SIGNIFICANCE OF PALM TREE IN IGBO LAND: THE LINGUISTIC TERMS, A CULTURAL IMPERATIVE AND ITS SPECIFIC GRAMMATICAL FORMS

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Abstract
The importance of palm tree in the Igbo culture is the pivot of this study. The aim of the study is to document the linguistic terms of the significance of the tree. The palm tree is an aged long tree in the Igbo culture. Everything about it is well known by the Igbo people. The job, raw materials, income, food and medicine from the palm tree are not new to the Igbo people. But in this recent time of technology, more advanced way of processing the palm produce has emerged and some of the people have started forgetting some terms that are used to describe things concerning the palm tree. As technology is still advancing, it is necessary to document all the terms so that they will not go into extinction in future. Those involved in the advancement of technology can also borrow terms from Igbo language. The study x-rays the general usefulness, the job, raw material, income, food and medicine from palm tree emphasizing on the verbs and nouns for them. Every part of the palm tree has a name in Igbo. The study concludes that it is necessary to document all the terms for the significance of the tree pin pointing the verbs and nouns concerning the palm tree in Igbo and how they are used. It concludes and suggests that, cultures that are yet to start enjoying the gains of palm tree should borrow from Igbo to enrich their vocabulary.

Keywords: Palm tree, Igbo land, Linguistic terms, Cultural imperative

Introduction
The importance of palm tree and everything that concerns it can never be erased in any form from the Igbo culture because of the numerous gains from it. The Igbo people cannot do without the palm tree. The emergence of new technology and new terms for the palm tree
production and things concerning palm tree cannot easily be wiped away from the Igbo tradition. Terms for things concerning palm tree had existed for so long in the Igbo culture.

Ilechukwu (2017:145) contends that with the recent technological advancement in the method of production and processing of palm oil, more English terms that do not exist in the Igbo language create communication problems. In addition to mastering English terms for palm oil production, it is necessary to master and document the Igbo terms because it is not everybody that can afford the new technology for palm processing and things that relate to it. The Igbo terms should not cease to exist instead let other languages that lack term for the production and the processing borrow from the Igbo. In line with the above, Chukwukere (2005), suggests that the terms that are not in the standard Igbo should be borrowed from the Igbo dialects. The terms used are mostly drawn from Mbaaasa dialect. Nwaozuzu (2008) groups Mbaaasa under East Central Group of Dialects (ECGD). It should be noted that Standard Igbo grows from different Igbo dialects. A term that exists in a dialect may not exist in another. When the need arises, the standard Igbo borrows from the Igbo dialects as suggested by Chukwukere (2005).

The Palm tree is an aged long tree in Igbo land. The discovery of the importance by the Igbo people cannot be traced. Regarding the numerous gains, Ezeuko (1986) says that the palm tree is essential in all ramifications for human beings. Igbokwe (2012), has it that among all the trees God has endowed to bless the Igbo people with, the palm tree is the most essential.

2.0 Importance of Palm Tree in Igbo Land

The usefulness of palm tree for the Igbo is not new and its importance cannot be over emphasized. Everything about the palm tree is very useful for the Igbo people. From the apex (omu) to its root (apali) are useful, each part has its peculiar use.

The youngest yet-unfolding tender leaf (omu) from the palm tree is used for the following: to tie firewood, oil bean, tapioca, melon cake, etc. It is sometimes used for wrapping: cassava, snails, palm fruits etc. temporally before they are kept in their permanent places. The omu is used to wrap parcels to prevent the things wrapped from scattering. Furthermore, omu tied on different objects signifies the following:

- a vehicle signifies that the vehicle is carrying a corpse.
- a tree signifies that the tree is about falling, no one should cross to avoid the tree falling on someone.
- trees that are due for harvesting signifies that no one is allowed to touch, pluck or harvest the fruits except the owner. Such trees include: pear, pepper, fruits etc.
- road signifies danger; that one should not pass through because the road is in a terrible shape or there is danger of any sort on the road.
- Piece of land signifies that no one is expected to enter the land for any reason, either that the land is in dispute or no one should defecate on it or the land is due for planting this planting season.

Mounting of omu at the market square in some parts of Igbo land signifies that there is masquerade festival. According to Akidi (2008: 97), when omu is mounted at the village square
or market square it signifies that masquerade festival is coming up soon. She also says that if this newly sprout palm frond \( (omu) \) is placed in front of a house it means that there is inbreeding between close relatives. That is there is a case of incest; or a relation killing a relation. The mounting of the \( omu \) in this context signifies that what happened is a taboo and the families that mounted the \( omu \) on their door post are not in support of the abominable act.

\( Omu \) is usually deeped inside a jar containing wine to prevent the wine from overflowing and souring quick.

\( Omu \) is used for rituals, sacrifices, incantations etc. The usefulness of \( omu \) for the Igbo people are too numerous. The matured palm frond \( (igu) \) that is the greenish palm leave serves as food for goats. It can serve as shade, it can be used for shelter etc., brooms are also gotten from it. The long stick \( (ogugu) \) can serve as yam stick or stake. The \( ogugu \) can also be used as firewood. The rope \( (eriri) \) gotten from the \( ogugu \) is for making basket of different types. It is used to tie firewood, yams, fodder, packages, etc.

The palm frond can also serve as mulching material and can even be used specifically as manure. The remains containing thorns after the palm frond might have cut out can also serve as firewood. The palm tree and its entirety can be used to check erosion.

Wine which is very good for health is found in palm tree. The wine is gotten by making a hole on the base of the flower on the palm tree. In line with this, Mmaduekwe (1979) says that the base of flower is chiseled out, and from the hole thus made, ‘\( Nkwu\) enu’ gushes out. \( Nkwu\) enu (palm wine), a type of wine from the palm tree is very important in Igbo tradition; more especially for traditional marriage. Palm wine is more valued in Igbo tradition than raffia wine.

The palm wine is used for oath taking; it is used for strengthening medicine to make it more efficacious. The palm wine is used to produce hot drinks like \( mmanya\) oku \( (kaikai) \). The palm wine can be used as antidote.

The palm tree consists of the fruit with the kernel, spikes etc. the fruit produces oil. When the chaff from the fruit that produces oil is removed, what remains is the palm kernel with its shell. The mesocarp of the fruit produces the palm oil used for cooking different types of Igbo dishes such as soup, stew, yam, moi moi etc. It also serves as medicine. From the palm kernel, palm kernel oil is extracted by frying the oil so produced and used as medicine for cough, convulsion, fever etc. The spikes with the bunch when burnt to ashes serve as catalyst. The ash is also used for the production of black soap. The palm oil extracted from the specie called \( ojukwu\) is also used as antidote. The oil from \( ojukwu\) is more efficacious than that of the ordinary one. \( Ojukwu\) oil serves as medicine for cough. When applied on boils it lessens pains from the boil, softens the boil and helps the person suffering the boil to get quick relief. The trunk is used for erosion checking, it is used as raw materials for building and it also serve as timber.

After the extraction of oil from the fruit, the chaff is used to aid combustion. The chaff is called \( abiribo \) in Igbo. The thick substance coming out after the extraction of oil from the chaff \( (upurutu) \) is mixed with chaff to mold \( ogbenyedimbu\). The \( ogbenyedimbu\) when dried is used for light in the night. It is also used to search for snails in the night during the snail season. The torns from the base of palm frond is used to unshell snails, remove thorns from the human body etc.
The palm nut shell is used for erosion control. It can also be used to aid combustion. There are edible animals that live only on palm trees. Such animals like *ebie, ikukoro, akwa, oňu mayi* etc. These animals live only on palm trees and no other tree. The animals are also medicinal.

It is not all the general uses that are discussed because of space and time. From the discussion on the general use of the palm tree, it is obvious that palm tree can give job, food, medicine and income to the Igbo people.

As stated earlier, palm tree gives job, medicine, food and money. These are the major reasons the terms concerning them should be preserved to avoid loss. All these that are gained from palm tree do not just come by without effort. This part enumerates that numerous gains are gotten from the palm tree. The gains are discussed according to the headings below:

2.1 **Job from Palm Tree**

It is possible for one to be gainfully employed by processing and marketing the palm products. For example, one can be planting and selling palm seedlings and make money.

Other jobs include gathering the palm bunches from the bush, picking of palm fruits, threshing or removal of the fruits from the bunches, cooking of the palm fruits, extraction of the oil from the fruit/chaff; bottling of the palm oil, selling palm products and palm kernel oil products etc. One can engage in one or two of the above jobs to earn a living. One can indulge in palm kernel oil production as a job. These jobs also yield a lot of money. There are people that dwell on broom making as jobs and they are comfortable.

There are many other jobs being given by palm tree. They include cutting down of palm bunches, which also includes, dressing of the palm tree, wine tapping, processing of palm oil, cracking of palm nut, picking of the palm kernel etc. All these are jobs from palm tree. One can stay in any locality, in any part of Igbo land and engage in these jobs or travel to another locality for the jobs.

Palm tree can be planted anywhere in Igbo land. The palm tree does not require much or special manure. It can grow on itself without being planted by anybody. It can be dispersed by erosion or animals. Human beings can grow or plant palm tree on a place suitable to them. Or transplant from a temporal place to a permanent place. With palm tree, the youths can be gainfully employed than indulging in the rampant social vices of today.

2.2 **Food from Palm Tree**

Palm fruit is chewed either raw, boiled or roasted. The kernel can be eaten alone, chewed with *garri*, corn bread fruit, cassava, *ijiriji*, etc. Ilechukwu (2017) asserts that:

Palm oil fruit contains two kinds of oil – the palm kernel oil and the palm oil that gives vitamin A. The palm kernel is a source of two economic products – palm kernel oil and palm kernel cake. Palm kernel oil can be used for cooking and frying, production of fats and margarine for plastics, animal feed and soap production (Ilechukwu, 2017: 146).
From the above assertion, it becomes very clear that palm kernel serves as food for both man and animals. Kernel oil can be processed into vegetable oil for stew and frying other things. Palm oil is used to prepare almost all kinds of Igbo dishes. Ash (ngu) from the burnt spikes and bunches are used for the preparation of sauce for yam, meat, tapioca etc. Ash is also used to cook bread fruit to help it soften fast, the ash can be used to cook kanda, beans etc. The ash acts as catalyst for cooking hard food. Wine is a good drink that goes with abacha, pepper soup, nkwoja, and other pepperish dishes.

The palm fruit and kernel can be chewed raw, roasted, fried or cooked. The animals that live on palm trees are edible animals. After chewing the palm fruit, the oil is swallowed but the chaff and the nut are spit out. The kernel can be chewed and either swallowed with the oil or spit out with the chaff. All the food from palm tree are swallowed after chewing except the chaff (abiribo). Wine is drunk not licked. A na-ańu mmany ańu o bughi nracha. It is not proper to say anyí na-eri akwu, aki, etc. But is proper to say anyí na-ata akwu, aki etc.

2.3 Revenue from Palm Tree

When the palm tree is well dressed, it bears fruits. The fruits, oil, the kernel, the trunk, the broom, wood, the wine etc. yield a lot of money to the owner. One can engage on business that concerns palm tree and be comfortable in life. He that has plenty palm tree does not lack money year in year out. This is because he sells things from the palm tree all the time.

Communities sell their palm products and use the income from it to build halls, markets, schools etc. Any person that has enough palm trees can never go hungry or lack money unless the person is very lazy or is not sensible at all.

2.4 Medicine from Palm Tree

The palm oil is a medicine that is rich in vitamin A. It cures cough. It helps to soften boil as well as helps it to burst fast thereby reducing pains from the boil when rubbed on the boil. The kernel oil is also good medicine that cures cough, fever, convulsion etc. The palm wine is rich in yeasts that clear the eye. This means that palm wine is good for the eye. Nursing mothers are advised to take palm wine to aid lactation. Palm grub is put in clean water as medicine given to children of about a day old to three months old. This is said to cure gastro-intestinal problems in children of the above age.

3.0 The Linguistic Form and its Importance to Cultural Verbal Forms

The verbs are listed with their English equivalents and one or two of their grammatical usage in Igbo. Nkwụ in this context is the tree while akwu is the fruit that nkwo bears.

1. Te (tap) - tee nkwo - tap wine
2. Gbu (cut) - gbuo akwu - cut down the palm fruit/palm tree.
3. Doọ (transplant) - doọ nkwo - transplant palm tree.
4. Kpa (fetch) - kpata akwu - fetch palm fruit by removing
5. Nwuo (remove/seperable) - nwuo  akwụ - separate/remove in plenty, palm fruits.
6. Wụ (pour) - wụọ mmany akwụ - pour out wine from the calabash to calabash/pour palm fruits into something (basket).
7. Ri (climb) - rịa nkwụ - climb the palm tree.
8. Hịa (cut) - hịa aţiża - cut out the brooms from the palm frond.
9. Wa (break/cut) waa nkx/ nkwx - chop or cut into piece the palm wood.
10. Pe (break) - pee nkụ - the use of axe to break wood.
11. Ti (crack) - tie aki - crack palm kernel.
12. Bu (carry) - isu akwụ - to carry palm bunch from the farm to where it will be processed.
13. Ghe (fry) - gee akị, akwụ - fry palm fruit.
14. Ghe (cut) - gee akwụ - cut the spikes from the bunch.
15. Me (make) - mee ude aki - prepare palm kernel.
17. Fụ (bear) - ifụ ogbe - to bear fruit. This is only used for palm tree.
18. Ghụ (thresh) - ghuo akwụ - use pointed object to bring out palm fruits. This is when the bunch has been cut down.
19. Wo (thresh) - woo akwụ - use of long pointed object to bring down palm fruit from the palm tree while it is still on top of the tree.
20. Che (preserve) - iche aţiża, mmanụ, ak - to preserve broom, oil, kernel, etc.
21. Zu (grow) - izụ nkụ - to grow or take care of palm tree so that it will start to bear.
22. Za (sieve) - iza mmanụ - to sieve palm oil.
23. Kpa (weave) - kpaa ekete - weave basket.
24. Kpa (fetch, bring/seperate) - kpaa akwụ - fetch palm fruit, separate palm fruits from spikes.
25. Sụ (pound) - isụ akwụ - to pound.
26. Bu (carry) - bute akwụ - carry palm fruits.
27. Họ (select) - hoọ akwụ - select palm fruits.
28. Ru (roast) - ruọ akwę - roast palm fruit.
28. Pa (carry) - pata ogbe akwę - carry the palm bunch to where it is supposed to be.
29. Fo (uproot) - fopu nkwụ - (uproot when the palm tree is yet young, especially with hard).
30. Bụ (uproot) - bụọ nkwụ - uproot palm tree from the root.
31. Fọọ (squeeze) - fọọ akwę - squeeze to get oil for immediate cooking.
32. Gba (Squeeze) - gbaa akwę - squeeze palm fruit with water in other to get oil for immediate cooking.
33. Pa (extract) - paa akwę - extract oil from palm fruit.
34. Kwụ - kwụọ aziza - (remove the leaves from the broom with knife or razor).
35. Ke (tie) - kee aziza, nkụ, - tie broom, firewood.
36. Ghu (cook) - ghu akwę - cook palm fruit.
37. Bụ (uproot) - bụọ nkwụ - uproot palm tree.
38. Tx (seperate) - tùọ akwu - separate the kernels from the chaff in other to extract oil from the chaff.
39. Ta (chew) - taa akị, akwu - chew kernel, palm fruit.
40. Lo (swallow) - loo akị - swallow kernel.
41. ụ (drink) - ụọ mmanụ, mmanụ - drink palm wine, oil.
42. Mi (sip) - mịa mmanụ - sip wine.
43. Ra (lick) - rachaa mmanụ - lick oil.
44. Re (sell) - ree aziza, mmanụ, akị, ude akị - sell broom, oil, kernel, kernel oil etc.
45. Ibe (lease) - igba nkwụ ibe - to lease palm tree.
46. Gbugha (retailing palm fruit) - o na eme ebughaa
47. Kpa (buying of palm oil) - ikpa mmanụ
48. Ọrụ ejo - hired labour. One can be hired and paid to do jobs concerning palm tree such as carrying palm bunches, the fruits, the kernels, squeezing out palm oil etc. By so doing, one gets a lot of money.
49. Te (rub) - tee ude akị, mmanụ nri - rub palm kernel, palm oil.
50. Jx (drink) - ụọ mmanụ, drink wine.
51. Ra (lick) - rachaa mmanụ nri, ude akị - lick palm oil, palm kernel oil.
52. Mehuo (ignite) - were ogugu mehuo ọkụ - use palm frond to ignite fire.
53. Munye (to light) - munye okụ na nkụ - light the firewood.
54. Fu (bear) - Nkwụ fuo ogbe a mara na ọ bụ nwunye nkwụ
   - when palm tree starts bearing fruit it indicates that is a female palm tree.

There are enough verbs to describe everything that concerns palm tree in Igbo. The usefulness of palm tree and everything that concerns it was discovered long ago by the Igbo people.

There are some verbs that are very peculiar to palm tree. Examples: It is only the palm tree that fx is used to describe its bearing of fruits. In Igbo, nkwụ anaghị amị amị kama ọ na-altụ ogbe (mj is not used for palm tree). But mj can be used for trees like pear, cashew, coconut etc.

Retail (Ebugha) is used for trading on palm fruits as occupation.

Most of the verbs concerning palm tree are simple verbs with the morphomic structure CV; that is consonant and vowel. In their syntactic structure they appear as cv + v. that is consonant, vowel plus vowel. Vowels are added to verb when they are used in a sentence a vowel is attached in the front of the verb. For example gbụ + ọ = gbụọ (cut), ọjị + a = ọja (climb) the verb are suffixed with vowels. This does not mean that verbs concerning palm tree in their simple forms cannot be prefixed. The simple verbs can be suffixed as well as prefixed as the case may be. The simple verb can also be prefixed and suffixed at the same time. Because of space and time only the simple (cv) and the (cv + v) verbs are used for examples. There are also cv + cv verbs. That is simple verbs that are suffixed with another simple verb to form complete verb or disyllabic verb. Among the verbs about the palm tree few verbs like: gbụha, mehuo, ibe, hịa etc do not have the same morphological structures like other verbs in the examples.

Linguistic Terms / Grammatical Forms Concerning Palm Tree

55. Nkwụ - palm tree
56. Ogbe akwu - palm bunch
57. Ukwu nkwụ - The trunk
58. Mkpurụ akwu - palm fruit
59. Akwu - palm fruit
60. Akị nkwụ - palm kernel
61. Igu - palm frond
62. Ogugu - stem
63. Aziza - broom
64. Ogwu akwu - the thorns
65. Aghirighị - the spike
66. Ishida akwu - the small palm fruit
67. Omụ - the newly sprout palm frond
68. Apaị - the root
69. Abịrịbo - the chaff from the palm fruit
The Igbo people found palm tree useful so early. Everything from palm tree is found useful by the Igbo people. Almost every average Igbo man owns at least a palm tree. The tree is useful for the Igbo people.

There is nothing in palm tree that has no name to describe it. Everything about palm tree has a name in Igbo. All the names pointed out in nouns concerning palm tree are peculiar to palm tree except *apali* (root) and *omu* (newly sprout leave); because the roots of other trees are also called apali and the new leaves of other trees are also called *omu*.

**Conclusion**

The study has proved that palm tree in Igbo land and its linguistic terms are culture specific and culture bound. The study will promote Igbo culture, and also preserve the linguistic terms from going into extinction.

This paper has tried to establish that palm tree is the most useful tree for the Igbo people, in the sense that everything about it is useful from its apex to the root. Also one can be gainfully employed with palm tree, have enough income and get medicine and food from it.
As palm tree is an aged long tree which its usefulness was discovered long ago. Everything about it has linguistic terms that are culture specific.

**Recommendations**

- The verbs and nouns about palm tree in Igbo should be documented to avoid loss as technology is advancing.
- Cultures that lack terms for palm tree should borrow words concerning palm tree from Igbo to make up their own. As technology advances those involved in the advancement of technology can find terms from Igbo language to describe some operations in palm production that lack necessary terms.

**References**


