

## Power Manifestations and Manipulations in Interactive Discourses: Evidence from Ezikeoba Elders' Council

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### Abstract

This paper examines interactive discourses of Elugwu Ezike Elders' Council in Elugwu-Ezike speech community of Igboland, southeast Nigeria from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective to discern the linguistic forms that create unequal balance of power relations and determine the extent to which traditional judicial system can be enlisted in the interpretation of interactional power. The Elders' Council acts as a repository of discursive resources and all such signals act within the interactional context to provide useful inputs for the interpretation of the different power equations that exist. The identified discursive signals usually employed for marking interactional power include: asymmetrical employment of politeness strategies, address forms, prerogative use of proverbs, scatological and anecdotal resources, topic selection and sustenance, use of evaluative statements, negotiation of speaking turns and speaking rights, questioning, overt statement of power, and dominant interpretive framework.

**Keywords:** power, interactive discourse, CDA, Elders' Council, manipulation, Igbo.

### 1. Introduction

According to Stibbe (2001: 145), there has been what Fairclough (1992: 2) calls a 'linguistic turn' in social theory where language is 'being accorded a more central role in social phenomena.' The work particularly describes how language contributes to the domination of some people by others. Describing social construction, Burr (1995:33) notes Stibbe, sees language as providing us with ways of structuring ourselves and the world. A good number of scholars have examined the role of language in power relations (cf. Hodge & Kress, 1992; Fowler, 1991; van Dijk, 1997; 1993b; 1995; 1996; Fairclough, 1989, 1992; Chimombo & Roseberry, 1998). Most of this work on language and power focuses on the role of discourse in oppression and exploitation. As further observed by Stibbe, the journal *Discourse and Society* is "dedicated to power, dominance and inequality and the role of discourse and their legitimization and reproduction in society, for instance in the domains of gender, race, ethnicity, class or world religions."

van Dijk (1997) believes that one of the classic senses of ideology is a mode of thought and practice "developed by dominant groups in order to reproduce and legitimize their domination." One of the ways this is accomplished is to present domination as 'God-given, natural, benign, or inevitable.' In van Dijk's more generalized sense, this is just one kind of ideology, where ideologies are "shared self-definitions of groups that allow group members to coordinate their social practices in relation to other groups, (p. 26). Rather than explicitly encouraging oppression and exploitation, ideology, according to Fairclough (1989: 84), often manifests itself more effectively by being implicit. This is achieved by basing discourse on assumptions that are treated as if they were common sense but which are, in fact, "common sense assumptions in the service of sustaining unequal relations of power."

Stibbe (148) notes further that ideologies, embedded and disseminated through discourse, influence the individual mental representations of a society's members, which in turn influence their actions. These mental representations are part of what van Dijk (1997: 27) calls "social cognition" because members of a society share them through participation in, and exposure to discourse. In the end, this social cognition in a typical Ezikeoba traditional context will influence how social constructions exist in the mindsets of the people.

In the Marxist roots of Critical Discourse Analysis, analysis focuses on hegemony, where perpetuation of inequalities of varying degrees is carried out ideologically, rather than coercively, through the manufacture of consent. Cultural constructs determine the fate of people in any given society. These "cultural constructs" are intimately bound up with language and discourse. Discourse, observes Fairclough ((1992:64), "is a practice not just of representing the world but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning". From this perspective, discourse can be considered as a way of talking and writing about an area of knowledge or social practice that both reflects and creates the structuring of the area. According to Damico *et. al.* (2005: 62) the concept of power and its manipulations within the social and cultural contexts of modern society is pervasive. Societal and interactional power and its consequences are anticipated and accepted from the actions of governmental agencies and other institutions to the ways that individuals impose their will on their dependents. In this paper, we are concerned with the overall foundational construct of power and how it is exercised and enacted through language and within discourse. Our database draws from the traditional system of government of the typical Igbo society of Ezikeoba as

encapsulated by the *Oha-in-Council*. Ezikeoba is synonymous with Elugwu-Ezike, an Igbo community in Enugu State southeast Nigeria. Ezikeoba comprises of over thirty autonomous communities, whose traditional system of government imbued with executive, legislative, and judicial powers is vested with the *Elders' Council* generally referred to as *Oha*.

As Damico *et. al.* (2005: 63) posit, human beings constantly interact with one another and these interactions involve not only the ways we construct our communicative interactions but also how these constructions correlate with 'underlying' social forces such as power and solidarity. This predisposes us to have a functional comprehension of the relations between social forces on our language and discourse in order to understand how members of *Oha-in-Council* are able to accomplish social actions and navigate the complexities of communicative interactions. In this regard, we expect to filter out the operational features of interactional power and how members of *Oha-in-Council* negotiate powers in collaborative terms during face-to-face interactions through which they construct the 'self' in relation to others and create social roles, power and authority hierarchies.

Of course, it has to be noted from the onset that interactional power is an existential reality anchored on the anvil of power differential, that is, a situation whereby one interactant or group of interactants seems to have more power than the other in the discourse. In such unequal interactional encounters, the power imbalance is collaboratively constructed by the parties involved and coded by the extent to which the more powerful interactant employs behaviours and resources to exert control and constraint on the interaction. Such deliberate interactional nuances are willfully intended to manipulate the interaction to create and sustain 'power asymmetry' and as some scholars (Hudson, 1996; Fairclough, 1989; Grimshaw, 1990) have noted, it is through such asymmetry in communicative behaviour that power and authority manifest themselves in social actions. In this paper, we hope to see how the members of the *Oha-in-Council* employ discourse strategies to mark interactional power during joint sittings. This would be examined from the theoretical prism of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the basic principles of which would form the thrust of discussion in the next section.

## 2. Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a theory, an aspect of which examines and analyzes power asymmetry in discourse. It depicts instances of injustices in social interaction, and aims at raising people's consciousness of them. A recent school of discourse analysis, notes Luke (1995) concerns itself with relations of power and inequality in language. Critical discourse analysis, in the opinion of Fairclough (1992), refers to the use of an ensemble of techniques for the study of textual practice and language use as social and cultural practices. It builds from three broad theoretical orientations. First, it draws from poststructuralism the view that discourse operates laterally across local institutional sites, and that texts have a constructive function in forming up and shaping human identities and actions. Second, it draws from Bourdieu's sociology the assumption that actual textual practices and interactions with texts become "embodied" forms of "cultural capital" with exchange value in particular social fields. Third, it draws from neo-Marxist cultural theory the assumption that these discourses are produced and used within political economies, and that they thus produce and articulate broader ideological interests, social formations and movements within those fields, (Hall 1996).

Generally, CDA begins from the assumption that systematic asymmetries of power and resources between speakers and listeners, readers and writers can be linked to their unequal access to linguistic and social resources. In this paper, we apply this theory to interactive discourse of Elugwu Ezike Elders' council in an effort to shed light on the linguistic forms that create unequal balance of power relations between the Council members (*Oha*) and non-members of the Council in the course of discharging its statutory functions as the custodian of traditional system of government. In the next section, we shall characterize *Oha-in-Council* in Elugwu-Ezike cultural context, using the Olido Elders' Council as a case study.

## 3. Oha Olido (Elders-in-Council)

The traditional government of every autonomous community is anchored on the *Oha*, whose membership is usually drawn from all the recognized matrilineal families that make up the community. Usually, each matrilineal family is represented in the *Oha* by the eldest surviving male. The next male member of each family ranked in order of seniority constitutes the *Ngteta* or *XkwxOha* Council, whose basic constitutional responsibility is assisting the *Oha* in discharging its duties as the sole custodian of traditional system of government. The next tier after the *Ngteta* is *Egal*, which essentially comprises all the youths of the community. These three tiers constitute the general assembly of the community, with the *Oha* headed by the *Onyishi* occupying the exclusively privileged position. Equally regarded as an integral part of the general assembly is the *Oha Umuada* (Women's Council), whose membership is constituted like the *Oha-in-Council* and presided over by the eldest surviving female person known as *Ede*. Although both Councils sit independently at intervals, circumstances could warrant a joint sitting. In such

situations, the *Oha-in-Council*, led by *Onyishi*, reserves the prerogative to invite the *Ede* and her Council for a joint sitting, and which the latter is bound by tradition to honour. Such joint sittings provide the appropriate context to discuss the concept of power in language and discourse, various hues and shades of power asymmetries.

According to Eze (2006: 10), Olido is a community of three villages: Ukwuolu, Ugwuabudu, Uwelu. Before the present political rearrangement that introduced the idea of autonomous community, Olido was regarded as one of the six villages that make up the Umuitodo community in Elugwu-Ezike clan. Other communities included Umuozi, Esodo, and Ezeodo. The three villages were then known as *Ekwema* (Quarters). Each *Ekwema* is made up of a number of matrilineal families (*umunna*). Ukwuolu has four *umunna*: Umuayoryi, Umuedugwu, Umunaaja, Umuodu; Ugwuabudu has two *umunna*: Umuabi and Umuodachi; Uwelu has five *umunna*: Umueze, Umuogiryi, Umuokerenyi, Umuosayi, Umugbabe. Each matrilineal family is headed by the eldest surviving male person called *Okpara* who keeps custody of the primordial *arua*, being the symbolic representation of the founding father of the matrilineal family. The heads of these families together with the *Onyishi* and *Nkpozi* constitute the *Oha Olido* (Olido Elders' Council). The current configuration of the Council admits the rotational head of the vigilante group, *Onyeshi oche* as a bona fide member just as the President of Olido Abroad Union or his representative is granted honorary membership and sits in Council with other members whenever the *Oha-in-Council* deems it expedient to invite the Union for consultations and deliberations on crucial matters.

The Council sits in *Obu ezogwa*, the traditional courtyard of the *Onyishi*. During such sessions, only the council members are eligible to sit in the Council chambers. Even when the session involved joint sitting of the *Oha* and *Oha Umuada*, the *Ede* and her delegation is usually given seats inside the *inyiginya ezogwa* far removed from the corridors of power, that is, *Obu ezogwa*. This sitting arrangement is a subtle statement intended to mark interactional power and sustain the established asymmetrical relationships, which we shall be discussing shortly.

#### 4. Data

A corpus of data was collected from a variety of different sources, many of which provide clues to how interactional power that mark the relationship between the *Oha* and others is socially constructed. The corpus derive largely from personal observations of *Oha-in-Council* sessions, which held deliberations on the alleged murder case involving some youths of Olido. Sometime in 2008, one Mr. Felix Oome died during a minor scuffle that eventually snowballed into a full scale fight. As a result, a formal report was made to the Igbo-Eze North Police Division, which led to the arrest and detention of some youths numbering over fifteen. The matter became so intractable that the detained youths accused of masterminding Mr. Oome's death were later transferred to State Police headquarters, Enugu before they were finally remanded at Nsukka prison where they were tried for alleged murder of Mr. Oome. The death of Mr. Oome and subsequent detention and trial of some Olido youths posed a very serious challenge to the *Oha-in-Council*. Consequently, the Council decided to wade into the matter primarily to address the issue of brokering peace between the families of the deceased and the detained youths. To this effect, the *Oha* convened a joint session of the *Oha*, *Oha Umuada* and Olido Abroad Union at *Obu Onyishi*.

The interactions during the joint session provided the corpus of data from which the discursive signals that act within the traditional context of Igbo society to manifest interactional power would be filtered, sieved, and analysed. The discussion that follows, based on the analysis of the above data, is intended to elicit an answer to the question: To what extent does the differential use of language influence the interactional power manifestations and manipulations and by extension create and sustain power asymmetries as well as social inequalities in Ezikeoba socio-cultural context?

#### 5. Manifestations of interactional power

In this section, we examine the different signals that act within the interactional context of a typical Igbo traditional society of Elugwu-Ezike, which provide the bases for constructing the power relationship that exists between the members of *Oha-in-Council* and other non-members. As earlier observed, there are a number of ways that interactional power has been identified to manifest in the area of study. These include but not limited to the following: asymmetrical employment of politeness strategies, address forms, prerogative use of proverbs, scatological and anecdotal resources, topic selection and sustenance, use of evaluative statements, negotiation of speaking turns and speaking rights, questioning, overt statement of power, and dominant interpretive framework. These discursive signals shall be discussed briefly in turns.

##### 5.1. Asymmetrical employment of politeness strategies

Politeness is seen as the expression of the speakers' intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward another. It is equally viewed as "a battery of social skills whose goal is to ensure everyone feels affirmed in a social interaction". Being polite therefore consists of attempting to save face for another. Politeness is considered in terms of positive and negative face. Face is the public self image that every adult tries to project. Brown and Levinson (1987) defined positive face two ways: as "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others", or alternately, "the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants. Negative face was defined as "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others", or "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction--i.e. the freedom of action and freedom from imposition". Positive and negative face can be said to exist universally in human culture. In social interactions, face-threatening acts are at times inevitable based on the terms of the conversation.

A face threatening act is an act that inherently damages the face of the addressee or the speaker by acting in opposition to the wants and desires of the other. Brown and Levinson outline four main types of politeness strategies: bald on-record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record (indirect). The scope of this paper would not permit elaborate explanation of these strategies but the whole essence of any politeness strategy is to mitigate face or redress the loss of face. Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) have the ability to mutually threaten face; therefore, rational agents seek to avoid FTAs or will try to use certain strategies to minimize the threat.

From the interactions during the session under study, it was discovered that while the *Onyishi* and other members of Oha made no deliberate attempt to observe any politeness strategy in addressing other non-members, the reverse was the case when it was the turn of the Abroad Union executive members led by the National President, Cyril Abugu to make their own contributions to the issues being discussed. Other non-members followed the same pattern in an auspicious manner that signaled power asymmetry. When the Nkpozi introduced the main item on agenda, which was the alleged murder case and the detention of the accused youths, the chairman of the Council (Onyishi) told the Union representatives that they were invited to ascertain their own opinion on how the issue could be resolved amicably and to the satisfaction of all the parties involved. As highly mobile and itinerant members of the community, the Onyishi told them that their exposure and interactions with people outside the narrow confines of their community might have imbued them with wisdom and knowledge, which pale into insignificance the rustic, antiquated and pristine wisdom of their grey hairs. The dramatic import of this unusual deference and concession was not lost on them. Instead, it only helped to sharpen their politeness instincts, knowing full well that any false sense of security could predispose them to let down their guards and let loose their tongue in a manner that could attract serious sanctions from the elders' sharp tongues.

Against this backdrop, the Union's spokesman chose the path of positive politeness strategies, which seek to minimize the threat to the hearer's positive face as he stooped to speak. Such strategies, which are most usually used in situations where the audience knows each other fairly well, are used to make the hearer feel good about himself, his interests or possessions. Of course, it goes without saying that in addition to hedging and attempts to avoid conflict, some strategies of positive politeness include statements of friendship, solidarity, compliments, indirect speech. The President began by expressing the Union's gratitude to the Oha for considering them worthy to be invited and be part of the decision-making process of the community. This is without prejudice to the fact that the Union representatives were constrained by the exigency and imperativeness of the invitation to abandon their respective workplaces as civil servants and businessmen. It was an enormous sacrifice, which the elders hardly took cognizance of while summoning them to the meeting. Even if they did, the rare honour of being invited to sit with the elders in the Council chambers exclusively reserved for only those that have been specially privileged by the gods to attain such a golden age, was enough to mitigate whatever loss or privation they might have incurred or suffered. This explained the effusive downpour of politeness expressions in form of compliments and platitudes, all intended to minimize the threat to the Council members' positive face by attending to their interests, needs, wants, being optimistic about the outcome of the meeting, making offers and promises, exaggerating excitement over the Council's interest, avoiding disagreement, minimizing imposition, and using obviating structures, like nominalizations, passives, or statements of general rules, offering apologies where necessary. All these add up as a conscious attempt at achieving Geoffrey Leech's six politeness maxims of tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy.

The tact maxim imposes requirement on the Union's representatives to minimize the expression of beliefs, which implied cost to the Oha and maximize the expression of beliefs which imply benefits to the Council members. Through this strategy, the Union's spokesmen minimized the chances of imposing their views on the Council and by the same token attend to its needs, interests, and wants. Leech's generosity maxim offered the Union President and his delegation the opportunity to minimize the expression of benefits of whatever suggestion they offered to themselves and maximize the expression of costs to the Union members. The approbation maxim minimizes the

expression of beliefs which express dispraise of other and maximizes the expression of beliefs, which express approval of other. The first part of the maxim predisposes the Union delegation to avoid disagreement with the Oha while the second part arms them with the leeway to make the Council members feel good by showing solidarity. Also, the Union delegation employed the modesty maxim to minimize the expression of self-praise and maximize the expression of praise of the Oha for their celestial wisdom that informed the decision to hold a joint session of the Council and others. In all these, the Union leaders showed enough deference to the Council, conceding all the credits to the wisdom of the elders' grey hairs. Even when they were prodded on by the Oha to offer their own suggestion on the way forward, the Union representatives did so by dispensing tact and humility in a manner that did not only enlist their support and public acclaim but also avoided the danger of seeming manipulative and being misunderstood.

This deliberate effort by the Union delegation at employing politeness strategies, whose redressive import is intended to satisfy a wide range of the Council's desires such as showing interest in and claiming common ground with the Council members, seeking agreement and point of convergence, asking for forgiveness and giving deference where necessary, provided only the flipside of the social interaction as the elders made no attempt to redress or mitigate the face threatening acts. In other words, the Oha members conducted themselves in a manner that constituted an act that inherently damaged the face of the Union delegation. The face has earlier been characterized as either positive or negative; positive face refers to one's self-esteem, while negative face refers to one's freedom to act. The two aspects of face are the basic wants in any social interaction, and so during any social interaction, cooperation is needed amongst the participants to maintain each others' faces. Failure on the part of one participant to cooperate could constitute damage to the face of the other participant. Positive face is threatened when the speaker or hearer does not care about their interactant's feelings, wants, or does not want what the other wants. Negative face is threatened when an individual does not avoid or intend to avoid the obstruction of their interlocutor's freedom of action. In essence, freedom of choice and action are impeded when negative face is threatened. Throughout the session, the Council members freely, wittingly and unwittingly threatened the positive and negative faces of the non-members of the Council in the way they spoke during the interactive discourse. As a result, the Union representatives and other non-members of Oha were constrained to succumb to the power of the Oha, resorting to subservience and other instances of slavishness; expressing thanks almost endlessly, asking for apologies and excuses; accepting offers and violation of social etiquettes with the meekness and equanimity of a sacrificial lamb; committing themselves to things they would not want to do.

Such asymmetrical employment of politeness strategies goes to justify the characterization of power as a measure of an entity's ability to control the environment around itself, including the behaviour of other entities. Power can derive from multifarious sources: delegated authority, privileged position within the multidimensional social scale, expertise, persuasion, knowledge, celebrity, force, group dynamics, social influence of tradition, etc. In the case of the Oha, it can be said that their power derives from their privileged position and social influence of tradition. The Oha perspective is typical manifestation of Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas on the 'will to power', which presupposes the domination of other humans as much as the exercise of control over one's environment, that has tended to inform much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century analysis of power. This fits into the theoretical prism of Michel Foucault's "technologies of power" framework, which conceptualizes power as something 'exercised with intention'. In other words, power is actions upon others' actions in order to interfere with them. It presupposes freedom in the sense that power is not enforcement, but ways of making people *by themselves* behave in other ways than they else would have done. Grice (1975) is of the opinion that all conversationalists are rational beings who are primarily interested in the efficient conveying of messages. Brown and Levinson (1978) use this argument in their politeness theory by saying that rational agents will choose the same politeness strategy as any other would under the same circumstances to try to mitigate face. In essence, all rational agents including the Oha and non-members are reasonably expected to seek to avoid face threatening acts or use certain strategies to minimize the threat. Yet, the Oha members, emboldened by their highly privileged and exalted position or what French & Raven call 'legitimate powers' chose to ignore any form of politeness strategy in their dispensation of interactional powers during interaction with other non-members.

In analyzing the inseparable link between power and knowledge, Foucault (1980) outlines a form of covert power that works through people rather than only on them noting that "belief systems gain momentum (and hence power) as more people come to accept the particular views associated with that belief system as *common knowledge*." Such belief systems define their figures of authority and within such a belief system, ideas crystallize as to what is *right* and what is *wrong*, what is *normal* and what is *deviant*. Foucault notes further that these "ideas, being considered undeniable 'truths', come to define a particular way of seeing the world, and the particular way of life associated with such 'truths' becomes. In the belief system of Elugwu-Ezike traditional society, the idea of asymmetrical employment of politeness strategy crystallizing as what is right and normal is eloquently attested to by the following proverb: *Qgerenyi (Onye ka g) nyukwu g eh n'az, i s ya OluOha* (When an elder farts in your presence, you show appreciation by greeting him, *OluOha*.) In essence, an elder's farting, especially the thunderous type,

which phonologists would want to characterize as ‘voiced *bi-anus* plosive’ is a great feat that deserve an appreciable dose of congratulations! In fact, an elder does not fart; he merely breathes. Even in rare cases where an elder acknowledges his farting prowess after one delayed release, he makes a feeble attempt at mitigating its odouriferous sting by uttering *gb pi*. By this unprecedented singular act, the younger interactant is expected to appreciate the elder’s polite gesture to mitigate the face threatening act and breathe in the ‘aromatic’ perfume without squiggling or squinting his face.

According to French & Raven (1959), power is that state of affairs which holds in a given relationship, A-B, such that a given influence attempt by A over B makes A’s desired change in B more likely. Conceived this way, power is fundamentally *relative* - it depends on the specific understandings A and B each apply to their relationship, and, interestingly, requires B’s recognition of a quality in A which would motivate B to change in the way A intends. Related to the interaction in focus, the elder needs to draw on the base or combination of bases of power appropriate to the relationship to effect the desired outcome in the young person. In the same vein, the young person is expected to appreciate the nature of the relationship existing between them and act accordingly. To do otherwise is to act in manner that expresses his indifference toward the elder’s positive face or negative assessment of his positive face. This indication of indifference to the positive face needs of the elder could earn the younger interactant serious sanctions.

### 5.2. Address forms

Forms of address are often employed during an interaction to mark interactional power. In other words, speakers tend to locate themselves along the power continuum by the way they name their addressees. During the joint session of Oha, the interaction between the Oha and other non-members showed that there are a number of address forms as part of the verbal repertoire of the speech community, which assisted the interactants in locating themselves along a power continuum. Not surprisingly, the interactants with more power (Oha) opted for more intimate forms when addressing the non-members just as the latter used more formal and distant forms such as titles while addressing the Oha members.

In Olido traditional context, the Oha members have titles with which they are addressed. The Onyishi, for instance bears either the *Ag* or *Xde* title depending on whether he is of the Qmxdaga lineage or not. An Qmxdaga Onyishi takes the *Ag* title but an Onyishi who has no Qmxdaga blue blood makes do with *Ude* title. Other members of Oha who by their positions as *Okpara Umuna* equally have such titular appellations as *Ekwueme*, *Ugwudike*, *Odugwu*, *Oloosayi* etc. A non-member of Oha who is given the privilege to address the Council is expected to remove his foot-wears, squat on either leg or both to greet members by reeling off their titles in hierarchical order after which he ends with *Oha kwer n oo* (Please, may everybody accept his greeting) or *O mare nke e, kwer n oo* (Please, all title owners, accept your greeting). The reverse is the case when it is the turn of Onyishi and other elders to address the non-Council members as we observe interactional power manifestations in the light of unequal or lopsided distribution of address forms. For instance, while addressing the Union President, the Onyishi simply called him by his first name, Cyril. Sometimes, he may choose to address the person by alluding to his father’s name: *Nwa onyen...nwa Ogbona Ochebo*. This strategy perhaps, is intended to underscore the insignificance of the addressee’s personal name, which does not merit even a royal mention. On the other hand, it could still be interpreted as a subtle politeness strategy meant to accord respect to the addressee’s father, who might have distinguished himself as a war hero, wealthy farmer, successful palm wine tapper, great wrestler, or blacksmith.

Either way, the unequal distribution of address forms as markers of the power differential bespeak the interaction power manifestations that characterize interactive discourses of typical Ezikeoba *Oha-in-Council*. Of course it needs to be pointed out here that the demands of politeness require that the Onyishi or other members of Oha reciprocate the polite address forms by replying *Igbadogwu* but the law of asymmetrical employment of politeness strategies examined above nullifies any such imposition on the elders. Let us consider, for instance, power coded as evident in the unequal distribution of address forms during this typical interactions between Onyishi and Union President:

*Bialeka Cyrin, Oha g bor aga?* (Come Cyril, how is your family today?)

*Nna anyi, a ryiode Ugwuanyi Agama ne anyi ebikwutego ishi eka nta.* (Our father/the Great One, we thank the Almighty that we woke up today).

Here, we note the unequal balance in the distribution of address forms, with the scale tilting in favour of the more powerful participant, that is, the Onyishi.

### 5.3. Use of proverbs, scatological and anecdotal resources

Generally, the use of proverbs, idioms, wellerisms, anecdotes and scatological references is considered as the prerogative or exclusive preserve of the wise elders in the Igbo cultural context. The Ezikeoba traditional society is

not different in any significant way. This was evident in the interactions that took place during the Oha sessions. The Onyishi and his co-elders demonstrated this much in the way they explored and exploited the inestimable mines of proverbs, parables, and other instances of aesthetic manipulations of Ezikeoba dialects, leaving the non-members of *Oha-in-Council* to crouch in awe and ponder the seamless ease and mellifluous suavity with which they knitted and wove the fine literary fibres together into a coherent flawless discourse.

Other non-members of the Council who aspired to use proverbs began by taking express permission from the elders: *Unu bu nd ogerenyi mar et s ne Ogodo Amoke gbagbon ejo ulq ne o lako he* ( You, the elders have a proverb, which says that no matter how long Ogodo Amoke flees a bad home, he would eventually return to it). Failure to ascribe the proverb patent to the elders would be considered a serious affront and almost a sacrilegious encroachment on the pristine recesses of tradition, of which they are the natural custodians. The same applies to scatological references such as human faeces, farting as well as calling the spade a spade in matters relating to human private parts: *At medome oome, o woo ajoko* (When the vagina behaves well, it becomes a sex maniac/ A woman who donates her vagina freely is misconstrued as a sex maniac). A non-member who uses such terms ordinarily or in proverbs even with express permission is considered as rude and vulgar because he is not licensed by tradition to do so. However, the *Ede* and other members of *Oha Umuada* who may have sufficient reasons to make use of proverbs and other idiomatic expressions risk no sanctions from the *Oha* expect where it was proven beyond all reasonable doubts that such proverbs or scatological references were not intended to denigrate or desecrate the pristine sanctity of the ancestral symbols, *arua*.

#### 5.4. Topic introduction/selection and sustenance

The exclusive control of topic introduction/selection and maintenance of such topic is another manifestation of interactional power observed during the interactions. In the case of the *Oha-in-Council*, the elders who constituted the dominant interactants were naturally predisposed to determining the topic(s) to be discussed and even the duration of the discussion. Damico, et. al. (2005: 69) alluded to this by citing Shuy (1987) and Walker (1987) who opined that “whoever controls the topic is often the person who controls the interaction, not only in face-to-face manipulations of power but in broader applications as well.” This aspect of interactional power came to the fore when the Nkpozi Oha, the traditional Clark of the Council formally introduced the agenda of the meeting, part of which was the alleged murder case of Mr. Felix Oome and the detention of the alleged masterminds. Midway into the discussion, Chief Jonathan Agbedo, made some attempt to introduce an extraneous topic for possible discussion. Specifically, the speaker drew the attention of the *Oha-in-Council* to the Igweship tussle between him and Chief Augustine Agashi and the need for the Council to heed the advice of the Honourable Commissioner for Chieftaincy Affairs, Chief Godwin Ogbo to write a letter informing the state government about the matter with a view to resolving it.

According to Eze (2006), Chief Agbedo was duly elected by the community as her first Traditional Ruler but the State Government was misled into issuing a certificate of recognition to the wrong person, Chief Agashi. That was the issue, which the speaker felt was crucial and needed urgent attention, but the Council, led by its Chairman thought otherwise, and expressed it volubly in a manner that fell short of reprimanding the speaker for attempting to usurp the powers of the Council. He was promptly overruled for attempting to introduce a topic outside the purview of the agenda prepared by the Council. Ordinarily, the issue raised by Chief Agbedo was topical enough to have warranted immediate inclusion as one of the matters arising for deliberation. However, given that the Onyishi and some members of the Council including some representatives of the Abroad Union seemed more favourably disposed to having Chief Agash[ as the new Igwe, despite the flawed process that threw him up, overruling Chief Agbedo’s motion sounded so natural as if it jelled perfectly with the thinking of the gods and ancestors of the land. This seems to provide justification for Fairclough’s (1989) assertion that even in larger social events such as paneled investigation, the balance of topic content and even ideological ‘spins’ are overwhelmingly in favour of the existing power-holders.”

#### 5.5. Use of evaluative statements

Evaluative statements, note Damico et. al. (70), are employed to signal power asymmetry in situations where the power differential is inherent in the context. An explicit case of interactional power is manifested when one interactant provides an answer to a question or makes a statement, which is in turn evaluated by another interactant. Cazden (1988), in Damico et. al. cited the following structures: *that’s correct; a fine thought; very good* as examples of such evaluative statements that teachers provide as responses to students’ interactions in the classroom. In the case of *Oha-in-Council*, the Onyishi and some other members of the *Oha* used various evaluative statements to establish interactional power and traditional authority. Such statements usually resound from the hallowed chambers of *Obu Onyishi* each time a non-member of the Council is squatting before wise ones to make his or her presentation on a

matter being discussed. For instance, when one of the Union's representatives, Mr. Ignatius Ugwuanyi was invited to address the Council on the issue being discussed, he stressed the need for caution in the light of the delicate nature of the case. He suggested that the first step to be taken in the direction of amicable resolution of the case was paying condolence visit to the bereaved family. In this regard, he requested the Council to mandate the Union to undertake this task on behalf of the community. This point made with every measure of pungency, elicited such evaluative statements as *ezokwu abia n* (the truth has come); *oniye bu okwu onye mar ihe* (this one is the statement of a wise person); *haniya bu gwamuku ya* (this is it) etc.

When Chief Agbedo raised his motion about the chieftaincy dispute, the Union President, Mr. Abugu quickly interpreted the mood of the Onyishi and some other Council members and opposed it. As he reasoned, the Council should not be unnecessarily burdened with such an old issue at a time the community was grappling with such a serious case as murder. To entertain Chief Agbedo's motion was to chase rat when one's house was on fire. Such puerile fantasies could not be associated with the wise elders, Mr. Abugu intoned to the admiration of those he had spoken their minds. The admiration came in form of such evaluative statements as *ibaa!* (yes); *okwu g d nryi* (your speech is fruity); *wor gaba* (carry go / forward ever). Of course, such positive evaluative remarks are interpreted as a tacit endorsement of the speaker's line of reasoning coming from the power-wielders, whose sole ambition is to direct and control the flow of interactions in order to establish and sustain interactional asymmetries needed to accomplish the goals of most interactions. If the statements were negative, the speaker would have been compelled to make a detour and figure out the course charted out by the elders for him to toe.

#### 5.6. Negotiation of speaking turns and speaking rights

There is an interlocking nexus between the negotiation of speaking turns and speaking rights and the exercise of interactional power as has been demonstrated by such works as Halliday (1978); Sacks *et. al.* (1974); Brown & Levinson (1987); Fairclough (1989); O'Donnell (1990). According to Damico *et. al.* (70), these works have demonstrated that "...speaker(s) with greater power typically manipulate and control both the range and granting of speaking turns – often through interruptions of the other speaker(s) with little risk of discord. The more powerful interactant can interrupt, choose the next speaker, or extend the turn with long chunks of uninterrupted talk." The foregoing clearly typifies the interactions between the Oha and non-members. From observations, it was clear that the highly outspoken Onyishi appropriated the powers to determine the speaking turns and the rights of the interactants to speak. Tradition confers on the Nkpozi the authority to introduce the agenda, and recognize those that have made indications to speak at a point in time and accord them the right to speak. It is also within his powers to raise point of order to redirect a speaker that has strayed from the topic of discussion. But the Onyishi would not let the Nkpozi do his duty.

Instead, he would interrupt a speaker at intervals with the least regard for the his/her self-esteem and sensibilities to reprimand him/her for daring to voice out an opinion that may be out of sync with his or the Council's position. One particular speaker, who emerged from the popular side, that is, the middle-aged group (*egal*), approached the threshold of the *Obu* with a passionate plea with a view to drawing the Council's attention to the plight of some of the detained youths who might not have had any hand in the alleged murder and the need to secure their bail from police detention. Instantly, the Onyishi lost his peppery temper and let loose his acerbic tongue on the hapless young man: *Fuchimag gbalie mbenufe; onye gwar g kama homu? A nekwa ne nwa jikpa eene tor oz, i bia mbeniye ba achotore onu ke anyi ja agbafuta nd oyibo sr ne he ne enyo enyo ke nd eka he d ya bu ochu.* (Shut up your trap and get lost; who told you to say a thing like that? The serious matter at hand now is that a full-fledged man is lying stone dead; yet, you come here to jabber about, asking us to go and bail those people being detained by government for their alleged involvement in the murder case).

The terribly embarrassed young man did not need to be told that he had since lost his speaking turn and right if he had any *ab initio*. He had strayed into the lion's den. Only a rare streak of luck would snatch him away from the cannibal's jaws and navigate him out of the wicket. Wisdom pointed to the folly of stretching his luck too far. Quickly, he stitched up his fractured emotions and collected the rioting fragments of his fading human essence before melting away unceremoniously. With such dismissive fiat, the Onyishi sent out a clear message that sizzled into the inner recesses of any other 'rascal' that might have a similar outlandish idea. By wielding his powers to circumscribe the speaking turns and rights of interactants, the Onyishi had clearly defined the rules of engagement, which conferred on him limitless rights to manipulate and control the interactions in order to establish and sustain interactional asymmetries.

#### 5.7. Questioning

Questioning is another discourse tact employed by the dominant interactant to manipulate and control interaction and sustain interactional power. In Searle's (1969) version of speech act theory, questioning is regarded as a form of



control, a kind of control meant to get one interactant to do something for the more powerful interactant. In most interactions, it is usually the case that the dominant individual has greater freedom to use questioning to control the discourse. In the case of *Oha* being studied, the Onyishi and other members exploit the manipulative resources to achieve a wide range of purposes. For instance, questioning could be used to nail an interactant, put him on the defensive and perhaps extract information or unreserved apology from him. Naturally, the interactant marked out by his less powerful position within the multidimensional social scale has a greater obligation to provide the answers. As was observed in the preceding section, the Onyishi turned the young man's honest submission into interrogation, and thus succeeded in putting him on the spot. The rhetorical question, *Qnye gwar g kama homu?* (Who mandated you to make such utterance?) was not intended to elicit any answer from the young man but its significance derives from the fact that there is greater rather than lesser asymmetry along the power differential.

#### 5.8. Overt statement of power

As another effective signal of interactional asymmetry, overt statement of power is one explicit means of signaling power differential, which manifests in a number of ways. The dominant interactant can achieve this by drawing up the agenda and announcing it at the meeting as well as defining in clear terms the rights and privileges of those in attendance. When the joint session of the *Oha-in-Council* commenced, the Nkpozi empowered by Onyishi announced the main objective of the meeting, that is, the alleged murder case and the detention of suspects and how to resolve it amicably. The *Oha* reserves the inalienable right to determine the issues to be discussed and also forecloses the introduction of any extraneous issue. Even when topics are introduced for deliberation, it still behooves the *Oha* to define the mode of interaction in terms of who talks and who listens; who issues directives and who carries out the directives.

This explained the abrupt interruption of Chief Agbede by Onyishi when the former tended to persevere in his motion, urging the Council to take a disposal action on the chieftaincy dispute. Onyishi promptly reminded him that the matter he was harping on was not before the *Oha* and it was not within his (Agbede) powers to define the agenda for *Oha*. Onyishi sealed the matter permanently with a proverb, depicting the awesome powers of the *Oha*: *Ohe Oha kar ka shire* (Whatever the *Oha* decides supersedes all other opinions). In other words, nobody has the right to extend the frontiers of the scope of discourse delimited by the *Oha* not to talk about hitting tangentially off the mark. The mandate of the Union representatives and other stakeholders like the *Ede* and her *Oha Umuada* were spelled out to them in clear terms: practicable steps forward in resolving the alleged murder case. No more, no less.

Sometimes, the non-members may come up with a proposal that might possibly border on the common interest of the community; yet, the prime mover(s) must seek and obtain the express permission of the *Oha* to present it for possible deliberation. Even when the proposal might be intended to achieve a common good for the entire community, such proposer(s) would be reminded that it is against the tradition to seek audience with the *Oha* empty-headed. In other words, presenter(s) of any such proposal must do so with at least some kola-nuts and gallons of palm wine as escorts. Such is the asymmetrical character of the interactional dominance of the *Oha*, which is overtly and explicitly stated at any given opportunity.

#### 5.9. Dominant interpretive framework

Ulichny and Watson-Gegeo (1989) in Damico *et.al.* (2005: 70) present the manner in which one's contribution is interpreted via another individual's dominant interpretive framework as one of the subtle signals of interactional power. A number of discourse studies (Erickson & Shultz, 1982; Kedar 1987; Grimshaw, 1990; Morris & Chenail, 1995; Schefflen, 1973; Panagos *et. al.* 1986; McTear & King, 199; Cicourel, 1992; Lahey, 2004; Kovarsky, 1990; Simmons-Mackie *et.al* 1999) have revealed that interactional asymmetries exist when professionals such as doctors, lawyers, or teachers provide services for those who require their services. In particular, Damico & Damico (1997) demonstrated how dominance is negotiated through the clinician's response framework while interpreting the students' attempts at interaction. In all these, dominant interpretive framework is asymmetrically employed as a control mechanism for various functions, including as a constraint on therapeutic discourse routines.

A careful analysis of the *Oha-in-Council* reveals how the Council members controlled interactions between them and non-members through dominant interpretive framework. By reacting to the contributions of others, they exert interactional control and by so doing employ interactional dominance to set the agenda and guide the interaction. For instance, when they called for the opinions of the Union delegation on the alleged murder case and the way forward, the Union came up with the idea of a condolence visit to the bereaved family as the first step in resolving the case. Even though the idea was considered brilliant, the Onyishi and some other Council members would not let their egoistic and domineering instincts be dulled into insignificance or allow the Union to take the shine off their sail by swallowing the idea hook, line and sinker. They needed to negotiate dominance by interpreting the condolence idea as one that was originally theirs but which could still further benefit meaningfully from the

contributions of the Union representatives. By employing this dominant interpretive framework, the Onyishi and his co-elders not only influence the interaction but also how non-members ought to conceptualize issues perhaps to underscore the centrality of power asymmetry to attaining the goals of interactions.

## 6. Conclusions

This work has looked at the interactive discourse of Elugwu Ezike Elders' Council and how specific discourse structures are deployed in the reproduction of social dominance to create unequal balance of power relations between the Council members (*Oha*) and non-members of the council in legal and conflict resolution discourses. The foregoing justifies social power of groups or institutions as a central notion in most works in CDA. Conceiving social power in terms of control, individuals and groups, notes Dijk (1996), are said to have (more or less) power if they are able to (more or less) control the acts and minds of (members of) other groups. This ability presupposes a *power base* of privileged access to scarce social resources, such as force, money, status, fame, knowledge, information, "culture," or indeed various forms of public discourse and communication. The discursive structures of the Elders' Council equally show that groups may control other groups, or only control them in specific situations or social domains. In addition, dominated groups are naturally disposed to accept, condone, comply with, or legitimize such social power as being in sync with the "natural" order. This explains why the social power of the Elders' Council has been integrated in laws, rules, norms, habits, thus taking the form of "hegemony".

It is equally evident from this work that it is the prerogative of the Elders' Council to control the context, which Duranti and Goodwin (1992); van Dijk (1998b) see as the mentally represented structure of those properties of the social situation that are relevant for the production or comprehension of discourse. It consists of such ethnographic categories as the overall definition of the situation, setting (time, place), ongoing actions (including discourses and discourse genres), participants in various communicative, social, or institutional roles, as well as their mental representations: goals, knowledge, opinions, attitudes, and ideologies. In this regard, the Council wields enormous social powers by controlling context in terms of determining the definition of the communicative situation, deciding on time and place of the communicative event, or on which participants may or must be present, and in which roles, or what knowledge or opinions they should (not) have, and which social actions may or must be accomplished by discourse.

Apart from the context, the Council exerts control over the content as well as the structures of text and talk. For instance, it is observed how the Council Chairman (Onyishi) took unilateral decisions on the (possible) discourse *genre(s)* or *speech acts* of the meeting. He demanded a direct answer and not any convoluted circumlocution or self-opinionated argument from non-Council members whenever it suited his discursive convenience. He not only controls the topics (semantic macrostructures) and topic change but also enforces discursive regulations that prohibit access to conventional schemas, prescribes and/or proscribes specific speech acts, and selectively distributes or interrupts turns. In essence, the discursive structures of Ezikeoba Elders' Council tend to validate Dijk's (1996) claim "that virtually all levels and structures of context, text, and talk can in principle be more or less controlled by powerful speakers, and such power may be abused at the expense of other participants." Herein lies the power asymmetries, which characterize the interactive discourses of Ezikeoba Council of Elders.

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