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## **Euphemisms as Substitutes for Verbal Taboos in Igbo Language Dynamics**

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### **Abstract**

Some Igbo words and expressions are hardly used openly, especially in mixed company. Such lexemes refer to in this study as verbal taboos play crucial roles in the understanding of certain aspects of the world view in Igbo society. This paper examines and describes the various categories of some of such words, the reason(s) behind their avoidance, and the strategies involved when the concepts referenced in such words or expressions must be employed. Data comprising one hundred and fifty of the taboo words/expressions were elicited through oral interviews from two hundred Igbo native speakers representing various individuals without recourse to age, sex, educational background, occupation, and location. The respondents were randomly selected and interviewed based on convenience random sampling. The researcher equally relied on her intuitive knowledge of the language. The theoretical framework adopted for the analysis is Politeness and Face approach as proposed in Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987). Findings show that the open usage avoidance of the words/expressions in question is conditioned by cultural and

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religious norms of the society; and that euphemisms are mostly used as replacements for the avoided lexemes in certain contexts. The adoption of new lexemes, however, also brings about changes in the context of use of the items in the language.

**Keywords:** taboo; euphemism; politeness; language change; Igbo society.

### **1. Introduction**

One of the characteristics of language is that it is dynamic. As it lives, it changes, varying in time and space. A language can acquire new words as it lives, drop some words from its vocabulary, and equally change the meanings of some words (see Aitchison (1972); Aitchison (2001); Anagbogu, Mba and Eme (2001); Wardhaugh (2006); Rodman and Hyams (2007); Olaoye (2008)). Establishing this fact, Mc Manis, Stollenwerk and Zheng-Sheng (1987) state that all languages change as time passes. Again, systematically, whether speakers desire changes or not, often, they are not aware of it. For Yule (1996), each language user recreates for him/herself the language of the community. In addition to this, there is also the occasional desire to be different. Because of the above reasons, he concludes that it should be expected that languages will not remain stable. Changes and variation are inevitable.

Language changes in all aspects of its grammar, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. Some of the changes might be as a result of social or historical factors. Although languages change with time, none of these changes upsets the basic design characteristic of human language. No language has ever disintegrated through a series of changes, for there are some unconscious mechanisms which enable a language to retain its stability.

Most changes in language are subtle and minor and their diffusion through the speech community is so gradual that they escape the attention of speakers while they are taking place. Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007) observe that language change is slow compared to human life span. For Aitchison (1972), changes come in because of the need to maintain and simplify the patterns of language in order to ease the load on the human memory.

Considering the viewpoint of the language user, the most obvious changes are those that affect individual lexical items. Lexical change is very fascinating for it is profoundly connected with the life, literature and culture of a community. This type of change can be appreciated by a careful observation on everyday usage. A word or sense may become obsolescent if it develops unpleasant associations, and so, is replaced by another word which is felt to be more tolerable. Aitchison (1972) views taboo as an interesting type of cause of loss of lexical items. Taboo words, as Trudgill (1983) notes, occur in most languages and are associated with things which are 'not' said, and in particular, with words and expressions which are 'not' used. There are however, inhibitions about normal use of taboo words, for if they were not used at all, they could hardly remain in the language.

Based on social reason, taboo words are avoided and new words/phrases arise in their places and the new ones in a way bring about semantic change in language. In this study, therefore, we investigate this phenomenon, using Igbo as a typical example. To do this, we have divided this work as follows: Section 2 is a brief explanation of the concept of taboo. Section 3 is the function of taboo words, while Section 4 deals with attitudes to taboos. In Section 5, the effects of taboo on language users are examined. Section 6 is on the theoretical

framework while section 7 deals with taboo in the Igbo language. Finally, Section 8 forms the conclusion.

## **2. The Concept of Taboo Words**

The word *taboo*, according to Fromkin *et al* (2007:443), is a borrowing from Tongan, a Polynesian language. It refers to acts that are forbidden or avoided. In linguistics, taboo refers to a total or partial prohibition of the use of certain words, expression and topics especially in social life. Akmajian, Demers, Farmers and Harish (2010:303), see taboo words as those that are to be avoided entirely, or at least avoided in 'mixed company' or 'polite company'. Continuing, they state that taboo language is not limited to obscenity. Sacred language can also be taboo; that is, language to be avoided outside the context of sacred ritual. Trudgill (1983:29) remarks that in different parts of the world, taboo words include those for the left hand, for female relations or for certain game animals. He adds that some words are much more severely tabooed than others. In Norway, for example, some of the most strongly tabooed expressions are concerned with the devil.

The notion of taboo covers any topic likely to be controversial and cause envy. Such topics include death, money and details of one's personal life in some places. Fromkin *et al* (2007:444) remark that 'words relating to sex, sex organs, and natural bodily function make up a large part of the set of taboo words for many cultures.' For Millar (2007:45), 'in English, taboo subjects include (or have included) sex, reproduction, excretion, death, and the human body.' Taboo words are 'forbidden' in the minds of speakers, those who use them as well as those who do not.

Taboo language is something defined by culture and not by anything inherent in the language itself. Taboo words in a particular language reflect part of the system of values and

beliefs of that society. Words which are tabooed in one community may not be in another. Confirming this idea, Fromkin *et al* (2007: 443), cite the remarks of Fanny Trollope, a British visitor to America in 1830:

Hardly a day passed in which I did not discover something or other which I had been taught to consider as natural as eating, was held in abhorrence by those around me; many words to which I had never heard an objectionable meaning attached, were totally interdicted, and the strongest paraphrastic phrase substituted.

Some of the words that were taboo at that time in America but not in England were *corset*, *shirt*, *leg* and *woman*. More so are *cunt*, *prick*, *shit*, and *damn it*.

Lyons (1981) and Dixon (1997) consider the fact that there may be social taboos operative within the language community, such that the uses of particular words indicate membership of particular groups within the community. A look at the synonyms *lavatory*, *toilet*, *loo*, and *WC* drives home this point. The synonyms are well understood but the fact remains that particular groups within the community may choose and use one of the above mentioned, and its usage shows membership of the group.

### **3. Functions of Taboo Words**

Taboo words are used as an outlet for anger, frustration or pent-up emotion. It is also used as a means of releasing nervous energy after a sudden shock. Taboo words have also been credited with various social functions as a marker of group identity and solidarity. More so, taboo words serve as a way of

expressing aggression without resort to violence. As Wardaugh (2006:239) summarizes,

Linguistic taboos are ... violated on occasion to draw attention to oneself, or to show contempt, or to be aggressive or provocative, or mock authority - or, according to Freud, on occasion as a form of verbal seduction, e.g. 'talking dirty'.

Having examined the functions of taboo words, we shall take a look at the attitude of the society towards taboo.

#### **4. Social Attitude to Taboo**

There is actually no linguistic reason why a word should be viewed as 'clean' and the other 'dirty'. In the view of Fromkin *et al* (2007), the filth or beauty of language must be in the ear of the listener, or in the collective ear of the society. Nothing about a particular string of sounds makes it intrinsically clean or dirty, ugly or beautiful. Also, Fromkin *et al* (2007: 444) state that:

There is no grammatical reason why the word Vagina... is *clean* whereas cunt is *dirty*, or why prick or cock is taboo but penis is acknowledged as referring to a part of the male anatomy, or why everyone defecates but only vulgar people shit.

It can be seen that taboo has to do with the values and beliefs of the society. It is the society that decides what is to be taken as a taboo and their reactions to non-adherence to such.

The use of taboo words in television phone-in programmes provokes shock and disgust. Trudgill (1983:30-31) avers that the BBC has on some occasions gone to considerable extent to cut off participants if their use of language contained taboo words.

Taboo words affect innocent language expressions. Speakers sometimes behave as if there were very real connections between the words themselves and their taboo sense. Trudgill (1983:31) observes that this behavior leads to the avoidance of certain words or phrase simply because they sound similar to taboo terms.

The avoidance of certain words or phrases simply because they sound similar to taboo terms cuts across languages too. Akimajian *et al* (2010:304) notes that bilingual or multilingual speakers sometimes avoid words in one language that accidentally resemble taboo words in another language. This is known as interlingual word taboo. With reference to Haas (1957), Akmajian *et al* (2010) illustrate interlingual taboo with American students learning Brazilian Portuguese. These students were often embarrassed to learn the word *faca*, meaning *knife*. The reason is that *faca* sounds like the tabooed English word *fuck*. Moreso, Thai students in the United States had to replace the word *phrig* meaning *pepper* with *Lyn* meaning 'phallus' but secondarily came to mean 'pepper' in the context of dinning out. This is because *phrig* resembled the American English slang word *prick*. Most importantly, the Thai students would not like the Americans to overhear a word that sounded like a tabooed word of English especially when dining in public.

Trudgill (1983: 31) reports that female America Indian speaker of Nootka were reported by teachers to be entirely unwilling to use the English word *such*. The word has close phonetic resemblance with the Nootka word for *vagina*, hence, the avoidance. All these show that there are some ways in which society acts upon language as well as language upon society.

### **5. Effects of Taboo**

Taboos change as societies change. Topics such as divorce and depression, and illness such as AIDS, may not be as tabooed as

they used to be. Despite the development of liberal attitudes, there is still a strong antagonism to the use of taboo words in public speech. Millar (2007:46) argues that

... speakers try desperately to find some words or phrase that will be readily understood without producing sniggers or glares ...

Based on the antagonism to the use of taboo words, it is broached by several techniques. Some taboo words in English used as exclamations were modified and softened so as to be less direct, sacrilegious, and offensive. Akimajian (2010) notes that *darn*, *heck*, *gee* or *jeez* are used as euphemisms for *damn*, *hell* and *Jesus* which are considered taboo words. Euphemism is an indirect word or phrase that people often use to refer to something embarrassing or unpleasant, sometimes to make it seem more acceptable than it really is. The Greek historian, Plutarch, cited in Fromkin *et al* (2007: 445), records that the ancient Athenians... used to cover up the ugliness of things with auspicious and kindly terms, giving them polite and endearing names. Plutarch's record shows that the use of euphemism in language is not something new. Holmes (2013:339-40) aptly notes that:

The term *crippled* was an acceptable way of describing someone with a physical disability...the term gradually grew to be regarded as tasteless and unacceptable, so the terms *handicapped* and then *disabled* were substituted .... Those who work in this area currently use the phrase *person with a disability* or *person with impairment*.



Fromkin et al (2007:443-444) give examples of some taboo words which have been substituted with euphemism:

**TABLE 1**

<b>TABOO WORD</b>	<b>EUPHEMISM</b>
Harlots	Companions/Sex workers
Taxes	Contributions
Prison	Chamber
Death	Pass away/ pass on
Morticians/Undertaker	Funeral directors
Have intercourse	Shag, root...
Urinate	Drain the dragon, siphon the python...

From the foregoing, it can be asserted that language is not static. All languages change with time. Language change often comes about through the social phenomena of taboos (Palmer (1981). As a result of the antagonism to the use of taboo words, euphemism, among others techniques or means is used to modify the taboo words. The modification brings about some changes. The fact that everyone does not use any of the aforementioned euphemism stated in Table 2, does not mean that changes are not taking place. Language change may be gradual or sporadic. As Aitchison (2001: 66 -67) rightly puts it:

A change tends to sneak quietly into a language, like a seed, which enters the soil and germinates unseen. At some point, it, sprouts through the surface. Similarly, people may become socially aware of a change when it reaches a certain crucial point.

## **6. Theoretical Framework**

This study employs the Politeness and Face Theory as espoused in (Littlejohn & Foss 2008). Politeness is a strategy adopted by language users in interaction and serves the purpose of providing deference of the speaker to the hearer or vice-versa. It has to do with mutual respect to maintain cordial social relationship (Nta and Ekpa, 2003). Nta and Ekpa (2003:157) defined 'face' as the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself. Quoting Brown and Levinson (1975), face is 'something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced and must be constantly attended to in interaction.' The best-known socio-psychological treatment of politeness and face, according to Littlejohn and Foss (2008), is that of Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson. This theory states that in everyday life, we design messages that protect face and achieve other goals as well. Brown and Levinson argue that politeness is a goal because it is a culturally universal value. They further argue that different cultures have different levels of required politeness and different ways of being polite, but all people have need to be appreciated and protected. They call the 'need' *face needs*.

Politeness and Face consists of two aspects; the positive and the negative. Positive face is the desire to be appreciated and approved, to be liked and honoured. Negative face is the desire to be free from imposition or intrusion. Positive politeness makes one to be approved, appreciated and honoured. It is achieved by showing of concern, complimenting, and using respectful forms of address. Negative politeness is designed to protect the other person when negative face is threatened (Littlejohn and Foss (2008). Politeness prevents the violation of the other's face.

Most members of the society aim at protecting their faces especially during conversation with others. They equally strive

for stability in their relationship with others by being polite. The Igbo are not left out in the bid to sound polite and thus save the face of their fellow language users in communication.

### **7. Taboo in Igbo**

The Igbo enjoy a relatively peaceful environment. Every community has codes which are maintained by its members. There are certain restrictions due to religious and social reasons. Defining taboos, Anaedo (2004: 9) notes that:

Taboos are things forbidden .... A taboo can be a place or word that is believed to have inherent power above the ordinary and this mysterious power can only be approached by special persons.

Certain things are not said by everyone in Igbo land. This is not because they cannot be said, but because they are preserved for certain individuals. There are certain taboos which forbid the use of certain words that are adjudged to be offensive in certain contexts.

In Igbo culture, just as in many other cultures, taboo words and expressions are forbidden by social conventions. Certain words and phrases are considered 'dirty' or 'vulgar'. Such words are consciously avoided in certain discourse situations. Some words and expressions are exclusively reserved for elders. Emenanjo (2008:29) confirms thus:

In the ethnography of Igbo speech, when elders talk with fellow elders, they can use ... the forbidden areas of speech referring to sex, excretion, death, pregnancy , etc. proverbs which, to the uninitiated, will sound 'lewd' if not 'pornographic'. They could, however,

when they want to be ‘polite’ especially to those who are not their peers, use euphemisms or proverbs which are inherently euphemistic.

It is on the above premise that elders in Igbo land use freely, among themselves, some Igbo proverbs and sayings which appear vulgar. Some of them include the following:

1. Utù kenibe, ò di kà ò gā-ebu òtū n’isi.  
(When the penis is erect, it looks as if it will carry the vagina on its head).
2. Ò dìrìrì utù mmā ò kpodo isī n’àlà?  
(Is it good for the penis and it faces downward?)
3. A mà kà òkōchī àdì òtù gà na-àsa utù àhụ.  
(No matter how severe the dry season is, the vagina will continually bathe the penis).
4. Òtù buru òjà, utù afuwaa yā.  
(If the vagina were a flute, the penis will blow it apart).
5. Ùdèlè siri nà ò buru nà e tinyēkwue nnū n’òtù, umū mmādù ànwusisīā n’elū yā.  
(The vulture says that if the vagina were to be salted the more, people will die on top of it).
6. Òtù sī nà ya mà kà ya dī wèrè kpùdo ihū n’àlà.  
(The vagina says it knows how it looks, that is the reason why it faces downwards).

These, among many others, are some of the vulgar proverbs used by elders. They do not use them just for the fun of it. Such proverbs are used to express some truth about practical life, warn, advice, instruct, or even mock the authority.

The fact that taboo words and expressions are forbidden by social conventions compel some users of the language to find milder substitutes or euphemisms to express them. Wardhaugh

(2006) states that euphemisms are employed to avoid mentioning certain issues directly.

Practitioners of certain professions feel ashamed as regards their reputation in identifying with their means of livelihood. The society resorts to euphemism for occupational prestige. Even men of the underworld use euphemism to substitute for taboo words. Such examples include those in table 2.

**TABLE 2**

<b>TABOO WORDS</b>	<b>SUBSTITUTE</b>	<b>GLOSS</b>
ndī uwē ojii 'people in black'	eke 'python'	the police
duōduō 'stich- stich'	obìomā 'one with a good heart'	mobile tailor
igbā àkwùnàkwùnà 'to loiter (around)'	ìzū ahīa usū/ìkwūnye kòtìh 'to engage bat trade' / 'to hang the curtain'	prostitution
dibìà afā 'diviner'	onyē òhùzò 'seer'	diviner
igbā àpìrìkò 'to cut corners'	ìrū orū / itī aka 'to work; / 'to hit the hand'	to dupe
ndi ohi 'those who steal'	umùn nwā '	thieves
iji egbè èzu 'to use gun for stealing'	ìzū afīā 'to trade'	armed robbery
onye òjìegbèezū 'a person who uses gun to steal'	onye afīā 'a customer'	an armed robber
amōosu 'witch /	òfenàbàlì 'flyer at	a witch

wizard'	night'	
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Fromkin et al (2007:444) posit that two or more words or expressions can have the same linguistic meaning, with one acceptable and the other the cause of embarrassment or horror. The argument here is that the use of the taboo words cause embarrassment for both the speaker and the listener(s); hence, the resort to euphemism in order to save face.

It has been pointed out earlier that words relating to sex, sex organs, and naturally bodily functions make up a large part of taboo words in many languages. Fromkin *et al* (2007:444) note that some languages have no native words to mean 'sexual intercourse' but have to borrow such words from neighbouring people. The Igbo have words for sexual intercourse, sex organs and other naturally bodily functions but hardly use them especially in mixed company for such words/expressions go against the fulfillment of one's positive face. The society therefore resorts to euphemisms in order to sound polite. Holmes (2013:285) argues that

politeness involves contributing to social harmony and avoiding social conflict... In many cases, being polite involves adapting sensitively to evolving social relationships ...'

Examples of this can be found in table 3.

TABLE 3

TABOO WORDS	SUBSTITUTE	GLOSS
ọhụ n̄sị 'excremental cavity'	ikè 'anus'	buttocks
amụ/utù 'scrotum/penis'	akwārà/òdogwū nwokē/Ìkeh̄gà 'vein/hero/power-source'	penis
àkpa āmù 'scrotum sack'	ọgòdò 'cloth'	scrotum
àkū 'vagina' (← akụọtụ 'coverlet')	àbùbà/ aji ìkè 'feather' / 'anus hair'	pubic hair
inyū n̄sị 'to excrete'	ìkpū ọh̄iā/ìgā azū ụlò 'to go inside the bush' / 'to go to the backyard'	to defecate
nsọ 'taboo'	ìgbū ọkūkò/ìrē mmanū 'to kill fowl' / 'to sell oil'	menstruation
ìdī ìmē 'to be pregnant'	ìkwū n'elū/ìdī ahū àbùò 'to stand on top' / 'to be of two bodies'	to be pregnant
ìmā nwokē 'to know a male'	ìwā ògàdà/ìpù n'ụlò 'to be astride' / 'to leave the house'	to be deflowered
ìrā di/ìkè/ọtù 'to sex a husband, anus '/vagina'	ìjì ìfē/ìp̄iā ọkụ/itī òkwè/ìmē nsorī 'to hold a thing' / 'to flog fire' / 'to play game' / 'to stimulate'	to have sexual intercourse
Ìbì ugwù 'to cut (into half)'	ìchō mmā 'to beautify'	circumcision
ọtù 'vagina'	àhū nwaānyị / ihū ụkwụ	vagina

		'female body' / 'the front of the legs'	
ogbè ikè 'bunch of anus'		ìdōnyèe/ìbū azụ 'to be fatty' / 'back load'	fat buttock (female)
ara 'breast'		̀ǹk̀eihu 'frontal one'	Breast

Discussions of death and sicknesses are issues that require tact in Igbo land. For this reason, certain euphemistic forms are used to refer to them. The substitutes are on the belief that they will reduce possible pain and sorrow. It is also a way to show sympathy for the deceased family, friends and relatives. Such include expressions in table 4.

**TABLE 4**

<b>TABOO WORDS</b>	<b>SUBSTITUTE</b>	<b>GLOSS</b>
nsī nwaānyị 'female poison'	orìà nwaānyị 'female disease'	sexually transmitted disease
onwụ 'death'	Ifé aka/ìbulā akwụkwọ 'to wave hand' / 'to carry books home'	death
ìgbū mmadụ 'to kill human'	ìkwātù mmadụ 'to fell human'	to kill somebody
ozu 'corpse'	mangālà 'a species of dried fish'	corpse
orịā mmìnwụ 'drier disease'	Echīetèka / Òbìrìnaajāochā 'tomorrow is too far'/'	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)



	'that which ends at the real'	
itē/ihā/ikē ime 'to pluck pregnancy'	igbō akwa 'to vomit egg'	to commit abortion

The gods are sacred and revered, that the words or expressions used in referring to and communicating with them are strictly reserved for certain individuals, especially the traditional-priest, who are regarded as being closer to the gods. Even when the society knows such forms, they do not use them; rather they resort to other substitutes, as illustrated in table 5.

TABLE 5

TABOO WORDS	SUBSTITUTE	GLOSS
waataa 'break and eat'	ọjì 'kola-nut'	kola-nut
ọdìọrà (← ọdìoramma) 'that which everybody craves'	ndù 'life'	life
akāètè	azù 'fish'	fish
ọ̀bàraowū	mmiri ọ̀gwù 'medicinal fluid'	liquid form of medicine
akatūrūkpa	nwaànàọjì 'child'	person from a big family
àgàliowū	egō oyibō 'European currency'	European money/currency
ọ̀dìàyàlì	umùaka	children

akāāk̀ẁ/̀̀g̀l̀j̀ kẁ	nd̀ich̀t̀e ‘the ancient ones’	ancestors
̀̀t̀èò̀b̀l̀à	ih̀e wer̀e anya ‘that which is clear’	something distinct
akā̀ò̀d̀il̀i	̀̀l̀à/̀̀ǹi/̀̀ǹà	land
̀̀g̀d̀ìò̀s̀e	ih̀e ihere ‘a thing of shame’	a shameful thing
ò̀d̀ìǹà̀à̀b̀ò	ò̀ch̀ìch̀i	darkness/confusion
ò̀l̀il̀ò̀ak̀a	ji ‘yam’	yam
akẁùob̀i	Ewu	goat
̀̀t̀é̀à̀kẁù	ok̀e mm̀à̀d̀ù	a respected person
ò̀b̀iò̀ẁù	nwàā̀nỳì d̀ì im̀e	a pregnant woman
ò̀g̀ò̀liò̀d̀ìi	ò̀r̀j̀à afò	stomach trouble
ò̀g̀ò̀liò̀r̀à	ò̀r̀j̀à ‘disease / sickness’	sickness/ ill-health / ailment’
ò̀b̀à̀l̀à̀et̀e	mmiri ǹā̀-er̀ù er̀ù	stream
ò̀b̀à̀l̀à̀t̀ul̀e	dib̀j̀à ‘medicine man’ / ‘diviner’	traditional medicine practitioner
ò̀b̀à̀l̀à̀ù̀l̀ul̀ù	ò̀g̀ẁù e l̀ir̀i è̀li	a buried charm

Other taboos words and their euphemistic forms include those in table 6.

**TABLE 6**

<b>TABOO WORDS</b>	<b>SUBSTITUTE</b>	<b>GLOSS</b>
ir̀i ǹg̀à̀r̀ì ‘to eat bribe’	iǹā̀ aka ā̀z̀ù ‘to accept back hand’	to accept bribe
ig̀ò̀t̀e nwà ‘to buy a child’	ik̀ù̀t̀e nwà ‘to carry a child’	to adopt a child
og̀b̀è̀nỳe ‘poverty’	nd̀i enweg̀h̀ì k̀à ọ̀ hà ha ‘those who are	the poor

	wretched'	
̀nsi 'shit'	mkposi 'convenience'	faeces
̀ulò nsi 'house of shit'	̀ulò mkposi 'house of convenience'	toilet
enyi nwaanyi 'female friend'	asa/nnwa 'paragon/babe'	girl friend
ogwu egò 'medicine for money'	egò obàrà 'blood money'	ill gotten wealth
igbà àlùkwaghim 'to divorce'	Idòkà akwukwo 'to tear paper'	to divorce
igbà àmà 'to bear witness'	Isu imi 'to poke nose'	to reveal a secret
egò 'money'	kpòkòm/ chaa 'emptiness'	money
̀ubiam 'want/poverty/paucity'	òwuìtè 'boiling pot'/ 'the boiling of pot'	poverty
anwùrùikè 'strong tobacco'	ahihā/ifē 'grass/thing'	hard drugs
nsògbu 'trouble/ problem'	̀ugba 'oil bean'	problem
inwē egò 'to have money'/ 'acquisition of money'	inò mmā 'to stay well'	to be wealthy
imē òkwà/mkpukè 'partridge pregnancy'/ 'pen pregnancy'	imē oghom 'accidental pregnancy'	unwanted pregnancy

Fromkin *et al* (2007: 446) aver that

... euphemisms ... show that a word or phrase has not only a linguistic denotative meaning but also a connotative meaning that reflects attitudes, emotions, value judgments and so on.

The above euphemisms are used to maintain a positive face and strengthen human ties.

Igbo people believe that when certain harmful animals are called by their real names, especially at night, they appear. In order to mention such animals whenever the need arises, the euphemistic words are used. Onuora (2004), observes that in view of this belief, *akpi* 'scorpion' is called *Odogwu ozara*, *agwo* 'snake' is *Ogologo ihe/eriri* while *esu* 'millipede' is called *Mkpisiodee*.

The examples cited so far have shown that Igbo, just like many other languages, has a roundabout way of saying things the society considers as taboo. People avoid taboo words and expressions by using euphemistic forms in order to sound polite. The use of such substitute words in markets, schools, hospitals, media houses and in general polite speech, has gone a long way in overshadowing the original words which are felt to be taboo or obscene.

## **8. Conclusion**

Language would stand still only if the society did. Language changes as time passes. The changes might be gradual or sporadic. Sometimes, old words are lost because of the arrival of new ones. Because of the attitude of the society to taboo words, new ways are employed in saying such things. The new forms of expressing taboo words contribute to a change in language. In the Igbo society, certain words and expressions are tabooed as a result of cultural and religious norms. Euphemisms are used to replace tabooed words in order to maintain a positive face, the

adoption of the new lexemes bring about changes in the Igbo language.

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