



Ekajuk “Proverbial Cult Of Obscenity”: Lessons In Traditional Artistic Education, Emotional Catharsis Or Profanity

Francis Mowang Ganyi

Dept. Of English And Literary Studies, University Of Calabar

Miichael Bonchuk

Dept. Of English And Literary Studies, University Of Calabar

Abstract:

Human society has consistently viewed obscenities with revulsion and disdain, yet every human language makes use of obscene utterances in its every day interactions. In several cases, obscenities provide the best stock of artistic resources which portray the literary and aesthetic content that carry the cultural or artistic ethos of that community. Psychologists and literary scholars have proffered reasons that aim at explaining the functionality of these societal tendencies towards obscene language use. Many have posited that obscenities could have positive values of relaxation and expurgation in society. In the attempt to assess the usefulness of obscenities in Ekajuk Society in Nigeria, this writer discovered that, among the Ekajuk, obscene language use has, sort of, assumed a cultic status as a result of its restricted usage while at the same time providing opportunities for the elders to code and decode messages in proverbial parlance. Since proverbs are the highest form of artistic use of language in traditional society, the appearance of obscenities in proverbs can be said to be the Ekajuk elders' attempt, through language intensity, to achieve higher levels of attitude change in younger generations thus making for better societal cohesion. However, this has to be very subtly carried out in order not to institutionalize obscenities in the society and bring about moral decadence instead of the desired ethical rejuvenation of society.

1.Introduction

Drachler, in this summation recognizes the importance of proverbs, tales and traditional songs as the prime repository of traditional wit and wisdom which often go unnoticed. To the African, proverbs and tales are the evening theatre as well as daytime school for the education and instruction of younger generations, yet these same proverbs are sometimes suffused with what may be described as obscene utterances which raise doubts about their relevance or utility in traditional contexts of usage. The attempt to satisfy this curiosity about the preponderance of supposedly obscene proverbs has led this writer to try to explore the aesthetics of language use and the utilitarian value in the obscene proverbs of Ekajuk people, a sub-tribe of the Ejagham Nation who inhabit the Northern confines of present day Cross River State. This kind of study becomes necessary for two reasons. First, despite the diversity of African languages, their importance as organs for shaping the communities, particularly their cosmic beliefs and environmental ethics cannot be played down upon. Secondly, and very importantly, as Drachler observes... the influence of Oral Literature will persist not only because African rural life continues but because new generations of African writers will probably continue to refresh themselves at this source, no matter how many springs or world Literature they choose to drink from. (P.16)

Language, it is known, plays a vital role in the development of Literature. Therefore more and more African modes of creative expression receive continuous attention as more people seek to understand the thinking of Africans; their traditions and their literary models. Ekajuk language and culture form part and parcel of Ejagham cultural heritage and their proverbs reflect the dynamic quality of their traditions, the subtlety of their literary and artistic skills and their adaptability to changing circumstances. Ekajuk proverbs are thus seen as a valid expression of the creative imagination as well as a complex assessment of their relationship to their environment. J.L. Dohne (1969) therefore posits that... the highest object of language-study is to obtain an insight into the characters and thought-modes of mankind.

He feels that this can be done in two ways; either by “an accurate acquaintance with the verbal forms in which its (i.e. the languages’) ideas find utterance” or “by the investigation of its literary compositions”. In Ekajuk community in particular and Africa generally, proverbs are not only time tested verbal forms for the expression of ideas but also constitute veritable literary compositions which serve as compact means to an understanding of the people’s cultural and linguistic heritage. Through them one

deciphers the cosmic belief system and the ideological and philosophical world view of the Ekajuk people. For this reason one feels that an analysis of the proverbs will not only portray the aesthetic content of language use but also, perhaps, reveal the reasons for the obscene or profane content of the proverbs. This is because despite the prime place of proverbs in Ekajuk linguistic hierarchy, obscenity easily creeps into their usage forcing one to ask “why” and “what purposes” obscenities serve in the language or community.

Again, it is generally known that a language is the product of the environment. It emanates from the ecology of that environment as well as the peoples’ conceptual framework of their customs and beliefs which are consequently encapsulated in the language which best expresses their belief system. The use of proverbial obscenities may well explain the ecology of the group or their lives and experiences even though this may require authentication from universal or global views on obscenities. Timothy Jay (2009) therefore argues that... When scholars disregard or dismiss swearing [and obscenities] as irrelevant to a complete understanding of language, we are left with a polite or sanitized and therefore false science of language. The entirety of humanity, the angry, hateful or enticing emotional expressions all languages contain are ignored.

Jay finally submits that... Swearing [and other obscene utterances inclusive] is a rich emotional, psychological and socio-cultural phenomenon with implications for those studying language acquisition, child rearing, gender differences, neuroscience, mental health, personality, person perception, Verbal Abuse (emphasis mine) and cross-cultural differences.

It is evident that a lot has been written on the psychology of obscenities and profane or offensive language, and Jay agrees that “... it is scattered across scientific disciplines and throughout the subfields of psychology.”

Though occupying a place of prominence in modern psychological studies, obscenities and offensive or objectionable language is not necessarily culture compliant particularly in traditional cultures where severe restrictions are imposed on their usage. The case with modern or cosmopolitan cultures may be a little different. Here, obscenities are no longer as shocking or as offensive as in traditional settings because of film cultures, GSM or even other mass communication expletives which have tended to socialize and so reduce the obnoxious potential of obscenities. One therefore notices that the use of obscenities in traditional societies seem to be the exclusive preserve of certain groups of people particularly elders thus, accruing to these elders a cultic attribute which endows them with the exclusive knowledge of the how and why obscenities are required. But even in

these cases where obscenities are supposedly permitted, they are restricted to proverbial utterances which meanings are not very obvious. In spite of this restriction, the mention of the obscene word itself is still abhorrent or out rightly abominable.

Also, it is observed that the meaning of the obscene proverb goes beyond the obscene utterance itself and encompasses life experiences that are peculiar to the entire community thus endowing the proverb as a veritable linguistic tool for encoding experience. Its usefulness as a means of studying language potential and inflections is invaluable. In Ekajuk community, the beauty of expression becomes evident when elders indulge in proverbial language which allows for a wide range of information or ideas to be expressed in very few words. The proverb therefore affords the elders opportunity to couch poignant language in very few and often veiled utterances. The usefulness of this is that the range of perception or understanding of the meaning of the coded message is reduced and the frequency of usage is also very minimal thus restricting the frequency and attractiveness of obscene language amongst all classes of people in the society. Moreover, the proverb is not just uttered, it requires an appropriate context for its use and contextual situations for obscene language use are few and far between.

Of interest in Ekajuk community is what can also be described as the “Cult of cursing or abusive Language” which permits the use of obscenities or offensive utterances in public. Here, contests are organized between villages or age grades. One person each from the contesting villages or age grades are allowed to engage in abuses or curses aimed at one another or even extending to communal practices of contesting villages or age grades. Up to five or six sets of contestants may be allowed and at the end of each round, any contestant who runs out of abusive expletives loses to his opponent. The village or age grade with the highest number of winners from the overall rounds wins the contest. The importance of this is that the contest allows for practice in rhetoric and other oratorical devices. It opens up young people in the use of oratory and builds them up in public speech which is most desirable in a community dominated by oral communication. Such contests are judged and supervised by senior age grade members and no one is allowed to continue the use of these offensive utterances in public after the competition.

A typical session runs thus

- Contestant I: Shab Shab Eshamarr Areh Nkpate Abang Nyi Meaning Look At Your Ugly Face Like A Calabash Of Shit

- Contestant II: shab shab eban ban nwul areh nnang nyi meaning look at your cut nose like a scorpion
- I: nyin abon akpade areh abon ti etal bah meaning look at your tiny legs like a black smiths bellow sticks
- II: Ba bah li ana abon ti wubu ebong go mbang egbeh meaning yours look like a farmers dew removal sticks
- I: Eri areh anyomo nneh meaning your penis looks like a mother fucker.
- II: ebfan ebah foongho nshor no nkul ntang ntang meaning infact the ugliness of your scrutum only rivals your grandsires [own]
- I: nyor alap alap areh ntarr anneh nyi meaning your mouth is as watery as your mother's cunt
- II: ntarr ar nneh foonghor nyor nkong meaning your mother's cunt resembles a snail's mouth, it is never dry.

The contest continues this way until one contestant runs out of steam and loses and a new pair takes off there from. Again in the community, supposedly obscene or offensive objects could be couched in very beautiful or poetic language which affords them ironic or mock heroic stature e.g.

Shit is described as

nkonfee a njjanghe meaning the fly's perfume or

akorr nfonor shab nne ambol meaning attractive to the owner but repulsive to an outsider. Here the hateful or offensive essence is hidden from the public.

In this perspective, Ekajuk world view favors proverbial language but represses and discourages obscenities except for utilitarian purposes.

Ekajuk community in Ogoja Local Government Area of Cross River State is a predominantly illiterate society which maintains and transmits its history and culture in verbal utterances particularly proverbs which appear in all facets of traditional life. However, recently, with the widespread emphasis on Western formal education most nooks and cranies of the community can now boast of schools which enhance the spread of literacy in the area. This, notwithstanding, the preponderance of illiterate adults in most social discourse still emphasizes the paramountcy of orality as the major means of expression of the people's cultural life. Proverbs, therefore, become handy as the quickest and most graphic methods of articulating traditional wisdom, ways of life and

modes of thought. The book of proverbs tells us that... what a man thinks is what he really is (proverbs 23:7) thus raising the question

Is the Ekajuk man inherently filthy in thought which manifests in his language or does he indulge in obscene language for mere pleasure or for the attainment of other societal goals?

2.Ekajuk World View

Cosmology, world view and religion have remained the major means by which the African cultural experiences are best expressed and the African is known to be very deeply religious. To the average Ekajuk man, therefore, cultural practices become the basis for interaction and expression of individuality and communal integration. These same religious and cultural practices serve as a means of reconciliation of individuals, groups and the entire society to their universe and the external world. In all these, the proverb and other linguistic devices in the community serve as the literary and linguistic means for the expression of these cultural norms and practices as well as their religious outlook. The proverb, as a linguistic unit, occupies a central position in discourse as a time tested, relatively simple but complex and pregnant means of coding ideas. So the question still remains, if obscenities are abhorrent and offensive and serve no positive purpose, why are there obscene proverbs in Ekajuk language, or do obscenities exist in Ekajuk parlance?

3.The Meaning Of Obscenity

The meaning of obscenity or obscene language has been a matter of controversy and defies appropriate definition. The dialectics of what connotes obscenity has for long defied legal, literary or political configuration. Ludwig Marcuse (1965) posits that obscenity “has several connotations”.

Says Marcuse... There are two views to obscenity... the relativist point of view which states that the notion of obscenity differs from culture to culture, between communities within a single culture, and also between individuals within those communities, [AND] there is the contrasting universalist point of view which states ... in the words of Susan Sontag in her essay *The pornographic Imagination*... that “the obscene is a primal notion of human consciousness, something much more profound than the backwash of a sick society’s aversion to the body.

From this, one can presuppose that there is more to obscenity than its objectionable essence otherwise human linguistic and psychological development will not indulge in its creation and perpetration.

Obscenity itself is traced to the Latin word “obscenus”, meaning foul, repulsive, or detestable”. It is derived from the Latin phrase “ob caenum”, meaning “from filth”. In legal contexts, it refers to words, images or expressions and actions which offend the morality of the time. Simply put, obscenity implies disgusting language, but disgusting language, as seen above, would differ from culture to culture, within a single culture and even between individuals within the same community. Therefore in Ekajuk language, “abi alum” refers to “bad words” while “ashab shab alum” refers to “dirty words”, both of which expressions connote obscene or lewd language, often frowned upon especially when used by young people. This kind of language is not meant for the public and is restricted to peer group conversation or sex talk between very intimate friends. Elders may use it to

young people when it is meant to teach or educate them on the wisdom of the ancients. Anybody using obscene language flagrantly is regarded as demented or having a “dirty mind” and so, open to societal sanctions which may include ostracism, the worst punishment for a crime in Ekajuk community. The meaning of obscenity is thus not universal as cultures differ and generational gaps influence the severity of what constitutes obscene language. The difficulty of providing a suitable definition for obscenity has attracted several acts and laws in what is now considered the civilized or developed countries including both Britain and the United States, some of which include

- The obscene publications Act 1857
- The obscene publications Act 1959
- The obscene publications Act 1964
- The Comstock Law 1873
- And several court cases which judgments have impacted on the meaning of obscene or profane language notably
- The Miller case 1973 and
- The Roth case 1957 as well as the establishment of the United States Commission on obscenity and pornography. Furthermore, Judge Augustus Hand of the United States Court of Appeal for the second circuit held in 1933 that... Offensive language in a literary work is not obscene where it does not promote lust...

Which would imply that where the supposedly obscene phrase or utterance is sincerely meant to portray a moral or teach a lesson, it may not pass for or be considered as obscene or offensive. This is why Susan Sontag (1967) describes obscenity as “a primal notion of human consciousness...” which would also imply that something can only be conceived of as obscene in the mind of the individual i.e. if one sees it as such. This position vindicates Henry V. Miller who argued that... Obscenity is really found [everywhere] in the world and he was simply [being] persecuted for telling the truth. Miller further asserts that

the expression of obscenity, therefore, is just the human mind's attempt to break away from what can be said to constitute repression of the individual in the modern civilized society, where institutionalized impositions inhibit free speech or free expression of an individual's mind especially when it relates to sex. If this were correct, there would be no offensive language and hence no restrictions on language use and consequently nothing like obscenity. Perhaps this is why D. H. Lawrence (1958) has posited that... When it comes to the meaning of anything, even the simplest word, then you must pause because there are two great categories of meaning, forever separate. There is mob-meaning, and there is individual meaning.

Mob meaning implies what is known and held by everyone, perhaps through the ages; while individual meaning is contextualized, immediate, circumstantial and determined by the user whose intention is implied in the usage. Whichever way one defines it, obscenity is generally known to imply indecent, disgusting, lustful or offensive language to the senses. The question that immediately arises here is “why then do people use obscene language if it is always conceived of as indecent and offensive? Or to bring it home to our discussion, “why do Ekajuk proverbs contain obscenities? One may also argue, like Miller, that obscenities are universal and exist in all languages which argument does not make them acceptable or less offensive. Their occurrence in all languages can, therefore, only mean that they must serve a useful purpose or that there is something positive about them. They must serve a purpose or function relevant to societal advancement or cohesion.

4. Why People Use Obscenities

In his book, *The End of Obscenity: The Trials of Lady Chatterley, Tropic of Cancer and Fanny Hill*, Charles Rembar (1968) opines that the victories at the U.S supreme court which legalized the sale of these works in America marked the end of whatever could be

regarded as obscene. The victory does not, however, imply that there is no more obscene language amongst human beings. It only means that in certain contexts, as in literary parlance, what may otherwise constitute obscenity could be tolerated particularly in the context of a literary work which is meant to teach or correct depravity or debasement. What is represented herein is therefore simply a simulation of obscenity and not obscenity itself which may or may not have been intended by the author. The overall purpose of the obscene utterance is what matters and what determines the obscene content of the material. Allison Pease buttresses this argument when she posits that modernism and mass culture have tended to collapse the distinction that existed in the past between aesthetics and obscenity. This is more so, she argues, as Charles Swinburne, James Joyce, and D. H. Lawrence have created what they styled “the aesthetic of the obscene”, which transforms debase or low cultural elements into a new kind of “high art”. (P.34).

The argument rests on the point that artistic or aesthetic interest, insofar as it appeals to or pertains to the rational instinct and is impersonal, aims at collective gain and is devoid of obscenity while pornography or obscenity in itself provokes personal or sensual responses which are often selfish. The aesthetic of the obscene therefore, upholds beauty and merit in the portrayal of the obscene if the aim is to teach a moral for the upliftment and edification of humanity and the creation of a better society. In this vein, though obscene expressions may communicate or conjure up lewd emotions within us, they also aid the expression of deep seated or strong emotions which we suppress in our interactions and so help lessen pain thus serving a cathartic effect. This is because an obscene utterance may, in fact; create a pleasant feeling, a feeling of relief from stress or stressful situations, particularly at school and in work environments. This perhaps is why in a celebrated case of obscenity between the United States vs. one book called *Ulysses* (1933), it is stated that Attorney Ernst downplayed the novel’s “subversive or potentially offensive elements”, and emphasized “its artistic integrity and moral seriousness”, thus leading judge John Woolsey to rule that:… The novel was serious and that its author was sincere and honest in showing how the minds of his characters operate and what they were thinking.

In the judge’s words:… To have failed to honestly tell fully what his characters thought would have been artistically inexcusable.

Furthermore, in the appeal to the *Ulysses* case Judge Augustus Hand further reiterated that ... Art certainly cannot advance under compulsion to traditional forms and nothing

in such a field is more stifling to [artistic] progress than limitation of the right to experiment with a new technique.

And finally Stuart Gilbert, (1930) still on the effect created by the novel *Ulysses* sums up the views by asserting that the passages... are, in fact, cathartic and calculated to allay rather than to excite the sexual instincts.

The significance of the judgments and Stuart's assertion lies in the fact that in determining what is obscene, we must consider contemporary community standards. It is obvious that today's global dialectics of communication discourse and technology pose no limitations on language use. Any kind of language appears on TV screens, on e-mails and face-book and there is no limitation to viewing, which ultimately impacts on the concept of what is or is not obscene. Also, in the United States, one of the tests of obscenity is "whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value". If this is accepted as a test for obscenity it follows that serious artistry, literariness, political or scientific value increases the functional relevance of an otherwise obscene utterance and invariably detracts from its obscene potential while conversely adding to its aesthetic appeal. If we accept this argument, then Ekajuk so called "obscene proverbs" are overtly valuable and very relevant tools for the determination of the aesthetics of language use and adolescent instruction in Ekajuk community. The proverbs satisfy immediate demands of social interaction and cohesion. For this reason Maura Pilotti et al conclude that their findings on a research conducted on "Taboo words in Expressive Language reveal that... Obscenities are "offensive emotional language" whose recipient is an integral component of their use... [Thus] sex differences may exist for the recipients of such expressions but not for the perpetrators... Meaning that in most societies, human beings, at one point or the other in their lives, particularly as college students or adolescents are prone or susceptible to obscenities or foul language, especially as it relates to sexual relationships. Perpetration of obscenities becomes a common societal phenomenon of both men and women dictated by contemporary societal definition of ethics and appropriate language for cultural sustenance. Again Henry Miller (2010) asserts that some cultures believe that obscenities could serve a cleansing process while conversely pornography would offend the senses the more. Despite their cleansing content, obscenities are seen as anything which depraves or corrupts people whose minds are prone to such immoral influences T. Jay (2009) contends that... harm from offensive speech is contextually determined; therefore attempts to restrict speech on a universal basis are misguided [therefore] word

offensiveness or appropriateness depends on contextual variables, and our sensitivity to the context...

Therefore, obscenities or offensive speech is, in fact, to be determined by the society and its acceptance or aversion to the supposedly obscene utterance. If in a particular language, obscene utterances serve a positive purpose, then their obscene or offensive potential could be considered to be less and the utterance's acceptability more enhanced. If profanities and swear words or obscenities have any relevance to language acquisition and child rearing as Timothy Jay (2009) imputes, then it is important that we analyze the contextual relevance of Ekajuk "obscene proverbs" to establish why traditional or rural communities lay emphasis on proverbial obscenities. Jay (2009) has adduced a number of reasons for the use of taboo or swear words which could apply to Ekajuk traditional communities to a very large extent. They include:-

Emotional or Cathartic effect

Externalization of anger and frustration.

Expression of abusive or insulting expletives which include blasphemy, sexual harassment, obscene phone calls, hate speech and other verbal abuses. He also adds

Positive social outcomes like release of tension to avoid physical violence, to enhance jokes and humor, sex talk and storytelling. All of these are aimed at the promotion of social harmony. Generally therefore, obscene language as it pertains to the achievements of emotional or cathartic effect, externalization of anger or frustration in individuals, is predominantly used in quarrels between spouses, between friends and even between families. In quarrels, there is no limitation to the use of obscene language as the context is defined by anger or frustration. Such expletives as

Edabe jia meaning you this stupid one

Wo ji ma shinghi nkpanghyor ruku abor nenkal meaning you who have become a woman's cunt washing vessel and

Ekpel kpele eshmarr areh nyor ntarr mi meaning your smoothed face looks like the mouth of a vagina are easily used on an individual who has caused the annoyance. The effect of course is the release of tension which achieves cathartic effect. Timothy Jay (1977) feels that dirty words may serve a clean purpose i.e. of cleansing a person of his violent disposition which is vented only in angry and obscene or profane language. This, in fact, is the externalization of anger and frustration.

In relation to positive social outcomes, obscene language curbs vice or indecent behavior in public. It particularly aids the control of greed and avarice e.g.... Nyor goong gondi areh nyor eri mi meaning your mouth is ever downwards like the mouth of a penis

This proverb is used to describe one who is never satisfied or a greedy man who is never forward looking but spends his time exploiting others to his own benefit. The individual so described often becomes a subject of ridicule and laughter in the community and this affects his personality rating. To regain his personality, he must curb greed and help to maintain societal harmony. In terms of jokes and humor, obscene proverbs abound and are commonly used by peer group members during work sessions to enhance relaxation and ease work stress or strain. Example is proverb seven in Ekajuk obscene proverbs which compare a hard working man to the scutum that never rests but keeps swinging. The expression of abusive or insulting expletives and sexual harassment is properly expressed in proverbs one, two, five, six, eight and a host of others in Ekajuk obscene proverbs in this text. As already observed, obscene language in Ekajuk community can be accepted as explanations for the realization of any or most of these goals for societal cohesion. However, what seems peculiar to Ekajuk people is that obscene or objectionable language is the prerogative of adults, or, to a large extent, aged members of the community who resort to obscenities in pre-determined contexts thus making obscene language use a sort of cultic indulgence. For this reason I have decided to style this exercise or experience "a cult of obscenity" which membership is restricted or determined by age and experience. Elders enjoy this privilege because obscene language is tolerated in specific circumstances to be determined by the elder who judges the situation and may find the obscenity most appropriate for the transfer of cognitive experience.

5. The Ekajuk Proverbial Cult Of Obscenity: It's Usefulness To Modern Society

As I observed at the onset of this paper, proverbial language is traditional society's chief medium of communication especially among the elders. Perhaps that is why obscene proverbs are also common among them. They come handy for the impartation of traditional knowledge especially as it pertains to sexual education. However, as I again observed earlier, formal Western education is fast spreading and replacing traditional education so what is the place of proverbs generally and obscene proverbs in particular in modern parlance? As traditional linguistic forms, proverbs are pithy, compact and aesthetically pleasant forms of verbal communication which aid vivid expression of

ideas. For this reason they continue to occupy a pride of place even in modern society particularly in situations of adjudication and education. M. Heins (2007) believes that ... obscene language, by 20th and 21st century standards includes “speech” that constitutes sexual harassment or discrimination e.g. patently offensive sexual and excretory references...Today, in Ekajuk culture, obscene language abounds in proverbs and in everyday speech. What this means is that even the younger generations may use obscene language but in restricted circles and only among their peer group. Elders use same much more freely but even here this kind of language is against the normal run of everyday life. The obscene proverb may not be uttered in the general context of conversational discourse that involves everybody except for purposes of instruction. In this context, the obscene proverb is not realized or used simply for its potential to evoke pleasurable emotions as in sex talk or peer group conversation. The import of usage here is purely instructional or for education hence is not objectionable. In this context, the obscene proverb represents a highly formalized pattern of language use which is a cryptic, pregnant linguistic expression that encapsulates the ancestral wisdom of the Ekajuk people. It also serves as a vivid means of graphically representing ideas and events or experiences for societal edification. Through them, elders indulge in experimentation on language growth and development as they weave or compose these proverbs to reflect different facets of human endeavor. An elder, Nshor Egre Mbrayip, observed that what youths engage in today defies simple everyday expression hence, he opts for proverbs which are sometimes obscene but still in keeping with societal experiences in modern times. For this reason, Timothy Jay again opines that ... The ubiquity of taboo words [or obscenities] throughout the lifespan, across all known languages, demands a reformulation of theories of human language toward a more central role for taboo speech. A consideration of about thirty obscene proverbs in Ekajuk will portray the extent to which obscene proverbs can also convey the world view, thought and aesthetic beauty of Ekajuk proverbial language. They also portray how proverbs, along with other linguistic expressions, become handy as graphic means of instruction. Obscenities, here, are not objectionable but instead, serve a cathartic purpose of exposing younger generations to the implications of perverse sexual behavior which may explode in drastic consequences. The overall effect here is the release of pent-up sexual emotions thus making for positive societal advancement. This is necessary since children must come to know about obscenities through socialization of speech practices and excessive repression could breed negative attitudes. We must therefore see obscene

proverbs in Ekajuk language in the light of modern and global trends not just as objectionable linguistic constructs but as advancements aimed at capturing modern trends in cultural and linguistic development. As society metamorphoses from a predominantly oral culture to a written culture, it necessarily absorbs cultural traits which are foreign and alien to it. Since modern views of obscenities are more liberal, Ekajuk culture has grown to imbibe them as a means of education in Ekajuk cultural values.

6.Ekajuk “Obscene Proverbs”

In considering obscene proverbs in Ekajuk, I have tried to translate them to bring out the full meaning and contexts of their usage but I must admit that my translations fall far short of the picturesque images created in the mind and emotions when the proverbs are rendered in the original Ekajuk language. Translation is not an easy task especially when one finds that the tonal nature of Ekajuk language and the fact that the writer is using English as a second language creates limitations which make it impossible to find exact correlates to represent the ideas being expressed in the proverb.

- Ekib kpomo mah babe mbaang
- The clitoris is a bad sentry. It allows free passage to visitors.
- Used to derogate a weak person given responsibility to guard valuables. They can easily be stolen.
- Ntarr kpo lun along bo kpe jam ebtia?
- Does one thrust a stick into a naturally bleeding cunt?
- Used to denote a bad situation which is being aggravated instead of being ameliorated
- Ebor kpo toonor eri shong manghe ntarr
- The hand accompanies the penis to learn about the cunt
- Used to describe one who inadvertently accompanies another person to commit a crime he would not have known about.
- Eri li wonghor wo kpo kaalleh
- The penis vomits whenever it is very satisfied
- Used to denote greed or avarice; one who grabs so much that he ends up losing all because he cannot care for all he has grabbed
- Kpi ridi re nenkal fonhor afonhor kak go ekpuma
- It is difficult for a woman to urinate into a bottle

- Used to denote hard tasks allotted to people who cannot perform them in order to dissuade them from claiming ability that they don't have
- Eshamarr areh ntarr jik alap
- Your face looks like a cunt sitting on water.
- This is an abuse for a dull-faced unintelligent individual.
- Lim ekpakefan gboka go nnab
- Work hard so your scrutum can vibrate under your buttocks.
- Used to depict lazy, slow and clumsy persons to stir them into action. It is believed that the scrutum never rests except if a man is lazy.
- Anim mah wuv ejuv binghi eri
- No one steals better than the penis
- Used to derogate a petty thief who ends up being caught. The penis is never caught by the clitoris.
- Wob shab areh ntarr alab nyi
- You are as disgusting as a watery cunt.
- Used to describe a persistently obstinate person who defies advice.
- Eshamarr areh abaang eror eti nya
- Your face is like shit falling from a tree-top.
- Is an abuse for a flat faced individual, implying that he is ugly.
- Ali tokhim ngo nnab ki fal abaang, meh wa nnim tokho go nwul fal amal.
- If you bite my arse without fear of shit, I'll bite your nose without fear of mucose.
- Exaggerated comparison meant to portray that one has committed a lesser evil compared to what was done to him.
- Abaang kpomo wuv nneh go alla
- Shit does not smell inside one's stomach
- Means one never has premonitions about every happening in one's life. Same as "I would have known"
- Ekpakehfan nnenkul kpo minghe epshenghe
- An old man's scrutum is difficult to look at.
- Is a stern warning against immorality or indulgence in actions against approved societal ethics. To be unethical is abominable just as looking at an old man's scrutum.

- Ebkod areh ntarr nyi
- As blunt as a vagina
- Is used to denote one's inability to react. Also used to describe incapacity to do anything. As a farming community, it could also be used as a comparison for a blunt knife that can't be used for any farm work. The alternative proverb here is
- Ntarr ka bu bom nne elok
- A cunt has never inflicted a cut/gash on anyone.
- Meaning how can a blunt knife inflict an injury or a cut.
- Ebfan kpo gah wuwu alab go etak ntarr
- The scrutum only bathes in cunt's house
- Used to describe a lazy, idle person who is always clean and goes about in people's houses looking for food which he himself cannot offer anybody.
- Mbanghenab kpomo rin abaang
- The anus never lacks shit.
- Used to describe availability of an item presumed to be scarce.
- Ejel li bom nenkal go areh, anim mah kpe birr ntarr
- A woman in labour in a market place cannot hide her cunt.
- Used to denote impossibilities. That some desirables are unattainable.
- Nnenum kpomo gaareh ebbing ntarr go eri kimme nkal ko
- No man measures the depth of a woman's vagina with his penis before marrying her.
- Means some conditions/considerations are unnecessary/ irrelevant during a truce especially when it pertains to love affairs.
- Ntarr kpomo taanghe eri
- The cunt never quarrels with the penis
- Means close friends or relations do not disagree or harm each other. Also used to connote danger. If the cunt never rejects the friendship of the penis, the outcome could be hazardous.
- Eri kpomo koonor ebfan
- The penis never parleys with the scrutum
- Describes family feuds or quarrels between close friends
- This can also be expressed in the form of a question

- Eri kpo ti taanghe ebfan-a?
- Does the penis quarrel with the scrutum?
- Ntarr kpomo kim efanghe lakeh eri
- The cunt does not tell lies against the penis
- Same as proverb “20”. Denotes closeness between two people. Also connotes pregnancy. The cunt will never deny that the penis passed through her to cause pregnancy.
- Ebjng eblak go ebun
- Sperm has stuck to the waist
- Is a description for bachelors. It’s a derogatory name for anyone who is of marriageable age but has no wife. Could serve as a warning that one should not be promiscuous if he remains unmarried.
- Bo kpo tahre nne no yakhe kim tan go alab go ebbing ntarr shaang.
- People rally to save/rescue a man drowning in water, not in a cunt hole.
- Used to describe reckless behavior especially as it relates to spending on women.
- Ekpidi eti ji gbor/nnong kim mbaang ji kpor kahn ari ah etarr bi kpo shire sha.
- The log that falls/lies across a footpath knows the number of penises and cunts that step over it.
- Means if you are in a privileged or responsible position, you become privy to secrets you would never have known.
- Nkpangheyor ruku abor bo kpomo kuru go ebkab anneh
- A cunt washing vessel is never displayed or kept in public.
- Means one does not disclose his/family secrets to outsiders. In the past women kept special vessels for cleaning-up before going to bed known only to the immediate family and kept in a secluded place. Secrets are as well guarded as these vessels.
- Eri foonghor ekpabughu, kpo mak eshi eshi
- The penis is a lizard. It nods repeatedly when satisfied or happy.
- Used to taunt a stammerer.
- Eri kpo ga nyin go ejanghe
- The penis is unimpeded by darkness
- Means an intelligent person always deciphers the truth no matter the wave of lies woven around it.

- Ntarr a monshe kpomo mmang abi
- A baby's cunt never grows grey hair.
- A warning never to try the impossible, or what the community forbids or what is frowned upon by elders.
- Ali gah formor anyom nnab
- If you are in haste, you fuck the arse
- Is a warning against doing things in haste and doing them badly. Cunt and arse are so close that in haste you can go the wrong way.
- Nenkali nob elnong bo kpo nyome shene efunfu
- If a woman is good in bed, she is kept till late morning
- Means if someone is generous, he surely attracts several dependants or many people who will always hang around him and never let him go about freely.
- Nenkali no kili mah ten kpo baneh ebun
- A woman who is ashamed to say NO to men goes home with a broken waist.
- Means anyone who is willing to work is always overburdened and can easily break down from excess work; a willing horse can be ridden to its grave.

From the foregoing it is obvious that Ekajuk "obscene proverbs", are in fact, serious linguistic tools for the impartation of the age old wisdom of the people. Their usages are not intended for sheer pleasure, but rather serve as avenues for the reflection of the aesthetic or artistic use of language. The metaphorical and personificatory use of language is best exemplified in the proverbs which also depict the skills of the users in the manipulation of linguistic resources available in the community. With them, Elders are able to vivify and externalize the norms and cultural ethics of the Ekajuk people. The "obscene proverbs" cannot, therefore, be said to depict the lewd or profane disposition of the Ekajuk people since obscenities are determined by the community who see and consider them as such. If a community allows or permits the use of these proverbs, then, there must be a positive value to them recognized and cherished by the people because the community decides what is objectionable and, therefore, constitutes an "obscenity". Again, since obscenities are arbitrary and subjective, obscene language is only peripheral to the core message to be imparted which is always central in the mind of the user of the obscene proverbs. Thus, the Ekajuk "proverbial cult of obscenity" is a cult of elders whose function is to foster education, societal cohesion and maintenance of cherished cultural values. This is in keeping with Cory R. Scherer's and Brad J. Sagarin's assertion

that ... judiciously used obscenity can increase persuasion [since] obscenity could impact credibility positively because the use of obscenity could make a credible speaker appear more human. And since Aune and Kibuchi (1993) argue that “language intensity can lead to higher levels of attitude change”, younger generations would benefit faster from messages couched in and imparted through so-called obscene language. Timothy Jay affirms this when he also observes that... taboo words can communicate emotion information (anger and frustration) more readily than non-taboo words, allowing speakers to achieve a variety of personal and social goals with them.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is observed that proverbial obscenities in Ekajuk community, which in the past, were highly restricted, are tending to gain currency as the community becomes more and more cosmopolitan and so more open to outside influences. The result is that the “obscenities” tend to impact more on the emotions of the younger generations because of their western oriented dispositions towards modern film and GSM cultures which make obscenities common place and less offensive. This way, they seem to enhance a faster learning process of the norms and values cherished in the community. Conversely however, the rampant use of obscene language by all classes of people is tending to impact negatively on societal morality evident in sexual looseness among young females. For this to be curbed, stronger restrictions on the use of obscene language should be imposed while at the same time encouraging elders who are skilled in proverbial usage to couch messages in proverbs for continuous societal edification and education. The earlier we adhere to the wisdom of the elders in restricting obscene language to proverbs which are not commonly used, the better for society’s moral and ethical advancement.

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