

An anthropolinguistic perspective to bride-wealth discourse among the Igbo of Nigeria

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Abstract

Some feminists argue that the payment of bride-wealth in marriage reduces married women to pieces of commodities that are sold in the market. On the other hand, some married men retort, “nwaanyi m ji ego m nuta’ (a woman I married with my money) in the face of a minor provocation. The attitude of both sexes on bride-wealth is the motivation for this study which sets out to investigate the trend of discourse on payment of bride-wealth between the families of a maiden about to be given out in marriage and that of the groom seeking for her hand in marriage, with a view to finding out the major people involved in the interaction, the reason(s) behind the payment of the bride-wealth, the bride-wealth paid for different categories of women, and the difference between the payment of bride-wealth in time past and at present. Five towns in Idemili and Nnewi Local Government Areas, both in Anambra State were purposively chosen for the research. Mixed method was used to source data. Findings reveal that very close relations from the families of the bride and groom to-be, are involved in the discourse. Sticks with tags representing some amount of money are used in the negotiation. The sticks are kept on the ground so that the ancestral spirits will be witnesses to the negotiation and the seal of the marriage. The communication is done both verbally and non-verbally. In time past, the father of the maiden looked forward to the bride-wealth and ties whatever he gets from it to a project. Presently, a token is paid as bride-wealth to seal the marital relationship. For the Igbo, the bride-wealth is what gives a woman prestige in her marital home and what is paid depends on the agreement of the town of the maiden and not necessarily on her qualifications. In a situation where the marriage failed, it is the return of the exact money paid as bride-wealth to the bride’s family that marks the end of the marital union. The study concludes that the Igbo attach high value to marriage, hence the involvement of the two families in the negotiation and the sealing of the relationship with a bride-wealth. They do not in any way see the payment of bride-wealth as a market transaction, rather, as a prestigious tradition. Such understanding will go a long way in correcting the misconception of some folks on the concept of bride-wealth.

Keywords: marriage, bride-wealth, negotiation, market transaction, ancestral spirits

Résumé

Des féministes sont d’avis que lorsqu’on verse une somme pour la dot dans le mariage, cela réduit les femmes mariées à des marchandises vendues sur le marché. Par ailleurs, certains hommes mariés réagissent face à la moindre provocation mineure en disant « nwaanyi m ji ego m nuta » (une femme que j’ai épousée avec Mon argent). L’attitude des deux sexes à l’égard de la valeur matérielle de la mariée est la motivation de cette étude qui se propose d’étudier la tendance du discours sur la valeur matérielle de la mariée. L’étude a pour but d’examiner la tendance du discours sur le paiement de la dot entre les familles de la jeune fille qui est sur le point d’être donnée en mariage et celle du mari qui cherche à obtenir sa main en mariage, en vue de découvrir les principales personnes impliquées dans l’interaction, la ou les raison(s) derrière le paiement de la dot, la dot payée pour les différentes catégories de femmes, et la différence entre le paiement de la dot dans le passé et aujourd’hui. Cinq villes dans les zones de gouvernement local d’Idemili et de Nnewi, toutes deux dans l’État d’Anambra, ont été choisies pour la recherche. Une méthode mixte a été utilisée pour recueillir les données. Les résultats révèlent que des relations très proches des familles de la future mariée et du futur marié sont impliquées dans le discours. Des bâtons avec des étiquettes représentant une certaine somme d’argent sont utilisés dans la négociation. Les bâtons sont maintenus sur le sol afin que les esprits ancestraux soient témoins de la négociation et du sceau du mariage. La communication se fait à la fois verbalement et non verbalement. Autrefois, le père de la jeune fille attendait avec impatience la fortune de la mariée et liait ce qu’il en tirait à un projet. Aujourd’hui, un jeton est versé comme dot pour sceller la relation conjugale. Pour les Igbos, la dot est ce qui donne à une femme du prestige dans son foyer conjugal et ce qui est payé dépend de l’accord de la ville de la jeune fille, et pas nécessairement de ses qualifications. Dans une situation où le mariage a échoué, c’est le retour à la famille de la mariée de l’argent

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exact versé comme dot à la mariée qui marque la fin de l'union conjugale. L'étude conclut que les Igbo attachent une grande valeur au mariage d'où l'implication des deux familles dans la négociation et le scellement de la relation par une dot. Ils ne considèrent en aucun cas le versement de la dot comme une transaction commerciale, mais plutôt comme une tradition prestigieuse. Une telle compréhension contribuera grandement à corriger les fausses idées que certaines se font sur le concept de la dot.

Mots clés : mariage, valeur matérielle de la mariée, négociation, transaction commerciale, esprits ancestraux

INTRODUCTION

Marriage means different things to different people hence ; Kottak (2002 : 214) asserts that 'No definition of marriage is broad enough to apply easily to all societies and situations.' This study has to do with the Igbo ; therefore, marriage will be defined as it applies to the Igbo society.

Marriage is the joining of a man and a girl child or woman, their families, kindred and in some cases, their communities. Okafor is cited by Ibekwe (2017) as noting that "in Igbo society, two persons do not marry ; two families do. By their very nature, Igbo marriages are a community affair." Anedo & Anedo (2017) lend credence to the above statement thus :

"Contraction of marriage between a man and a woman is not the business of the two persons alone but the business of families of parties, their friends and kindred...once the marriage is consummated, the lady so married is not owned only by the man she is married to but by the entire family and relations of the man. She is therefore called *nwunye m* (my wife) by everyone from the man's extended family. She belongs alone to the man only on bed...all the persons from the extended family of the bride, call the man, *ogo m* (my in-law)" (Anedo & Anedo, *ibid.*: 70).

The above excerpt describes the marriage relationship among the Igbo. Marriage is a way of establishing a relationship between two parties. There are some things that must be put in place before the consummation of marriage. One of such is the payment of bride-wealth. Bride-wealth is very vital in every marriage among the Igbo. Observation shows that there are some controversies on the issue of the payment of bride-wealth. While some men see it as a way to boost their ego that they paid to have their wives, some feminists frown seriously at it, objecting that it is tantamount to objectifying women and considering them as commodities to be sold in the market. Ezeifeke (2016) whose work is on gender stereotypes in selected Igbo idioms, notes that:

"Some idiomatic expressions construct the conceptual frame of WOMAN AS COMMODITY for trade and MAN AS BUYER. This mercantile metaphor is hinged on the customary bride price paid on the head of a woman by her betrothed before she is given out in marriage. Thus, the woman as a commodity displayed in a market represents, as soon as she is bought and paid for, the source of wealth to her father's house. This transaction equally signifies loss of wealth for her would-be husband. The amount of bride price determines the worth of the bride...This mercantile act is transacted and a compromise reached in the price to be paid. This transaction is called... *Ika akirika* or *iru aku nwaanyi* 'canvassing for price' (Ezeifeke, *ibid.*: 160).

The salient points from the above excerpt include : 'customary bride price', 'woman as commodity', 'woman as a source of wealth to her father's house', 'loss of wealth for her would-be husband', and 'amount of bride price determines the worth of the bride'. The above points and the day- to-day observations of some other feminists which center on bride-wealth serve as motivation for this study.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this study was collected through a mixed method. The researcher is a woman. Among the Igbo, women are not permitted to be part of bride-wealth negotiation. It is based on this premise that the researcher sought the assistance of five males who recorded at different times, the bride-wealth negotiations in five communities in Idemili and Nnewi local government areas. The communities include : Alor and Nnobi in Idemili South, Nkpor and Abatete in Idemili North, and Nnewi, the only town in Nnewi North. The recorded messages which were in Igbo, were listened to, written down and transcribed into the English language. The research assistants who were eye witnesses at the functions explained paralinguistic parts which were not part of their recordings to the researcher for a clearer understanding of the interactions. Observation from the data shows that but for dialectal differences, the process of negotiation is same in the selected areas, hence, the researcher's decision to use only two of the recordings for illustration in the study.

Additionally, the researcher interviewed elders and leaders from different kindreds, to find out the reasons behind the payment of bride-wealth, the people involved in the bargain, if the academic qualifications of the maiden or her beauty are contributory factors on the bride-wealth to be paid, and the difference between the payment of bride-wealth in time past and at present. All these form the data for this study.

MARRIAGE AND BRIDE-WEALTH AMONG THE IGBO

Marriage among the Igbo as stated earlier is the joining of two families, kindreds and in some cases, communities. No father pays attention to a suitor who visits in the company of friends. The Igbo tradition is that a suitor must come with few close relatives to disclose his intentions. On the part of the maiden, her close relatives must also be involved at every stage of the marital process. This is because a child/adult belongs to the community and they have to be involved at every stage of the person's development. The tradition of communal involvement in marriage is still upheld by the Igbo. Additionally, one giving out his daughter in marriage is a way of extending his lineage, therefore the need for both families to be involved and serve as witnesses.

On the issue of bride-wealth which is the focus of this study, interviewees reveal that bride-wealth serves as a seal for marriage. It is a token of compensation and commitment to the family of the bride-to-be in order to show that their daughter has value. To the Igbo, *ihe a kpatara n'akuku ite na-ana n'akuku onu* 'whatever is scratched up from the side of the pot ends up at the side of the mouth'. The maxim implies that one has no value for what one gets very cheaply. It is based on a show of commitment and respect for marital unions that the Igbo pay the bride-wealth. The Igbo pay bride-wealth and not bride price. Kottak (2002) differentiates between bride-wealth and bride price when he notes that bride-wealth is :

“A customary gift before, at, or after the marriage from the husband and his kin to the wife and her kin. Another word for bridewealth is bride price, but the term is inaccurate because people with the custom don't usually regard the exchange as a sale. They don't think of marriage as a commercial relationship between a man and an object that can be bought and sold” (Kottak, *ibid.* : 225).

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Continuing, Kottak explains that bride-wealth compensates the bride's group for the loss of her companionship and labour. It makes the children born to the woman full members of her husband's descent group. He further elucidates that dowry is a marital exchange in which the wife's group provides substantial gifts to the husband's family. The above explanation is very beneficial to this work as people most often interchange bride-wealth with bride price and dowry. The amount and procedure for the payment of bride-wealth differ from one community to another among the Igbo but one thing that is common is that the Igbo pay the bride-wealth before or at the marriage ceremony but not after it.

In time past, if a man performs every other marriage ceremony but leaves out the payment of bride-wealth, the relationship is considered as friendship. Most often, a child born under such union belongs to the ancestral home of the woman. To the Igbo, a friend does not have the ownership of a child, hence, the saying : *oyi ekete nwa* 'a friend does not have ownership of a child'. This to say that no matter how open the friendship between a man and a woman is, if the man impregnates the woman without paying her bride-wealth, he does not have ownership of the child. The child belongs to the woman's parents. In the traditional Igbo society, a bride-wealth is not paid for a pregnant woman. This is based on the belief that a groom cannot pay the bride-wealth of two persons at a time peradventure, the baby turns out to be a girl. One cannot also pay for another's *obi* 'out house', in case, the baby turns out to be a boy who will inherit an *obi*. The groom to be is often asked to wait till the baby is born. In a situation where a bride-wealth must be paid for a pregnant woman for some reason, like a childless couple seeking the hand of such in marriage so as to have a child ; the two parties involved in the negotiation assume that they did not know or see the pregnancy, based on the fact that the major reason for such marriage is very clear to all involved. The negotiation is equally done very briefly.

The condition of ownership of a child outside the payment of bride-wealth is no longer as strict as it used to be. Interviewees reveal that presently, there have been cases of some grooms who were handed back the child(ren) they had with their would-be bride after the bride-wealth was paid. This is not to say that it is an Igbo custom. It only has to do with some lapses and the unfavourable economic situation in the society.

During the pre-colonial era, a father looked forward to his daughter's bride-wealth, which was usually paid in cowries. It took able-bodied men to carry the bags of cowries to their would-be in-law's house. It sometimes takes days to count the cowries. The father of the bride-to- be usually ties the bride-wealth to a project which may be his taking a title or his using it to train his sons who will propagate his family. The first names given to female children at the said time drive home the point. Such names include : *Akuabia* (wealth has come) and *Ndaluaka* (let me be favoured with wealth) (see Oyeka,2018). Despite the heavy bags of cowries and the project(s) tied to it, interviewees still maintained that customarily, the payment of a bride-wealth even at the said time, was not a market transaction ; rather, it served as a compensation to the family that gave out their daughter in marriage.

Highlighting the importance of bride-wealth among the Igbo, Ikonne (2015) avers that: "*Many young females were given out to wealthy old men as settlement for debts... The reality that no formal dowry was paid on the women earned them perpetual humiliation from both husbands and co-wives as they were taunted with the fact occasionally.*" (Ikonne, *ibid.*: 3)

The above excerpt shows that bride-wealth is a mark of honour and seal for every marriage among the Igbo. Judging from the excerpt, it is clear that women who find themselves in the described situation are ridiculed despite the fact that the society knows that the young women's bride-wealth was paid indirectly, that is, the father of the maidens and their husbands came to terms that the debt owed serve as their bride-wealth. The way such marriages are contracted is not forgotten in a haste as the name *Ugwọaku* 'settlement for debt' which is sometimes given to a girl child born from such union, always reminds the society of the marital story of her parents. It must be noted that the above situation was in pre-colonial era. It is no longer practiced.

The procedure for the payment of the bride-wealth, according to interviewees remains the same. Very close family members of the two parties -bride and groom- are involved in it. The two families take their time to select their representatives based on the fact that the discourse requires great tact (see Nzeakor, 1976). In a situation where either of the parties do not have good orators, they look for one. The process follows when the bride-to-be and the groom seeking for her hand in marriage had done other necessary things, like making enquiries to see that they are not relations, asking questions to find out things about their linages and many others and have agreed that the two can be joined together as husband and wife.

The father of the girl about to be given out in marriage is usually informed on time by the middleman on the day his proposed in-laws will visit for the payment of bride-wealth, for everything that concerns the bride-wealth is done in the bride-to-be's family. Presently, it is most often done on the day of the traditional marriage. The girl's father sends messages to his relatives so that they will come to his house to either witness or join in the negotiation of the bride-wealth. On the part of the man, the relations are told but only few, who will join in the negotiation, are expected to go to the would-be-in-law's house. Other relations, depending on the village, give little token of support to the man that is getting married. For the Igbo, *nwa bu nwa oha* 'a child belongs to everybody'. This is to say that the man who is getting married belongs to all and not exclusively to his parents ; hence, the support for the good thing he is about doing.

One striking thing is that in all Igbo communities, no woman is involved in the bride-wealth negotiation. The reason as the interviewees revealed is that such involvement might bring disharmony among women, as one may see herself as more valuable than the other, hence, the higher bride-wealth that was paid on her head. Such competition is unhealthy for the society at large. It is based on the above reason that the bride-wealth negotiation is not done in an open place and most elders disallow video coverage of the negotiation. The amount of money to be paid as bride-wealth in some communities is also fixed that no one exceeds that no matter the qualifications of the lady or how rich the suitor is. The suitor may showcase his wealth in the *igba nkwu* 'wine carrying' ceremony but not in bride-wealth settlement.

On the other hand, the father of the bride-to-be, the groom-to-be and his father, are not allowed to take part in the negotiation process. They are represented by their relations. The reason behind someone representing them in the negotiation is that the society would not want them to take matters personally or be emotional during the negotiation process thereby reacting wrongly. The relations of the father of the bride-to-be represent him during the negotiation. They consult him when they need clarifications on any issue. The groom-to-be gives his trusted

relation some money that will cover the bride-wealth when the negotiation is over. In some occasions, the groom's father takes up the payment of the bride-wealth by giving enough money to whoever that will represent him in the negotiation. The society sees the groom-to-be as not fully matured to take care of a wife, hence, the involvement of his older relations. The family of the groom sees their son/brother's marriage as *inutara ya nwaanyi* 'to marry a wife for him'. This is based on the fact that they consider their son to be inexperienced in marital union thereby the need to be guided by the older and more experienced close relations.

Broom sticks, palm nuts or goat droppings, each representing certain amount of money is used in the negotiation (see Ogbalu, 1974 ; Ubesie, 1978 ; Orji, 1999 & Ofomata, 2012). Whichever one that is chosen is usually kept on the ground during the negotiation process. The reason is to have the ancestral spirits as witnesses to the seal of marriage. Based on the fact that the negotiation is not a market transaction, both parties do not mention the subject of their discussion during negotiation but they still focus on it in a very relaxed mood. It was also gathered that the bride-to-be is usually referred to by different metaphors such as *udara oma* 'beautiful local apple', *asa* 'beautiful species of fish', *akwu chara acha* 'ripe palm fruit'. Among the Igbo, an apple is more than a delicious fruit. The local apple is not only beautiful to behold, but it symbolizes fruitfulness. Fish is a delicacy most people love but the specie called *asa* is not only beautiful but very tasty. Every part of ripe palm fruit is useful to the Igbo. The palm fruit is either cooked, roasted or used to prepare palm oil used for sundry purposes. Hardly do the Igbo cook without palm oil. The fiber and kernel left when the juice must have been extracted are equally used for sundry purposes. Interviewees explained that it is based on the beauty and usefulness of the above things that they are used to refer to the maiden whose hand is being sought in marriage. They also avoid mentioning her name so that it will not appear like a buying and selling transaction. To the suitors, it is something good which they saw that they came to plead for, so that the good thing will extend to their own family.

During the negotiation, certain things are fixed, which include the money for the kindred. It is only the money that will be given to the bride's father that is negotiable. Interviewees explained that the amount is not fixed but every town has an idea of what a suitor should not exceed in their community. Despite this knowledge, no suitor comes and drops the bride-wealth, takes the bride and goes home. A negotiation must take place and most often, in a relaxed mood. The reason is to make it clear that it is not a market transaction that one hurriedly prices an item, pays for it and takes it home. It is usually stretched so as to let the couple know that the union is not something very easy that they will go into it today and dissolve it the next day. It is also drummed into their individual ears that any day they think of divorce, that they will go through the same rigorous process to tell their witnesses about their intention. It is believed that going through such rigours to get a divorce serves as a deterrent to having many divorce cases.

The amount to be paid as bride-wealth as noted earlier, has nothing to do with the beauty or level of education of the bride-to-be. It is usually a token of commitment which acts as a seal for the marriage. To the society, no amount of bride-wealth can suffice for the training of a daughter, not to think of the vacuum her absence will create in her father's house and the kindred as a whole. A woman is given out in marriage just to propagate the human race. It was also gathered that the amount to be paid as the bride-wealth is hardly a hindrance to the marriage

relationship once every other thing is in place (see Osuagwu,1979). Buttressing the point further, interviewees note that no matter how long the negotiation drags, no suitor pays completely, the amount agreed on, no matter how rich or poor his family is. They must remove some money from what was agreed on. The Igbo has it that *anaghị anụcha nwaanyị anụcha* ‘you can never finish the procedure of marrying a woman’. The maxim implies that a marital union is an establishment of a relationship between two families or kindred and not an ordinary transaction that one starts and finishes same day. The father of the bride sometimes gives back part of the bride-wealth to his in-laws in the name of lending them some money. Most borrowers pay back with interest. The reason behind ‘the lending’ is to let the in-laws/ groom’s family know what is expected of them, which is commitment to the marital institution, so as to have an interest to return. The interest might be in form of payment of visits to the bride’s family especially during festive periods. It might also come in form of extending the bride’s father’s branch through the grandchildren that will come through the marital union.

Negotiation is done in a peaceful and joyful way. Ubesie (1978 : 44) explains that ‘*Na mmadu buuru mmanya jewe n’ezinaulo ka e kesị ya nwanị gosiri na o na-akpo ha ezigbo aha...*’. (That someone carries drinks to a family to marry their daughter shows that he has goodwill for them.) It is based on the goodwill that good spokesmen are chosen for the interaction. The spokesmen have supporters and witnesses. The major work of the supporters is to call their spokesman to order whenever he makes a mistake. This is usually done by telling the spokesman either of the following : *gbue ijiji bere gi n’ukwu* ‘kill the fly on your leg’ or *tututa ihe dara n’ala* ‘pick something that fell to the floor’. Once a spokesman hears that, he understands that there is a need for him to readjust. The mistake often comes when it appears that the in-laws to be are making great demands during the negotiation. It requires tact to understand that such demands serve as an endurance test. It is also a way of telling the suitors that the bride-to-be is very valuable to her family. It takes a well- informed spokesman to act very wisely by showing very clearly that they, the suitors, are very serious in their demand for the girl’s hand in marriage. The spokesman knows when to plead and how to break one of the broom sticks used for negotiation severally whenever they are asked to add something to the token they are presenting. For instance, if a stick stands for one thousand naira, a good spokesman may break it into three and add one part each time his group is asked to top their token. This, he may do severally in the name of addition. Based on the fact that bride-wealth negotiation is taken to be a great task, part of the money paid as bride-wealth is shared among those who joined in the negotiation. Interviewees object seriously to the emerging trends among some Christians, who return completely or decline the bride-wealth of their daughters. To them, those who practice such are not conversant with the tradition of the Igbo. Bride-wealth is a token of commitment for the marital institution and it is the exact amount paid for it that is returned if the marriage fails.

The settlement of bride-wealth is usually announced with great joy to other relations who were not part of the negotiation. It is at that point that the bride is handed over to the oldest man from the husband’s family to take good care of her. It is from that point that they can claim that they have got a wife for their son thereby calling her *nwanne anyị* ‘our wife’. Other ceremonies follow at this point.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

DATA 1

Here, the discourse on bride-wealth negotiation is carefully presented. Two families are involved in the discourse –the bride-to-be’s and the groom-to-be’s. Group A is used to represent the bride-to-be’s family, while Group B stands for the groom’s family.

- Group A: *Nđi be ayi, nnoṅu* 1.
(Our people, you are welcome)
- Group B: *Daalunu* 2.
(Thank you)
(Exchange of greetings- handshakes and embraces)
- Group A: *Nnoṅu...Kedukwanu ka unu si bia?* 3.
(Welcome...How did you come?)
- Group B: *Eeeemh ... (clears throat, picks and drops some broom sticks which were already provided by Group A on the ground before them).* 4.
- Group A: *(Guo ya onu) Daalunu, nnoṅu...uzo a, a ya-agakwia aga? O bu uzo nku?* 5.
(Counted them) Thank you, welcome... are we really going to pass this road? Is it the one that leads to the bush?)
- Group B: *Mbanu ...oṅ ije mmili...* 6.
(No...it is the path to the stream...)
- Group A: *(Guo ya onu) Unu nwara mana m...* 7.
(Counted them) You tried but errm ...)
- Group B: *Ka ayi je chikwuṅ isi puta* 8.
(Let us consult and come back)- They moved to a corner, did some consultations and added some sticks to ones earlier presented and placed them on the ground before Group A.
- Group A: *(Guo ya onu) Unu anwaka...lerukenenu Ada ayi anya...O chapulu achapu.* 9.
(Counted them) You tried very well...look closely at our daughter...she is very presentable)
- Group B: *Humus...ije ebihonanu....* 10.
(Hesitation...the journey has not ended...)
- Group A: *Nke ahụ doro anya mana unu ya-ewenitekwunu aka...o jebeghi eje.* 11.
(That is clear but you have to raise your hand higher-add more- it is still a long way to go)
- Group B: *Ngwanu, ka ayi gbaa izu bia* 12.
(Let us consult and come back)- They moved to a corner, did some consultations and added some sticks to one earlier presented and placed on the ground before Group A.
- Group A: *(Guo ya onu) Daalunu. Unu agbanika ma unu lezugodu Akwaugo unu biara maka ya anya. Unu amakwo na o guchaara akwukwo guo ma Yunivasiti?* 13.
(Thank you. You tried very much but look admirably at the eagle’s egg you came for. Do you not know that she studied to the extent of attending a University?)
- Group B: *Oṅ ko o si me mana okwonu ka aka ha ogori ka o na-atukwasa di ya* 14.
(That is the way it is but the length of a woman’s hand determines where she places it on her husband)
- Group A: *Onye nelu unu anya ma na unu kariṅi ya...oṅbara na ndu juru unu ahụ* 15.
(Whoever looks at you knows that you are more than it...you are still full of blood and life)
- Group B: *O buhokwonu na e yi akwa...oṅ ka oṅbara ha ayi n’ahụ ka ayi na-agba.* 16.
(It is not about the clothes we are putting on...we are bleeding as much blood as we have in our bodies)
- Group A: *Ihe unu kwuru di mma. Ka ayi baa uno puta* 17.
(What you said is good. Let us enter the house and come out (did some consultations)).
- Group A: *Unu nwakwoṅ mana unu kpakwuzie ya obele aka* 18.
(You really tried but it needs a small touch)
- Group B: *Ayi na-echekwo na one ayi mere di mma.. nwa ayi nwoke ka bu nwata...ayi wee bia iyoro unu nwaanyi...o nweghi onye ya-emegbu ibie...oṅ ije mmili...* 19.
(We feel that what we have done is good...our son is still a child...we came to plead that you give us your daughter...none will maltreat the other...it is a path to the stream...)

Group A: *Okwu unu di mma. Daalunu.*
(You spoke well. Thank you)

20.

The above conversation shows that the negotiation was done in a very relaxed mood. The bride-to-be's family welcomed their visitors. Welcoming guests and exchanging greetings with them is in line with Igbo tradition. The second welcome said by Group A in their second statement was a way to make their visitors relax for the business of the day. The greeting was followed by a hesitation which was also a way of making the visitors relax and adjust themselves for their engagement. A question on how they came followed (line 3), when the spokesman of Group A was sure that their visitors were very ready for the purpose of their meeting. To a layman, the question- *Kedukwanu ka unu si bia ?* How did you come ? - means the route they followed to their destination. In this context, it stands for the token they brought for the sealing of the marriage. Both parties understand the maxim, hence, the action from Group B in line 4. The clearing of throats from Group B's representative was more of a way of drawing attention to what he was about doing- dropping the sticks, which stands for the token they came with. The figurative response from Group A to Group B's presentation in line five shows that Group B fell very much below expectation. For the Igbo, the path to the bush is thorny and the wood in the bush will eventually finish and the path closed. The opposite is the path to the stream, people always need water, hence, the path to the stream is always busy. The response from Group B, in line six, which is that the journey is a path to the stream, shows that they need a lasting relationship. All they mean is that they were very ready not just for the bride, but in maintaining the marital relationship according to Igbo custom. Both parties used figurative sentences to show the seriousness of their discussion. From the tone of the response in line seven, the suitors already knew what to do, hence, the reason for their excusing themselves to consult with one another. They added something to the token they presented earlier. The response from Group A, in line nine shows that Group B tried but have not reached the expectation from them. The answer from Group B in line ten shows that they are conversant with tradition. The journey, to them, had just started and there will always be room for improvement.

Despite the response, Group A maintained their stand in line eleven by agreeing that though they tried ; they have not really done much compared to what is expected of them. On this, Group B decided to do some consultation, added something to what they presented earlier. Group A notes that they tried but this time praised their daughter's beauty and academic qualification, thereby telling the suitors that they needed to do more. The suitors agreed with Group A and gently employed a proverb to point out that they did the much they could in line fourteen. Group A subtly insisted by responding proverbially that they were more than their claims by their appearances. The suitors responded with a proverb, and still pleaded that they should forget about their looks, that they only did the much they could. Group A did not drag further, they rather did their own consultation and from their tone in line eighteen, which followed immediately after the consultation, it shows that the suitors tried. The explanations, plea and the promise from the suitors in line nineteen was very satisfactory to the bride-to-be's family, hence, their are accepting their suitors' presentation with thanks. Observed in the conversation are the humility of the suitors, the use of proverbs to drive home some points and the peaceful way the negotiation was done.

DATA 2

Here, the second data is presented. Just like in the first data, Groups A & B are used to represent the two families involved in the discourse. While Group A represents the bride-to-be's family, Group B represents the groom to-be's family.

- Group A: *Ndi obia anyi nnoonu* 1.
(Our visitors welcome)
- Group B: *Daalunu* 2.
(Thank you)
- Group A: *Um umumumuu...nnoonu. Unu nee anya, nke a bu nne ego, nke a bu nne egbu na agboghò egbu, nke a, udala na oji* 3.
(Clearing of throat...welcome. When you look, this is the mother (major) of the money, this one is for a mature she goat and a tender she oat; this, local apple and iroko (dropping the broom sticks for each on the ground for the visitors)
- Group B: *Daalunu. Ka anyi bia.* 4.
(Thank you. We will be back) (They do some consultations, removed some sticks and returned the much they would want to part with).
- Group A: (*Guo ya onu*) *Unu anwaka. Unu anwaka nnoo. Ukwu a Nama ji aga, o ya-ejikwia lu Oka?* 5.
(Count it) You tried. You really tried. Will the cow reach Awka at this speed?)
- Group B: *O lusigo eluo. Unu na-ekwu ka m setikwuo ukwu?* 6.
It has already reached. Are you saying that I should increase my speed?)
- Group A: *Ooyanu!* 7.
(That is it!) (Adding more sticks and dropping on the ground for them)
- Group B: *Ka ayi puta* 8.
(We will be back) (Added more sticks and returned to them)
- Group A: (*Guo ya onu*) *Ihe unu gwuruna bu adaumi. Unu egwuhona nke bu umi. Mmili nabugodu uzo baa n'adaumi tupu o baba na nke bu umi. Ngwa, onyeuku...(ochi)* 9.
(What you have dug is a small pond that connects to the well. You have not dug the well yet. Water enters the pond before the well. Now, the middleman...(laughter))
- Group B: *Ka ayi gbaa izu puta* 10
(Let us consult and come back) (Adds more sticks and returns to them)
- Group A: (*Guo ya onu*) *Ndi ogo, ayi, ekeleenu. Unu gborò ihe ewu na-eri. Unu egwugo umi kama na unu agwohonja agwo. O bulu na a gwoo umi agwo, mmili baa nja mhuu...11.*
(Count it.) Our in-laws, greetings, you really tried. you have dug the well, but you have not cleared it of silt. When you clear the silt, the water flows in easily)
- Group B: *Ayi agbanigokwanu. Unu achozili (onu mmadu ozo - diayi, gbuo ijiji...)* 12.
(We have really tried. Do you (interruption- Mr. kill the fly...)
- Group A: *Mbanu, ayi aya egbu onye ayi ya-eso kwa? Wetekwuonu mmanya ka ayi na-anu wee ne-eche ha.* 13.
(No, we will not kill a person whose funeral we will participate in...bring more drinks so that we will be drinking as we wait for them)
- Group B: *Ayi egwugokwo umi, machie ya, gwoo ya ma ogwugwo* 14.
(We have dug the well, covered it and have equally cleared the inside of silt (so that it retains water)
- Group A: *Unu gbanili hinne kama jisikwuonu ike, ije nwaanyi bu ezigbo ihe. Ije unu bjara be anyi, unu ga-ejeta ya ihe. Leronu nwaanyi anyi na-akponye unu anya, oo nwa a zuru nkeoma, burukwa nwa ya-emepere unu uzo na be unu ma o bata.* 15.
(You tried very well but try more; getting a wife is a good thing. You will surely gain by your coming to our house. Look very well at our child we are giving to you, she is well trained, and will bring you good when she enters your house)
- Group B: *Oo koo o si di mana ayi agbagokwonu obara one ike kwere ayi. Unu ma na ije nwaanyi anaghi ebi otu ubosi* 16.
(That is exactly the way it is but we have bled according to our strength. You know that the marital journey does not end in a day).

Group A: *Oṣ the mere eme mana unu ga-akpakwuzi aka o wee dika a na-eme.* 17.
(That is the way it is but you have to touch/increase it a little so that it appears that we are trying)

Group B: *Ka ayi p̄ta (Ha gbaa izu, tinyekwuwo osisi na nke ha nyeburu wee weghachi)* 18.
(We will be back) (Consults, adds more sticks and returns to them)

Group A: *(Guṣ ya onu) Unu gbaniri. Ayi ga-ejidegodu ya one a ma unu chetakwa na ije ayi na unu aburula ije ogo* 20.

(Count it) (You tried. We will hold this one but remember that our relationship with you is that of in-laws)

The first and second lines of the above data are the exchange of greetings which is in line with the Igbo tradition. In the third line, the representative of Group A cleared his throat just to get everyone's attention, greeted and moved straight to say what they expect from their visitors. In his presentation, mother of the money, the goats, iroko and local apple are symbolic. They represent what the suitors are expected to do for their in-law to be and his kinsmen. The most important of all, mother of the money, stands for the bride-wealth. The response from Group B in line four shows that they understood the tradition. In line five, though Group A thanked their visitors, they did not hesitate to put it figuratively to them that they fell very much below expectation. Group B employs an idiomatic expression in their response in line six to show that they were determined to do the needful in order to achieve their goal, which is getting a wife for their son. Lines seven and eight show a good understanding between the two groups. Group A still employed an illusion of water collectors to drive home their point in line nine, by stating that though Group B tried, all they had done was just a preparation for the major water collector. The action of Group B shows that they really had need for what they came for, hence their consulting and adding more to the token they presented earlier. As shown in the eleventh line, Group A still spoke figuratively by acknowledging that Group B has really dug the well but it remained clearing the inside very well so that it will collect water maximally. Group B's response in line twelve which was ended with ellipses shows that they felt they have tried. Actually, Group B's spokesman was interrupted by a kinsman because the beginning of his response shows someone who was almost disgusted by the demands of Group A. His kinsmen understand the tradition and the consequence of harsh response, hence, an interruption from one of them. The response of Group A in line thirteen shows clearly that they understood the incomplete statement from Group B. Their response equally shows that they meant no harm for Group B. They brought down the tempo that was about to rise by their demands. Their request for more drinks while they wait for Group B shows Group B that a little addition was still needed from them. Group B did the needful by adding to what they earlier presented. They claimed also that they had done everything as their comment in line fifteen suggests. It was their claim that led to more demands from Group A, highlighting what qualities their daughter has. Moreover, it is not for visitors to examine and score themselves in another man's family where they had gone to make a request. Group B understood the game, hence, their admitting and explaining that the marital journey does not end in a day as expressed in line fifteen. Group A, in line seventeen admitted to the explanation but subtly insisted that a little thing be added to the last presented token. Group B responded by doing so. Although Group A accepted their presentation, they indirectly reminded Group B, their in-laws, that much is still expected of them as in-laws.

DISCUSSION

Data reveal that both conversations were done in relaxed moods. Such mood is unlikely in a market transaction. Considering the duration of the negotiation, number of people involved in it, the use of symbols to represent money and figurative expressions used in the conversation, one cannot but submit that it is not a market transaction. In the first data, the in-laws were the ones that presented the token they wished to part with while reverse was the case in the second data. It is very clear from the conversation that it is the bride to-be's family that dictates the tune. Throughout the conversations in the presented data, the groom to-be's representatives marked their speeches with humility and plea, which showed how important their mission was to them. Such is not always the case in a market transaction.

Market transactions are marked with market survey and pricing from one shop to another. No matter how cheap a seller sells his commodity, it does not give room for 100% loyalty from the buyer. This is to say that a buyer has no serious commitment with the seller. Reverse is the case in marriage. A groom has special commitment to his in-laws both in life and in death. He is like an adopted son to the family. He visits them to see how they are faring especially in festive seasons. He equally takes part in the preparation for a befitting burial for the parents –in-law or their very close relatives whenever they die. Every market transaction has both the buyers' and sellers' direct involvement but such is not the case in marriage. All the bride and groom and their immediate families need do is to agree to the establishment of the marital union. The bride, groom and their parents are absent during the bride-wealth negotiation.

In market transactions, no well-informed seller sells below his cost price. In bride-wealth payment, no father checks the cost of training his daughter ; the amount to be paid is sometimes fixed either by the Government or the community and people hardly exceed the amount fixed by the community so as to avoid sanctions. Most communities in the research area do not accept anything more than thirty thousand Naira for bride-wealth. Such an amount is nothing near what is spent in the first month of a child's life. Another side to it is that even when the negotiation is over, the bride-wealth is not paid completely. The bride's father most times gives some money back to the groom's family from that little that he was given. This is a way to prove that he did not look up to the bride-wealth as a way of enriching himself. It should be noted that most often, the bride-wealth is paid on the day of wine carrying when both parties must have invited their guests and done some money consuming preparations. They spend in such preparations because they have an understanding that the payment of bride-wealth which is the first and major thing before wine carrying is not a market transaction which may or may not work out well.

Most things bought from the market are bought for personal usage unless otherwise indicated. The purpose of bride-wealth and marriage is completely different. It is an approved way for procreation. The acceptance of a token after the negotiation is just an indirect way of letting the bride know that she is precious and valuable to her father's house and therefore not just released freely to the man that indicated interest in marrying her. It is also a proof to the society that the bride is well cultured and did not run after the man or elope with him. It is based on this that the Igbo say that *Akirika bu ugwu nwaanyi* 'a woman's bride-wealth is her pride'. In other words, the payment of bride-wealth is an indirect way of announcing to the community that a girl has been culturally given out in marriage. A lady whose bride-wealth was not paid has no

prestige among the Igbo. On the other hand, it is a way of telling the groom that it was not easy for the bride's family to let her go. More so, the man needs to part with something, that is, some money or wealth for the sake of the woman so that he will not treat her with contempt when they live together.

The payment of bride-wealth is a very strong part of Igbo culture. Looking at the purpose behind it and the processes involved in the payment, one cannot but admit that it is not a market transaction. On the part of men who retort *nwaanyi m ji ego m nuta* 'a woman I married with my money', it is a gross remark by insecure men which needs no serious consideration. And if we must give it some thought, they really need to sit down, calculate what it takes to train a girl child in the first few years of her life not to think of what was invested in her till maturity and compare it with what they spent as her bride-wealth. They also need to check how easy it was for the bride to depart from a family she had been with for a good number of years, to another family which she has no idea of what she will meet. The man needs also to check the value that is attached to his life at marriage and the change of title that comes with it once they have a child, not to think of the grandchildren that follow with time. All these need to be put into consideration before any complaint from the man. Men need to consider the following explanation by Ogbalu (1981), that : "*Nwoke nwechaa ego, wuo ulo, mee ihe nile ndi ozọ di iche ma o lughị nwanyi, anaghị agunye ya na mmadu*" (when a man has money, builds a house, and does many other things but has no wife, he is not counted as a human being)". (Ogbalu, *ibid.* : 23).

It is based on the advantages of marriage that the Igbo count as nothing, whatever is spent in the process, hence the saying : *Aku nwaayi bu ego e riri n'obiocha* 'bride wealth is money spent with joy.' A clearer understanding of the importance of the payment of bride-wealth will go a long way in making the youths understand and appreciate it better as part of Igbo culture.

The token given to the bride-to-be's father as bride-wealth is traditional and therefore should be seen and treated as such. It is simply a seal of marriage. The fact that the family of the groom do not pay everything agreed on as bride-wealth and the idea of the father of the bride returning sometimes, part of the money paid as bride-wealth to the groom's family as a loan, further solidifies bride-wealth as a seal of marriage and not a market transaction.

If things go wrong in the marital union, and the woman wants to opt out, her kinsmen must return the bride-wealth to the family of the husband. It takes much time to convince her family members to do that. The woman is often advised that *di bu ndidi* 'husband (marriage) is patience'. When she persists, she is told that *nwayi majiri, o binwuo be di ya* 'when a woman packages herself well, she succeeds in her husband's house'. The saying is an indirect way of telling her to readjust herself and make sure that the marriage works.

On the part of the man, he is advised to look at his relatives and learn how to manage his home. If he persists, he is told that *nwayi na-eme ka atulu* 'a woman behaves like a sheep'. Behaving like a sheep in this context has nothing to do with submissiveness, but stupidity. The message in the saying is this : if people still manage to rear sheep despite its stupidity, he, as a man can manage his wife. To the Igbo, *ikwu amaghi, ibe ezi ya* 'when one does not know, his fellow teaches him.' The man is equally advised to consider the stress of convincing his kinsmen into going through the process they did at the bride-wealth negotiation all over again for another

wife. The task is cumbersome. No matter how hard the groom tries, it might take much time to convince all to join him in getting another wife. This is because the entire society watches what goes on and divorce may ruin the name of the family, making people to cast aspersion on them, like- *ha amaghị anụ nwayị* ‘they do not know how to take care of a wife’. No family likes such stigma as it will make it difficult for them to get wives from their community. It is based on the above that every couple tries very hard to sort out their differences instead of seeking for divorce as a way out. It is only when they find it difficult resolving their differences after efforts from both families that close family relatives sort them out through divorce, which is marked by the lady’s family returning the exact amount paid as her bride-wealth. All these accounts for low divorce cases among the Igbo.

CONCLUSION

This study has tried to clear the ground that the payment of bride-wealth is not the buying of a commodity among the Igbo. On the side of the men, they need to understand that their in-laws did not sell their wives to them ; rather, they gave their daughters to them as blessings, to establish homes and procreate. There is no amount of bride-wealth that a man will pay to ‘buy’ a woman, considering the care given to her, from cradle to maturity. For the woman, the payment of bride-wealth signifies that she is precious to her people. It is also a way of announcing her marriage to her people and confirming to them that she did not elope with her husband. A good understanding of this aspect of Igbo marriage and the advantages attached to it will go a long way in helping the youths appreciate the bride-wealth payment.

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