is discussed in Amali (1997). He observes that proverbs play very active and effective roles in this process of the administration of justice. With the main focus of the study being on the Idoma people, Amali highlights and stresses the power of Idoma proverbs in the determination of justice where the correct employment and application of this very important oral genre x-rays the issue at hand and brings in clarity for better understanding. The proverbs are therefore applied as an intervening tool in the resolution of misunderstandings and the parties involved get clearer pictures of the issues and decisions made.

In his work Ohaeto (1994) portrays the importance attached to the Igbo proverb on the issue of power. Studies of various Igbo scholars are used to highlight critical insights into Igbo proverbs. He believes power to be a metaphor which provides a gateway for understanding the proverbs and that metaphors are quite valuable in the coinage of proverbs. Proverbs of Igbo extraction are elaborately analyzed to project their impact and power in their context of usage.

In his paper Nwadike (1989) discusses Igbo proverbs on a perspective of their usefulness, derivation, origin, users and functions. He likens it to pregnancy such that the speech in proverbial expression is pregnant and the meaning is the pregnancy. He observes that proverbs are derived from our natural environments, cultural experiences such as beliefs, norms and values. Further to this, he asserts that Igbo proverbs originate from four main sources, namely from the ancestors, observations, social circles and Igbo praise names. According to this paper, users of

proverbs are mainly of adult age who employ them in praise of people, assert caution in correcting children and such other functions. The paper ends with a suggestion for the preservation of the Igbo proverb.

The main genres of African traditional literature which include prose narratives, the riddle, elegiac poetry, religious poetry, myths, legends and proverbs are the focus of Achufusi's (1980) paper. It x-rays these genres as used in African traditional set-ups. These genres portray African cultural life and attest to the existence of African literature. Understanding the African way of life and literature are significantly derived through these African oral genres. Achufusi views the proverb to be a concise form of speech which adds meaning to speech for a weightier expression.

Amali (1984) analyses Idoma proverbs with a focus on explicating literary qualities contained in them. It contains a collection of three hundred Idoma proverbs which are translated and analyzed. The work observes the traditional and significant role of proverbs in the Idoma society. In the daily happenings and activities of the people, a lot of things may go wrong and many others are well done. Behaviours of people may also be questionable and various societal ills and vices occur. The proverb is employed as a tool in speech to check excesses of people in various behavioral attitudes as guided by societal norms and values. In this work, Amali highlights and discusses various themes of proverbs, some of which are the significant role of women in society, the image of the child, precautions and reciprocity.

The work by Skinner (1980) presents samples of Hausa literature and oral genres with translations of the examples presented. Aspects of Hausa literature discussed include Tatsuniyoyi (folktales), Karin Magana (Proverbs), Praise songs, Poetry Waka (Songs), Littattafin Hira (Fiction), and Kirari (Precise-Songs) of the Hausa culture. Other aspects of Hausa literature discussed in the book include Islam and the language which has contributed to the Hausa people's zeal to hold on to the survival and growth of their Hausa culture. Of more interest to this present work is the aspect of proverbs, which directly relates to it. Skinner observes the importance of proverbs by referring to them as powerful expressions used at various gatherings and significantly during courting processes.



Omijeh (1968), in stressing the significance of proverbs, refers to them as indispensable in various situations which he outlines. One of these situations of the use of proverbs is their employment even in Bini names, whereby such names speak the mind of the people in naming their offsprings. He refers to them as proverb-names. He analyses what each category reflects, such as Bini's belief in predestination, individual responsibility, future brightness, indifference of outsiders, conduct, value and human behaviour.

From the foregone review of related literature, it is imperative to note that the proverb is an important aspect of oral literature which has attracted considerable research to highlight its significance. Idoma proverbs have also benefitted from such studies and have been brought to the limelight. Consequently, the Idoma marital proverbs selected for this work are presented and analysed.

#### ***Data Presentation and Analysis***

Fifteen marital proverbs of the Idoma people of lower Benue are here presented and analyzed. Proverbs play quite significant roles in daily life situations and activities.

Amali (1997:28) asserts that "amongst the Idoma people of Benue state, proverbs play an important role". Such importance of the usage of proverbs is highlighted in the following presentation, interpretation and analysis of Idoma marital proverbs.

1. Idoma – Oce noo lonyooligwu  
aa anu jigbeno gee  
gwuta mlanu le a (p. 13)

English – The person who has the wife  
with the hunched back is the  
one who knows how to lie with her

A wife is expected to be close to her husband and for both of them to enjoy the spirit of togetherness from each other. However, a husband may not be very comfortable with a hunched back wife because the hunch constitutes a kind of obstacle as to how she can lie down. She is therefore limited to specific positions. This is a difficult situation to manage. However, as put by the proverb, a man who finds himself in such a fix knows best how to manage it. The proverb can be interpreted to mean that any-

body who is directly involved in any issue knows how best to handle it.

This means that one may find oneself in an unusual situation but should not be discouraged. The proverb encourages people to manage any situation they find themselves in order to yield the best result possible, or to achieve what is desired. This proverb can be effectively applied in situations of confusion, unexpected happenings, difficulties, or in family-life situations, where there may be misunderstandings between the spouses which may lead to regrets by either party. This proverb if applied in such a situation would definitely serve as a reminder that one should adjust to whatever condition one finds himself or herself. This therefore directs that tolerance, patience and focus should thrive while problems confronting a person are taken and accepted in good faith. It simply teaches a lesson of “claiming what is yours”.

2. Idoma – Itodo kanoo lebeebe buje  
anoo lotu ce ta uhugbonyanoo

English – The porcupine says: I have every  
part of my body in thorns  
but I have left open my chest  
because of my wife (p. 33)

This proverb emphasizes love and the significance attached to a wife in Idomaland. Despite having its entire body covered in thorns, the porcupine realizes the need to have his chest bare and free of thorns to enable it to embrace his wife. He puts away thorns from the chest in order to accommodate her for their mutual union. This also goes further to call for the need for understanding between a man and his wife for peaceful co-existence. Such understanding would keep off issues that may result in misunderstandings and quarrels in the family. As put by Yahaya and Abdullahi (2010:25), “The family is sometimes bedeviled by certain forces which profoundly militate against its peaceful existence”. This proverb can also be applied to encourage people to make sacrifices for the benefit of each other, and also to indicate value attached to anything.

The proverbs can be interpreted to mean giving consideration to others in all dealings. That allows room to accommodate fellow-beings in decisions made for selflessness to thrive. So

finding yourself in the comfort of any place, the individual is advised by this proverb to allow room for others to enjoy or be accommodated in whatever it is that you are involved with. It directs and encourages people to accord each other their due regards.

3. Idoma – Onyabei fioine a

English – A wife is placed in higher esteem than a brother (p. 33)

The literal meaning of this proverb signifies the degree of appreciation accorded to a wife in Idomaland. It specifies that a wife is a worthier person to a man than his siblings. It therefore encourages a total commitment on the part of the man to take good care of his wife first and foremost before his siblings. It places the wife all above his siblings. It reminds siblings of the need for them to note the importance of a wife and there is no contest of who is more important to a man between siblings and a wife. Furthermore, this proverb decries taking undue advantage over other people in any situation. This means that everybody must bear in mind his right to anything and not to trample upon other people's rights to gain advantage over them. In situations of such crooked angles to issues and cutting corners, the proverb can be applied to remind the person involved of the need for him to consider others, and place such a person in the right direction.

4. Idoma – Ikinabo konya noo oo moin nana  
Enyoma noo coikpo oo je

English – The tortoise says. Even though my wife has not delivered a child, the mere fact that the amniotic fluid has passed between her thighs is good enough (p. 67)

This proverb can be interpreted to mean "half a bread is better than none". When a person attains any level of achievement without necessarily getting to the maximum, he should be appreciative of whatever he gets. This is to say that one must not have all that one desires before he is satisfied. Relating this to family situations too, it is said to childless couples to calm them down from being tensed up and anxious. In Idoma traditional society,

marriages are looked at beyond passion, as the major benefit looked forward to in any marriage is to produce children, as put by Yahaya and Abdullahi (2010:25):

Procreation, from one generation to another, which happens in peaceful and culturally bound manner is also another type of very important function of marriage.

So a childless couple would be seen not to be fulfilling the basic function of marriage in traditional Idoma. However, a lesson derived from the proverb above suggests that not getting what you desire does not warrant a “do or die” situation. The proverb teaches the need for patience, endurance and gratitude. It suggests that we should accept what fate offers us and appreciate any gesture offered us in good faith in any circumstance of life endeavours. So in situations where we need to encourage anybody who may feel dampened by getting little of what he desires, the proverb can be said to him to reason. Even farmers in their yields may be dissatisfied with the outcome of their harvests, asserting that they should have had more probably if the rains were more or if fertilizer had been applied. A speaker can state this proverb to the farmer so that he remembers to appreciate what he has got, and make do with it.

5. Idoma – Oba wugu konya a

English – A husband is the respect (source of respect) of a woman

Respect is held in Idoma traditional society with a great significance. It is based on age, gender and social status. Every category of the members of the community desires and deserves to be granted respect as due to it. The proverb here can be interpreted to mean that women are no equals to men. The success of a woman is tied to her husband and her achievements are said to be due to his pedigree. Sometimes, too, there is the tendency for people not to accept that others are ahead of them in status both in the family and in the larger community, in social programmes, activities and beyond. The important function desirable from this proverb is that it is a reminder to whom it is said, to realize or probably accept that he has people above him and he earns respect by respecting those ahead of him.

Similarly, the proverb above is a reminder to women that a husband is not to be undermined because his successes, achievements and respect are equally for the wife. It suggests that the womenfolk must work towards upholding the respect of men to earn theirs as well. Further to the above, the proverb may be applied to a man to ginger him to live up to his responsibility as the head of the family. He is expected to serve as a protective umbrella to his wife, thereby standing as a source of pride to her. This can also be interpreted to mean that a woman is expected to marry to earn respect in the Idoma community, if she remains unmarried she loses that respect which would have been due to her if she were married to a man. This further highlights the suppression that women experience, having their successes, respect, achievements and whatever tied to men, as if women are incapable of earning all the above on their own.

6. Idoma – Onya ikwobaa

English – The wife is the cause of the death of the husband (p.33)

It is believed in Idoma tradition that a man's life revolves around his wife. She is expected to be cooperative to him in running the family. Where she fails to live up to this expectation and undermines the role of her husband, many things may go wrong. She has to encourage him in his pursuit of activities in running the family, advise him on issues in family life, and stand by him always. Doing otherwise on all the above means her taking an antagonistic posture. She disrespects him, is careless about offering him assistance in whatever way, like in the farm, in the home, not according him love and respect. Having an uncooperative wife can push a man into a helpless condition of health. The result is unpalatable and better imagined. This proverb can be said to a stubborn woman whom the community may observe to be too assertive and uncaring to her husband. Another situation in which the proverb can be used is where a woman is adulterous. In Idoma traditional society, the traditional Alekwu god strikes a man who is discovered to be aware his wife commits adultery yet disregards it. Adultery is a grave sin in Idomaland and is highly detested if committed by women, yet pushed away by a wave of the hand when it is the menfolk that is involved.

The proverb may also be used to alert or remind a person that the one closest to him or her is the most dangerous to him or her. This is because such a person has close and easy access to you and thus is capable of doing anything against you at will. The proverb puts you on alert to be conscious of the possibility of your most loved or close relation committing an evil act against you, and the proverbs also calls for necessary precautions to be taken.

7. Idoma – Akpaabana legba de kpellalala  
Onyanu kebo flolololo

English – When the male thunder shouts kpallalala  
Its wife says peace flololo (p.46)

The Idoma tradition holds that thunder is both of the masculine and feminine genders. Thunder sounds can be loud and powerful or soft and not very loud. According to Idoma people, the loud sound is often referred to as the male thunder while the soft sound is the female. Whenever the male thunder strikes “kpallalala”, which is interpreted to be high and a demonstration of the tone of anger, the female thunder sounds in a softer and lower tone “flololo” signifying calmness. The import of this proverb is that where there is conflict or misunderstanding between two parties, there is bound to be heightened tension. When this occurs, one of the parties is advised to calm down and be unaggressive. The proverb can be used to resolve the misunderstanding and bring the people involved to calm down to an amicable resolution.

The major function derived from the haulage of this proverb is that it calms down parties in disagreements, misunderstandings and quarrels for a peaceful talk to resolve issues. This is so because it reminds them that where the parties are in heated arguments, there can be no discussion for a mutual resolution. It therefore seeks that patience and understanding should prevail.

Similarly, in the family circle, when a spouse is angry and speaks in an angry tone, the other should calm down and sue for peace. Traditionally, the Idoma woman lies below her husband in family hierarchy and as such is expected to act like the “female thunder”. This is, however, not to say that it is the female that would always be calm. The proverb applies to men too and

can be applied where he yells in anger against anybody within or outside his family. It is therefore not necessarily a proverb used only in the family but in any situation, anywhere where there is need to calm down tension and make peace between disagreeing people.

8. Idoma – Eca koba anu weca konya a  
 English – The insult of the husband  
 is the insult of the wife (p. 101)

This proverb is similar to No. 5 which states that “a husband is the respect of a woman”. Similarly, the insult of a husband also falls on the woman. Since a husband and his wife are seen to have come together as a couple, they have become one. What affects one affects the other. This means they have to work together and not to undermine each other. The husband as the head of his family works hard to live up to his responsibility, and his wife stands by him to achieve his goals. The proverb can be said to a woman where she is seen to be unperturbed by what concerns her husband. She is therefore reminded by this proverb to realize that she cannot be detached from what affects her husband.

Furthermore, it can also be applied where there is need for group work and unity. Every member of the group is by this proverb advised to be committed to working as a team. It means that what affects one, affects the other. So if there is no team work and there is failure, the failure is everybody’s.

9. Idoma – Okpliconya tugece kalo gwuta  
 anu lohi fiagoodo aanca a  
 English – Old woman shift a bit  
 That we may lie down  
 Is better than an empty bed.

This proverb is similar in meaning to proverb (4) which points to making do with what you have and value it. It means that a half of something is better than nothing. So in a person’s desire to have something, where he fails to get his ultimate desire, he should make do with what is available to him, and make the best out of it.

Furthermore, a family cannot exist without a woman. It takes two to make a couple. Where there is no woman in a family, it is incomplete. The proverb above reaffirms the popular saying that “half a bread is better than none”. The old woman referred to in the proverb can be seen as “half a bread” in a literal interpretation. Since she is old, she may not be as useful and effective in the family as a younger wife would be, but it is still better to have the old woman than having no woman at all since the family is incomplete without a woman. In attesting to the above, Amali (2000:27) states that:

The Idoma society believes in a well-organized and productive family. This cannot be achieved without women being fully involved. The society therefore conceives women as indispensable. A family without a wife cannot last long.

In the light of the above, the proverb suggests that even an old woman has a role to play in family life. In the absence of a woman in the house which renders the bed rather empty, having an old woman to occupy the bed space makes a difference. The proverb can also be applied to people to suggest to them to make do with what they have, be contented with what they have on hand and appreciate it. In the absence of a vibrant woman who can satisfy the man perfectly well, the old woman may well serve in a little way. Again it teaches us to be dynamic by adjusting to situations as we find them and be able to make headways for our own betterment.

10. Idoma – Anya ole anya onma,  
Anya oci noo kwoonma bi  
I yon onma le ca.

English – Women are the home  
Women are the fence  
The poles which hold the fence  
If the poles are not available  
The fence would collapse (p. 33)

The import of this proverb, metaphorically put, refers to women serving as pillars to a building (in this case family). The role played by women in the family cannot be overemphasized. The



woman is accorded a very significant recognition in an Idoma family. The proverb asserts that a family is held together by a woman. So her absence from any home crumbles the home. She is likened to pillars which hold the stilts of a home together. If those pillars are not available, the home cannot stand. This proverb can be cited to emphasize the important role played by anybody in a given situation. It also encourages the persons to whom the proverb is being said to live up to their role or bidding in whatever situation they find themselves.

The proverb also is useful in advising mothers. The emphasis is on the woman who should realize from the proverb that her presence and participation is needed in the upbringing of children. If she is unavailable, things go bad with the kids. The proverb is assertive on the significance of women generally in the society.

### ***Summary***

Idoma marital proverbs perform significant social functions. The proverbs analyzed in this paper highlight functions derivable from the application of each. Proverbs are employed to enhance meaning in speech, according them depth in meaning. The proverbs, applied in clothed language, performs appreciable functions such as encouraging the individual or group in a particular condition as in proverbs (1) and (4) analyzed in this paper. They emphasise the need to have the mind to expect any uncertainty in life and have the ability to absorb it. The need to be conscious of other people's rights as well as having the mind to accommodate others around you is reflected in Idoma marital proverbs as in examples (2) and (3). They encourage to accord others what is due to them and not to be selfish. A wife is accorded high degree of respect. She is held in high esteem and even placed above siblings to her husband, as exemplified in proverbs (3) and (10). In proverb (10), it is stressed that no home stands without the presence of a woman. This asserts the importance of a wife to any man, and this importance is highlighted and reflected in Idoma marital proverbs. The need to make do with what you have, and appreciate it in good faith is reflected in examples (4) and (9). These proverbs discourage ingratitude and greed. Where the desire is not achievable, one is expected to accept what is on hand, because "a bird in hand is worth two in the bush". Respect is an

aspect in traditional Idoma society that is taken very seriously. Every member of the community is entitled to one form of respect or the other and the individual should be accorded his or her due respect. Women, for instance, enjoy respect from the status of their husbands as asserted in examples (5) and (8). She also takes and suffers his insults. Infidelity is detested among Idoma people, and this is proclaimed in some of their marital proverbs as in proverb (6). Emphasis is made by way of a husband facing the consequences of his wife's infidelity by, with punishment from the traditional gods. Some of the marital proverbs in Idoma are used to resolve crises or misunderstandings between parties. This is reflected in example (7) where the proverb sues for calm and the exercise of patience. It further suggests that when two people are tensed and are at each other's throats, one of the parties should calm down.

Application of marital proverbs is useful in various situations in the society. Though they are marital proverbs, their application does not only concern marital issues but also across various other social situations.

### ***Conclusion***

From the analysis above, it is clear that marital proverbs in Idoma are applicable in various situations which cut across the social sectors of the people's daily-life activities. Women are projected as of great significance in the home. They are seen as the major poles which hold a house firmer and keep it in place. These proverbs emphasize the fact that no home can exist without a woman. Some of the proverbs focus on peaceful approaches to resolving crises. In such situations, the proverb is hauled to remind an aggrieved person to calm nerves down for an amicable talk to resolve the crisis. The people's way of life, values, morals and traditions are also reflected in marital proverbs. For instance, infidelity is seriously detested and severely punished. The extent of the seriousness of this crime is demonstrated in the proverb which suggests a man suffering the consequences of his wife's infidelity where he has knowledge of her act and ignores her or looks the other way. This study x-rays the functions of Idoma marital proverbs and holds that the proverbs are very useful in their applications in the communal life of the people in their dai-

ly interactions, discussions, love life, children's upbringing, marital life, love life, traditions and culture.

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