

IGBO PREFERENCE OF OIL PALM (*NKWU*) TO RAFFIA PALM (*NGWỌ*): EVIDENCE FROM THE CULTURE

Monday C. Onukawa*

onukawamc@gmail.com 08037611883

Chinwendu A. Nwizu

toniagreg28@gmail.com

08062706372

And

Edith N. Onukawa

onukawangozi@gmail.com 08038701999

Abstract

This paper examined the Igbo value of the oil palm (*nkwu*) and the raffia palm (*ngwọ*) as closely related and significant trees in Igboland. It specifically analyzed the various Igbo traditional worldview which suggest a high hierarchical placement of *nkwu* over *ngwọ*. The study adopted qualitative methodological design, involving semi-structured interviews with some Igbo elders drawn from various culture areas of Igboland, to collect data which were subjected to descriptive and interpretive analyses hinged on the cultural theory of preference formation. Introspection also featured in data collection and analyses as the researchers are Igbo natives, born and bred in Igboland. The study discovered that while *nkwu* and *ngwọ* are significant in the Igbo culture, *nkwu* is of more value than *ngwọ*. The study further discovered that the Igbo preference of *nkwu* to *ngwọ* is exhibited in the various aspects of the Igbo language and culture, and most evident in the cultural use of the various types of palm wine produced by both trees; in the Igbo proverb, and the hierarchical placements as complementary dual concepts. The study concluded that the Igbo preference of *nkwu* to *ngwọ* is a tool in the understanding of the ontological hierarchies among the Igbo, which is part of what concretizes the Igbo worldview.

Key words: Igbo, Preference, Oil palm tree (*Nkwu*), Raffia palm tree (*Ngwọ*), Evidence, Culture, Language.

**Monday C. Onukawa Ph.D is a Professor in the Department of Linguistics, Communication Studies/Igbo; Chinwendu A. Nwizu Ph.D is a Reader in the Department of English Language and Literature; Edith N. Onukawa Ph.D is a Reader in the Department of Linguistics, Communication Studies/Igbo, all in Abia State University Uturu, Nigeria*

Introduction

Palm trees are group of flowering plants in the monocot order of *Arecales*. They belong to the large family of *Arecaceae* or *Palmae*. They grow mostly in sub tropical and tropical warm climates with abundant sunshine, and have about 2,600 varieties (Eze, 2021). Among the varieties that grow in Igboland are the oil palm (*Nkwụ*) and raffia palm (*Ngwọ*). The varieties of palms are (closely) related and are culturally significant in the Igbo society. Though both oil palm (*nkwụ*) and the raffia palm (*ngwọ*) are significant in the Igbo culture, the oil palm (*nkwụ*) seems more significant among the Igbo, and they (the Igbo) seem to assign more value to it than the raffia palm (*ngwọ*).

Some extant literatures have discussed the significance of one of the major products of the oil palm tree-the oil palm wine (*mmanya nkwụ/nkwụ elu*) (see, for example Onuegbu, Obiajulu, and Nnajiogor, 2015 and Enyioha, 2015), while others have identified the characteristics and uses of the oil palm (*nkwụ*) in the Igbo culture (for example, Eze, 2021). However, the discussions on the significance of *nkwụ* and its products among the Igbo, as available to us, are not based on comparison with *ngwọ*, a closely related specie of palm. Again, to the best of our knowledge, none of the available literatures discusses the significance of *nkwụ* from the perspective of speech forms in the Igbo language. This gap, therefore, forms the preoccupation and concern of this paper which examines the Igbo preference of *nkwụ* to *ngwọ*, deriving from a comparison of both items as exhibited in the Igbo cultural practices, and forms of speech.

We present the similarities and differences between *nkwụ* and *ngwọ* , and also give pieces of evidence in the Igbo culture to justify the fact that the Igbo prefer *nkwụ* to *ngwọ*.

1.1 Study Objectives and Methodology

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. examine the Igbo preference of *nkwụ* to *ngwọ*

- ii. analyze the aspects of the Igbo language and culture that suggest the Igbo value of *nkwu* over *ngwo*.

For us to achieve these objectives, we adopted the qualitative descriptive and analytical approach. For our primary source of data we adopted the key informant interview involving oral interview method of some 25 informants of 60 years and above, from various culture areas of Igboland and who are believed to be knowledgeable enough as to elicit appropriate responses pertaining to *nkwu* and *ngwo* in the Igbo culture. Research assistants were also employed in collecting proverbs on *nkwu* and *ngwo*. Also, introspection featured in data collection as the researchers are Igbo natives, born and bred in Igboland. Library and internet were our secondary source of data.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

This study hinges on the cultural theory of preference formation. Culture has many influences, one of which is on people's preferences and choices. The cultural theory of preference formation was formulated by Wildavsky (1987). He assumed that support for and opposition to different ways of life, the shared values legitimating social relations (called cultures) are the generators of diverse preferences. The theory further assumes that people are able to develop many preferences from the clues by using their social relations to interrogate their environment. The theory also argues that culture is a more powerful construct in social preferences.

This theory and assumptions have been applied in diverse fields and persuasions, including those on cultural artifacts, eating habits, food, behaviour, health care, in which diverse cultural preferences are discussed. Certain preferences are said to be made in line with values, beliefs and traditions of a people. Cultural preferences are attitudes, values and activities that a culture at large seems to favour. Cultural preference is defined as the values and beliefs that are shared by an organization, which in turn influences decision-making, communication and behaviour throughout the organization. It is the set of values that have worth, merit and importance for the organization. On cultural

objects, a people's beliefs and values can be reflected in their preference for a particular object or entity as opposed to another, and in this case, such items or objects are said to be culturally significant.

2. Similarities and Differences Between The Oil Palm (*Nkwụ*) And The Raffia Palm (*Ngwọ*)

As we pointed out earlier, the oil palm (*nkwụ*) and the raffia palm (*ngwọ*) are related, in which case they can be assessed to be similar and also different. Some of our similarities and differences between *nkwụ* and *ngwọ* are drawn from the characteristics, uses and applications of palm trees discussed in Eze (2021).

2.1 Similarities Between Oil Palm (*Nkwụ*) and And Raffia Palm (*Ngwọ*)

- i. *Nkwụ* and *Ngwọ* seem to be the first pair (among members of the family of *palmae*) to develop in Igboland, as evidenced by the fact that only the prefixes of their names have changed diachronically from vowel to syllabic nasal in the languages from *akwụ* to *nkwụ* (some Igbo dialects still have it as *akwụ*), and from *agwò* to *ngwò* (some dialects now have *agwò* as the name of the fibre of *ngwọ*). It should be noted that the prefix of *akụ bekee* (coconut, which also belongs to the class of *palmae* (Eze, 2021)) is yet to change from vowel to syllabic nasal.
- ii They have erect upright stems, evergreen and are among the widely grown and longest surviving trees in Igboland and the entire world.
- iii The fronds of both *nkwụ* and *ngwọ* are used in making the ordinary baskets and the fishing baskets.
- iv. Some of the fibres of both *nkwụ* and *ngwọ* are used as ropes, climbing ropes, and twine.
- v The trunks of both *nkwụ* and *ngwọ* produce palm wine. In production, they are tapped the same way by climbing to the neck of the palm tree and cutting the ducts under which are placed calabash or plastic gallon.
- vi The cultivations of both *nkwụ* and *ngwọ* have high economic benefits. This is why in the traditional Igbo society a first son is usually mandatorily trained in the climbing/harvesting of either *nkwụ* or *ngwọ*, or in both.

2.2 Differences Between Oil Palm (*Nkwụ*) And Raffia Palm (*Ngwọ*)

i. The stem of *nkwu* can be used as planks for building constructions. The stem of *ngwo* cannot be so used.

ii The leaflets of *nkwu* and *ngwo* serve various purposes. The leaflets of *nkwu* are used in making broom and for fencing off a building; while the leaflets of *ngwo* are used for making mats which serve as roofing sheets (*akirika*, *okaj* or *atanj* in the dialects).

iii While both *nkwu* and *ngwo* can produce palm wine while standing erect (as noted earlier in similarities), only *nkwu* can still produce palm wine when cut down. This is why some of the Igbo refer to the palm wine produced by the oil palm while standing erect as *nkwu elu* (up wine), that is oil palm wine extracted from the palm tree above the terrestrial surface, as against the oil palm wine extracted from the felled oil palm tree. The specie of oil palm wine so produced is called *ikiri ala*, in some dialects. Commenting on the reason for the name *Nkwu elu*, and its superiority to and higher popularity than the one extracted from felled palm tree, Onuegbu, Obiajulu and Nnajofofor (2015) assert that:

Nkwu elu, which literally translates “up wine” is a specie of palm wine and most popular of the traditional palm wine among Igbo Africans. Its popularity is not fortuitous. It is harvested from up; hence the name *nkwu elu*-up wine “Up” in this context means “above the terrestrial surface”. Thus “up wine” means wine that is extracted from the palm tree above the soil surface. This very wine cements a kind of vertical relationship between man and God... (It) has an inherent force of a unity between Heaven and Earth, the departed and the living,

iv *Nkwu* produces oil. In fact, it produces two types of oil: palm oil or virgin oil from the fleshy mesocarp of the fruit, and palm kernel oil from the kernel of the seed (Eze 2021). *Ngwo* does not produce any oil.

v The cultivation of *nkwu* has more economic benefits than that of *ngwo*.

vi In some culture areas of Igboland *nkwu* is publicly owned by the community. In those areas the individual ownership of *nkwu* and the establishment of oil palm plantations (*Ogba nkwu*) are relatively recent practices. *Ngwo* is not so owned by the public/community.

vii *Nkwu* is more predominant in Igboland than *ngwo*. One would not be surprised if there is a place in Igboland that does not have *ngwo*. This cannot be conceived of *nkwu*.

viii The life span of *nkwu* is longer than that of *ngwo*. This is the source of the derivation of the Igbo proverb: *Uzo mu na gi ga-abu uzo nkwu, o gaghi abu uzo ngwo* (The ways/relationship

of you and I will be that of the oil palm, it will not be that of the raffia palm). That is, the relationship will last longer.

ix. While both *nkwu* and *ngwo* produce palm wine, the chemistry of flow of oil palm wine (*mmanya nkwu*) is slower than that of the raffia palm wine (*mmanya ngwo*). In fact, the quantity

of *mmanya ngwo* obtained from *ngwo* is usually about trice that of *mmanya nkwu* obtained within the same time limit.

x In taste, *mmanya nkwu* is different from *mmanya ngwo*. While *mmanya nkwu* has a unique sweet but pleasant taste which it maintains for a longer duration, *mmanya ngwo* has very sweet/sugary taste but ferments within a shorter duration.

3. Evidence of the Igbo Preference of *Nkwu* to *Ngwo* in the Culture

We give some pieces of evidence drawn from the Igbo culture to buttress the Igbo preference of *nkwu* to *ngwo*:

3.1 Cultural Practices: The pieces of evidence from the cultural practices are drawn from the palm wine (*mmanya nkwu* or *mmanya ngwo*) which are obtained from both *nkwu* and *ngwo*, and one of which must be available for Igbo cultural practices and events. In their view on the significance of *mmanya nkwu/nkwu elu*, and its mandatory availability in any Igbo ceremony, Onuegbu, Obiajulu and Nnajiofor (2015, p. 110) opines that

The ontological significance of *nkwu elu* (up wine) cannot be over emphasized. Though we accepted its possession of graded ontology, it is necessary to point out here that it is believed to have more ontological perfection than any of the local wine species. This point is accentuated by the fact that the Igbo African cannot hold any ceremony unless it is available.

We examine specifically the involvement of *mmanya nkwu* and *mmanya ngwo* in marriage, divorce, and libation. Marriage and divorce are quite peculiar cultural practices in Igboland, while libation is involved in all cultural practices and events.

3.1.1 Marriage

In her exemplifications with marriage on the discussions of interpersonal symbolic communication in the Igbo culture, Onukawa (2023), points out that:

Among the Igbo marriage is a very serious relationship. It is considered inseparable and thus contracted with all seriousness. ...In many cases in Igboland, the intending couple, contract their

marriages themselves-they consent to each other on marriage and later affirm same publicly. The groom commences the public affirmation of the marriage by scheduling to go with his relations to meet with the parents and kinsmen of the bride and perform all necessary marriage rites” (p.73).

One of the items that must be mandatorily presented in the performance of the traditional marriage rites is *mmanya nkwu*, (referred to as *nkwu ocha/ nkwu elu* in some parts of Igboland),

not *mmanya ngwo*. *Mmanya nkwu* is preferred, not just because of its quality, but rather because of the process of its production that involves slowness, steadiness, perpetuity and longevity. Our informants¹ affirmed to the above and further informed us that it is basically the philosophy of marriage in Igboland. The Igbo even express same in some of their proverbs like: *Kama m ga-agba ka ngwo, ka m gbaa ka nkwu* (Instead of flowing like the raffia palm, let me flow like the oil palm).

We believe, that this is a pan Igbo cultural practice (as most of our interviewees from most culture areas of Igboland confirm the use of *mmanya nkwu* in marriage, and that in those situations or places where *mmanya ngwo* is used, it only serves as a substitute to *mmanya nkwu* because of its (*mmanya nkwu*) non-availability. For instance, in some parts of southern Igboland, like *Umuhia*, *Ngwa* and *Ukwa* areas, in Abia State, *mmanya nkwu* is usually not available. Oil palm tappers do not show interest in those areas because, according to Dr Ike of the Department of Geography and planning, ABSU (Pers. Comm), “the rain forests are more in those areas, and have negative effects on the quality of *mmanya nkwu* produced”.

In some culture areas of Igboland, for example *Akpulu* and other places in *Ideato* in Imo State, *mmanya ngwo* is tabooed in marriage. In which case the said substitution cannot apply---it is either *mmanya nkwu* or nothing. Commenting on the utility and relevance of *mmanya nkwu*, and its mandatory involvement in marriage in Igboland, Onuegbu, Obiajulu and Nnajofofor (2015) state that:

The utility of up wine (*mmanya nkwu/ nkwu elu*) and its relevance cannot be overemphasized. In Igbo marriage rites, the presentation of palm wine by the bride to the bride groom makes the highest point of the ceremony. It suggests the groom’s acceptance by the bride, a kind of ontological communion banquet that finally seals the marriage contract. Inside a keg of palm wine carried by a suitor contains all the good luck and ill luck as the case may be, lurking at the suitor’s destiny. If prayer with the palm wine is accepted by the divinities, such pacification can make them to release blessings on the parties marrying themselves... We cannot overlook the significance of **our** traditional Anamnesis which efficacy is exclusively resounding with use of

palm wine, the sacred up wine. It is also necessary to state here that the sacred up wine has no alternative or replacement, either through symbol or sign. It is either there or not (p 111).

In some other places in Igboland, if peradventure, both *mmanya nkwu* and *mmanya ngwo* are available at a marriage ceremony, *mmanya nkwu* still takes its preference in all of the activities of the ceremony--- public affirmation of the marriage by the bride and groom (as the case may be), pouring libation of blessings etc. In *Nnewi* culture area, according to Chief Uche Mbonu, *mmanya nkwu* is patriarchal while *mmanya ngwo* is matriarchal. Thus if both are present at a

(marriage) ceremony, the men take the *mmanya nkwu* while *mmanya ngwo* (placed in the class of mineral soft drinks) is left for the women.

3.1.2 Divorce

In the Igbo culture divorce is perceived as a pejorative issue, hence in many Igbo culture areas it is communicated symbolically with some item, of which *mmanya nkwu* or *mmanya ngwo* is among. Onukawa (2023) exemplifies with the use of palm wine in divorce, stating:

.... If a wife continues in her unacceptable conducts, in spite of the series of counselling, the husband may decide to end up the marriage through some interpersonal symbolic means of communication which include the following:..... In some Igbo culture areas, a husband who decides to divorce his wife may place a container of palm wine, in front of the father-in-law's residence (p.81).

Though *mmanya nkwu* is used for marriage and also for divorce, in the case of divorce some other significant cultural items are affixed to the container to indicate the utter rejection of what it (*mmanya nkwu*) had earlier approved/confirmed (that is marriage). For instance "in *Nnewi* and other areas around it, the container is cocked with the leave of pear" (Chief Uche Mbonu, a native of *Nnewi*. Pers Com), whereas Professor Boniface Mbah informed us that in his *Orba* native home and other areas around *Nsukka*, the container of the palm wine is tied with palm tendril or palm leave. The *ube* (pear) leave affixed to the container interprets as: *O beelee/ O bielee*, "It has terminated" (from the verb *-bè* "terminate"), that is, the marriage has been terminated; while *omu* (palm tendril) signifies perpetual injunction, that means an injunction has been placed on the marriage ad infinitum.

In some other Igbo culture areas, like *Akpulu* and other areas in *Ideato*, *mmanya nkwu* is not used in divorce as a mark of high cultural value of it. What is used in divorce is *mmanya ngwo*, which is ordinarily tabooed in marriage in that area of Igboland. For a man to give his father-in-

law a container of *mmanya ngwọ* simply symbolically communicates to the father in-law that his daughter's husband has divorced her and again, the marriage is irretrievable. Again, in *Akpulu*, and *Ideato* in general, if someone tells a married woman: *A ga-agba gị ngwọ* (Someone will strike you with raffia palm wine) it simply means that "The woman will be divorced".

3.1.3 Libation .

Libation is a form of human communication with the living dead which is usually traditionally symbolically expressed with the palm wine. "The libation ritual called *itụ mmanya* precedes all traditional Igbo public and private events" (Onuegbu, Obiajulu and Nnajofofor (2015, p112). In the Igbo culture, the brand of palm wine used for libation, as in the case of marriage, is *mmanya*

nkwụ., not *mmanya ngwọ*. Chief Uche Mbonu (from *Nneewi*) and Mr Jude Iwuagwu (from *Mbaano*) and other informants from many other Igbo culture areas confirmed this. They also informed us that, as in the case of marriage, *mmanya ngwọ* is used only as a substitute where *mmanya nkwụ* is not available.

In their corroboration of the significance of *mmanya nkwụ* in Igbo culture, Onuegbu, Obiajulu and Nnajofofor (2015, p.110), point out the inevitable use of *mmanya nkwụ* in pouring libation, thus: "This fact (the efficacy of *mmanya nkwụ*) is also corroborated by the inevitable use of palm wine in pouring libation. Its use is anchored on the belief that up wine has more ontological potency, a kind of force that makes it acceptable to our ancestors and forebears". They further point out that: To hold any ceremony without *nkwụ elu* is like burying a person outside Necropolice.....In the same vein, any person who libates without *nkwụ elu*, the belief is that such exercise ends in futility...African forebears-ancestor-most often accept no other wine pouring in their honour than the sacred palm wine. There may be other acceptable substance used in libation, as a particular socio-cultural setting might demand, but the largely potency of palm wine among many African societies is hugely overwhelming (p.111)

While discussing the cultural practices among *umunna* (kindred) in Igboland, Oruche (2008) mentions the poring of libation with the palm wine (*mmanya nkwụ*),thus:

Libation with palm wine is a symbol of intimacy with the ancestors and harmony with the living. The invocation with the palm wine is a superficial symbol of imploring for an intimate spiritual grace of providential gods at events where individuals share a feeling of purity, protection and hope. During ceremonies, an elder pours a libation with the palm wine, symbolizing the safe cyclical passage of the forebears from the spirit realm to the physical world

3.2 Proverb

Proverbs in the Igbo language have been studied by many analysts and seen from various angles of definition. However, one theme that is central to all the definitions is that proverbs are the embodiments of the Igbo worldview. For instance, Ugonna (1974) after a comprehensive discourse on the concept of *Ilu* (proverb) sums it up as a kind of mirror which reflects human experience. Again, after classifying Igbo proverbs under about thirty themes, Nwadike (2009, p. 34) concludes thus” “In the outline, ‘philosophy’ is included as a genre of proverb, even-though each *ilu* (proverb) is an embodiment of Igbo philosophy of life”

It is on the premise of the above fact of the Igbo proverb, and also because of the high regard which the Igbo language and its users place on the proverb, that we

exemplify the Igbo preference of *nkwu* to *ngwo* with it. We collected forty proverbs based on *nkwu* and *ngwo* and their accessories and products. Out of this number there are six proverbs where the Igbo preference of *nkwu* to *ngwo* is overtly expressed, whereas we do not have any on the contrary. Only two of the proverbs are based exclusively on *ngwo*, while two are shared between *nkwu* and *ngwo*. The rest of the proverbs are based exclusively on *nkwu*. This fact informs/suggests that the Igbo prefer *nkwu* to *ngwo*. For want of space, we give all the proverbs of the other groups, and exemplify with only twelve proverbs that are exclusively from *nkwu*. We start with ones where the preference to *nkwu* is overtly expressed.

3.2.1 Igbo Proverbs where preference of *Nkwu* to *Ngwo* is overtly expressed

Añuna ngwo, nkwu na-abia (Don’t drink raffia palm wine yet, the oil palm wine is going to be available)

Kama igba ka ngwo, gbaa ka nkwu (Instead of flowing like raffia palm tree, flow like the oil palm tree)

Ije alumdi na nwunye bu ije nkwu, o bughị ije ngwo (Marrige is the journey of the oil palm and not that of the raffia palm---it lasts for quite a long time)

Onye amaghị (mmanya) nkwu na-akpo ya (mmanya) ngwo (One who does not know the oil palm wine mistakes it for the raffia palm wine)

A na-eto ngwo na o toka rue mgbe añuru nkwu (The raffia palm wine is eulogized of its sweetness until the oil palm wine is tasted)

Kama m ga-agbara aka nkwy, ka m gbara aka ngwo (Instead of not having the oil palm, let me not have the raffia palm)

3.2.2 Igbo proverbs involving only *Nkwu*, including its products and accessories

Ike nkwy/Isi nkwy abuo chaara onye akputa mma, ihe oma aghoo ihe ojoo (If two bunches of oil palm mature for someone with unsharpened knife, a good thing becomes a bad one).

Aka aja aja na-ebute onu mmanu mmanu (A hand soiled with sand results in a mouth soiled with palm oil)

Ike nkwy/Isi nkwy dara n'ala edetula aja (The oil palm bunch that fall down has touched the sand)

Mmanu gere gere bu ije nka (Care is needed to handle light palm oil)

Nkwu dachie uzọ, nwaanyi arja ya elu (when the oil palm tree falls across the road, a woman climbs on it)

A juo nkwy kapiwa onu, a mara na oge mgbu ya eruole (if one is chewing the palm nut and begins to squeeze his lips, know that he is ready to spit it off)

E dozie onu juo okpuruka o di ka o bu osukwu (If one adjusts his lips to chew Dura (a hard specie of oil palm nut), it seems he is chewing Tenera (a soft specie of oil palm nut))

Egbu, atukota ka mma na ike nkwy (harvesting and heaping together befits only the oil palm bunches)

Nkwu nochiri uzọ na-ebu apa mma (a road side oil palm tree gets scars of knife cuts)

Onye no nkwy ogologo n'akuku ma ole o chara (one who is standing beside a tall oil palm tree knows how many bunches that are ripe)

O bu onye bu igu nkwy ka ewu na-eso (The goat follows the person that bears oil palm leaflets)

Igu nkwy gbata, omu nkwy gbata o ghoo ike nkwy (If oil palm leaflet produces, the oil palm tendril produces, it forms the oil palm bunch)

3.2.3 Igbo proverbs involving only *Ngwo*, including its products and accessories

A ñụgbuo ngwọ a kpoo ya okpokoro (After exhausting the wine-contents of raffia palm, it will be termed an empty element)

Onye kwuo ebe agburu ngwọ ya si, ya agbaara ya mmanya (If one says the source of his raffia palm seed, it produces wine for him) .

3.2.4 Igbo Proverbs that are shared between *Nkwu* and *Ngwọ*

Mmanya (nkwu/ngwọ) ka a na-añutara diochi, anaghị adatara ya elu (you drink on behalf of the palm wine tapper, you don't fall on his behalf)

Kemgbe m hụrụ otilẹ diochi n'elu nkwu/ngwọ, ihe ọ kụtara ya ñụọ (Since the time I saw the buttocks of the tapper on the palm tree, let him alone drink what he produces).

3.3 Expressions

In the Igbo language, there are some (slang) expressions that are usually associated with ceremonies involving palm wine, the (somewhat excessive)provision of palm wine/other alcoholic drinks, and the intoxication of palm wine/other alcoholic drinks. All of the expressions on these are centred on *nkwu* and not *ngwọ*. For instance:

i The Igbo traditional marriage ceremony is referred to as *igba nkwu*

ii If someone provides excess quantity of alcoholic drinks (not necessarily *mmanya nkwu*) that was consumed, the Igbo usually say: *O feele nkwu/O fere nkwu/ O fere anyi nkwu*

iii If someone, by his conduct is considered to have drunk himself/herself to dreg, the Igbo usually say: *O tiele nkwu/ O riele nkwu*.

iv If someone is required to provide some drinks consequent upon a milestone, the Igbo usually tell him *I ga-eme nkwu*

3.4 The Factorial Value of *Nkwu* over *Ngwọ* in Complementary Duality/ Irreversible Binomial.

In his discussion on the Igbo “worldview of complementary states of being”, Nwoga (1984, p. 22) observes that “one thing that is easily decipherable in Igbo speech is the tendency to combine two elements and that goes straight into the nature of Igbo thought about the

manifestation of reality". He quotes the definition of "dualities" as given by Elliot Jacques in his study of the forms of time: "Dualities and duals refer to pairs of interconnected and interactive concepts which may or may not be opposite, such as figures and ground, or the positive and negative poles of a magnet, or the alternation of the truth value in the and/or conjunction in truth-table logic". He concludes that the Igbo see things in complementary dualities, and this manifests in expressions like: *mmụọ na mmadụ* (spirit and human being), *nwoke na nwaanyị* (man and woman)

Maduka-Durunze (1992) quotes Yakov Malkiel as referring to such phrases as "irreversible binomials" because they contain items which in unbiased normal usage the order in which they are stated cannot be changed. Maduka-Durunze (1992) points out the irreversible binomials in Igbo belong to various semantic fields, and that a linkage element called "polarity" collects the binomials into realms from various semantic fields and the binomials are further evaluated based on what he refers to as "factorial evidence". He states that binomials in Igbo have complex, yet clear relations with various kinds of hierarchical organizations in the language and in the life of the speaker; that the normal order of presentation coupled with the relevant factor axis,

determines the hierarchy in the socio-psychic perception of the people. He has four "factorial axes"—"the dimensional factor", "the social esteem factor", "the mythic factor", and "the aesthetic factor". He concludes that the member of a binomial which has greater factorial value comes first.

Other examples of complementary Duality/Irreversible binomials in Igbo are:

Chi na eke (Destiny and agency of destiny= Supreme God), *oha na eze* (public and kins= The public), *ikwu na ibe* (kins and peers= relations), *elu na ala* (up and down), *egbe na ugo* (kite and eagle) (culled from Onukawa, 1997).

Nkwụ na Ngwọ (Oil palm and Raffia palm) constitute an example of Igbo complementary dualities/irreversible binomials. At times, *nkwy na ngwọ* are used collectively to refer to one concept- agricultural property/ flora and fauna. *Nkwụ* is always placed first in their order of occurrence, and this does not change (the Igbo do not say "*ngwọ na nkwy*"). Since *nkwy* comes first, it has greater factorial value than *ngwọ*, in line with the thesis of Maduka Durunze (1992). We believe that the complementary duality of *nkwy na ngwọ* belong to the mythic factorial axis. The two possess some ontological potency. This manifests most in their products (palm wine) and make them favorable materials for communion with the ancestors. However, the force inherent in the *mmanya nkwy* is stronger than that of *mmanya ngwọ*, and therefore

renders it more acceptable to the forebears of the Igbo, and thus it is placed first in the hierarchy as complementary dual concept.

4. Summary and Conclusion

In summary, this study has shown that *nkwu* and *ngwo* have some strong socio-cultural and economic potentials beneficial to the Igbo. Their importance cannot be overemphasized. They are cultural elements that encircle the social living of the Igbo. The study reveals that while *nkwu* and *ngwo* are important to the Igbo, *nkwu* is more significant, important and efficacious than *ngwo*. The Igbo thus place more value and preference on *nkwu* than *ngwo* in line with the cultural theory of preference formation appeal.

The study equally found out that the said Igbo preference of *nkwu* to *ngwo* is centered mostly on the palm wine obtained from both *nkwu* and *ngwo*. This preference is manifested in all Igbo cultural activities and events, and in particular, marriage ceremony, divorce and pouring of libation. The cultural preference of *nkwu* to *ngwo* is also expressed in the Igbo language through the proverb, common regular expressions and also the hierarchical ordering in the complementary duality.

The study concludes that the cultural preference of *nkwu* to *ngwo* speaks to the Igbo “manner and process of forming ideas, concepts and judgement and hence the process of arriving at belief and holding opinion as to the truth of nature of anything” (Nwala, 1985, p.76). Cultural preference could also be used as a tool for the description of varied socio-cultures of the world.

Note: 1. We express our profound gratitude to our informants from the various culture areas of Igboland

References

- Enyioha, E. (2015) Palm Wine and Its Importance in the Traditional Igbo Society. <http://www.11ezinearticles.com>
- Eze, S.O (2021) The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: The chemistry of palm oil in Nigeria’s economic development. Abia State University, Uturu, 62nd Inaugural lecture
- Maduka-Durunze, O.N. (1992) Cognitive Hierarchies Among the Igbo: Linguistic Evidence from Irreversible Binomials. *Language Linguistics and Literature* (31)
- Nwadike, I.U. (2009) The Igbo Proverb. A Wider Perspective. Nsukka: Pascal Communications.
- Nwala, T.U. (1985) Igbo philosophy. Ikeja: Lantern Books

Nwoga, D.I. (1985) Nka na Nzere: The focus of the Igbo worldview. Ahiajoku Lecture. Owerri, Ministry of Education and Culture

Onuegbu, F.C, Obiajulu, M. and Nnajofo, O (2015) The ontology of Nkwu elu and its relevance in Igbo Africa socio-cultural society and beyond. *UNIZIK Journal of Religion and Human Relation*. 7 (1), pp. 110-118

Onukawa, E.N. (2023) Interpersonal symbolic communicative practices in the traditional Igbo society. *Language in Africa* 4 (2)pp 68-88

Onukawa, M.C. (1997) Kwe-names and the complementary Dual Concepts in Igbo. *Anthropos*: 93, pp 202-209

Oruche, O. (2008) "About the African Continent" Speech Delivered at the Umunna Cultural Association , May, 18,2008, at Indianapolis, USA.

Ugonna, N. (1974) Ilu in Spokn Igbo Literature. Lagos. Notes and Records

Widavsky, A (1987) Choosing preferences by Constructing Institutions: A Culture Theory of Preference Formation. *The American Political Science Review*, vpl. 81, NO. 1. Pp 3-22