TOWARDS THE SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY: CONSTRUCTION OF THE PEDAGOGIST IDENTITY IN SELECTED IGBO LITERATURE TEXTS

Chukwuebuka Uchenna, Oraegbunam, Ph.D. & Bankale, A. Oyetayo, Ph.D.
Department of Linguistics and African Languages
University of Ibadan

Abstract
It is an absolute truism that members of a given society often draw their sense of self mostly from the social categories to which they belong. Through a social categorization process, people with shared common features are categorized and labelled as the in-group, while the few that do not conform to the categorization are labelled the out-group. Language is the main code for such categorization and labelling. Over the years, the image of Nigerian pedagogists has been variously constructed in many fields but little attention is paid to how their image is constructed in Igbo literature. This study, therefore, examines how the pedagogists' identity is constructed by Igbo literary writers in their works. Data were drawn from four texts, randomly selected as samples from the three genres of Igbo literature and subjected to content analysis using the lenses of the social identity theory. Findings show that pedagogists are always portrayed as poor people, occupying the lowest rung of the socioeconomic ladder, and as such are not respected. The study recommends an upward review of pedagogists' welfare in Nigeria to make it more attractive, and by so doing change the general perception of people towards pedagogists.

Keywords: Pedagogist identity, Social identity theory, Identity construction in Igbo, Social categorization

1.0   INTRODUCTION

When interlocutors engage in a discourse, be it a discourse about self or a third person, identity is constructed. This is possible because a person's characteristic way of thinking and behaviour define his/her identity or how he/she sees another. Hence, identity is often described as a person's character which distinguishes the person, or a group, from others (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). But come to think of it, does identity matter? There has been some doubt in recent literature as to the seriousness of identity, given the level of attention it has now received in social sciences (Jenkins 2008, p. 5). Even though their inquiry might seem to be a little justified, the fact that they have raised questions along the line of identity is a pointer to the fact that identity discourse is to be taken more seriously (Jenkins 2008). As a mirror of society, literature objectifies various identity constructions as done in a face-to-face interaction.

The neglect of the academic sector and the societal abuse of the pedagogic profession in Nigeria, call for an investigation into the root cause of the ill-treatment meted to the stakeholders in the academic sector. It asks the question of how Igbo writers as social and academic commentators contribute positively or negatively to the predicament of pedagogists in the country through their writings. Previous studies on identity discourses focused more on the construction of gender identity in texts (Ghevolor, Ellah, and Ushie, 2021), entrepreneurial identity construction (Susanne, Middletonb, & Donnellon, 2012) issues, and the plight of teachers (Umeorah and Jacob, 2020) with scant attention paid to how the pedagogist identity is constructed in the Igbo literary space.

In this study, we shall first explain the Social Identity Theory (SIT) which is our operational framework, and our concept of 'pedagogist' in relation to the application of the concept in social clime determines public perception of practitioners in the sector. Efforts shall be made to review previous studies about identity construction in selected fields, including literary studies. We shall then illustrate, with instances, strategies that Igbo writers employ in constructing pedagogists' identities in their works, show the types of identities constructed as well as the implications of such identities on the real-life conditions of pedagogists in the Nigerian state.

The analysis done in this study is through the theoretical lenses of Social Identity Theory (SIT), while the interpretative design was used in the interpretation and analysis of data. In order to make a general statement as regards how Igbo literary writers construct the pedagogists' identity in their works, and the type of identity constructed, we have purposively selected and studied four literary texts, ensuring that each genre of Igbo written literature is represented (one text from poetry, two drama texts and a prose). The choice of these texts is owing to their pragmatic portrayal/representations of pedagogist identity. Again texts chosen for the study were all written by pedagogists. The chosen texts were M. N. Eze's *Mmakwaara* (2004), R. C. Anene and D. C. Maduelosi's *Ọkụkọ A Gbatara n'Afa* (2006), I. U. Nwadike's *Nwata Bulie Nna Ya Elu* (1992) and I. Ikwubuzo's poem 'Eluigwe ga-akwu Ụgwọ' in *Ọ̀menkà* (2002). The texts were subjected to a pragmatic analysis.

2.0   THE SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Social Identity Theory (SIT) promotes the view that individuals define their identities along the social groups to which they belong, and that such identification is what bolsters self-identity (Islam, 2014). Propounded by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, SIT tries to explain the cognitive processes and social conditions that underscore intergroup attitudes, principally, those pertaining to discrimination among groups, prejudice as well as prejudice (Mcleod, 2023). The theory studies the syncretism between personal and social identities. The main objective of SIT is to prescribe as well as forecast conditions that make (an) individual(s) think or see themselves as individuals or as part of a group. However, the theory also considers consequences of any identity a person chooses, be it an individual or group-associated identity (an identity drawn from being a member of a social group/class).

SIT which began in the early 1970s, was designed to fill the vacuum that existing theories on intergroup relations could not fill. It began to receive pronounced international attention in the 1980, and 1990s. The SIT is now one of the most influential theories of the intergroup as well as group processes in the world today. It has now reshaped how individuals think and view many group-mediated phenomena and has also extended its tentacles outside the confines of social psychology where it began (Hornsey 2008, p. 205).

In SIT, the 'self' is the key concept. It is reflexive in way that, through the process of 'self-categorisation', the 'self' can take itself as an object and as such, categorise, classify as well as name itself in distinctive ways vis-à-vis other social classifications or categories (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell, 1987, cf. Stets and Burke, 2000, p. 224). It is by this 'self-categorisation' that an identity is formed.

A social group in the context of SIT is a set of individuals who see themselves as members of the same social category. In this social group, people that share features similar to the 'self' are categorised and labelled as one group known as the 'in-group', while persons whose characters differ from the rest of the group are tagged the 'out-group' through a social categorisation process (Stets and Burke, 2000, p. 225). In essence, the basis of SIT is in uniformity of philosophy and action among group (in-group or out-group) members (Stets and Burke, 2000, p. 225). To this end, the in-group could be members of the same profession, religious or cultural affiliation who share the same work ethics, philosophy, or faith. Anyone or group that does not share the same ethos as members of this group is perceived as the out-group.

Three psychological processes are central in SIT: social categorization, social comparison, and social identification. These processes are also referred to as the cognitive components of SIT. Social categorisation refers to a way by which individuals are classified into social groups to have a better understanding of our milieu. It is a process according to SIT that allows the taxonomy of people based on their membership to groups (Vinney, 2019). Social identification, on the other hand, refers to a means whereby individuals identify as members of a group and by so doing adopt the group lifestyle. Social comparison points to a method whereby individuals who have identified with a particular group, now make comparisons between their (in-) group and other (out-) groups, with regard to social class and prestige. Hence, if self-esteem is to

be maintained, one must consider his or her in-group as having a higher social status than the out-group (Vinney, 2019).

The above follows that there are two main types of social identity, positive and negative social identities. People often get inspired to keep a positive self-concept and this image is driven to a large extent from group identification. They often create positive social identities by approvingly comparing their in-group in opposition to an out-group (Shinnar 2008, p. 554). Having a social identity according to Padilla & Perez (2003) "satisfies the individuals' simultaneous needs for inclusion and differentiation" (p. 43).

A person's perception of self is a cord that links the fellow's attitude, beliefs, and emotions, and for one to grow and evolve as a pedagogist there is a need to examine one's sense of self-identity (Godfrey, 2023). Hence, the quest for self-discovery can be captured in two basic questions, "Who am I?" and "How am I perceived by others?" (Ramin and Yadollahi, 2014, p. 94). Each of these questions when asked, moves a person's (pedagogists) thinking towards the basic features that underscore his/her very existence, one which can be a basis for defining him/herself to others. Again the later question also points to the identity one drives from his or her membership to social (or professional) group(s), giving the thinker a clue as to how other people perceive members of his group, which by extension confirms how they perceive him/her as a member of the group. It is on this point that this theory is considered appropriate for examining how pedagogists are perceived in Igbo literary space and the nature of identity constructed for them by the writers.

3.0 THE 'PEDAGOGIST IDENTITY'
Pedagogy refers to the link between tutors, pupils, and the learning environment and tasks (Murphy, 2008. p 35). The term does not merely describe the teaching activity but also gives thought to the production of wider social and cultural principles within the learning interconnections. It usually draws from two key paradigms: "traditional notions of learning as a biological, cognitive acquisition of uncontested knowledge, or notions of learning as a cultural and social construction within communities of practice" (Shah 2021, p. 9).

Pedagogist(s), in this study, refers to anyone or group of persons that perform the act of pedagogy in a formal education setting. This definition limits our scope of pedagogy and pedagogists to individuals who consider teaching in schools as a means of livelihood or who have chosen the teaching profession as a career path, irrespective of the level – basic, elementary, high school, or tertiary institution.

Pedagogists in Nigeria can be grouped into two; trained and serendipitous pedagogists. Trained pedagogists can be said to be a group of trained tutors who by their unintentional or deliberate attempt acquire basic training, to broaden their knowledge in the teaching profession and obtain the requisite qualifications needed to support their dream. This study is not oblivious of the fact that some of the students who studied under the Faculties of education and ended up as pedagogists originally never wanted to become pedagogists at first, but found themselves settling for courses in Faculties of education, because of their inability to secure admission into other desired Faculties. Notwithstanding the method by which one ends up getting basic training to become a professional pedagogist, the end product is an elite group who are equipped with the knowledge of the science of pedagogy.

Serendipitous pedagogists are the ones who never considered becoming pedagogists in their life, but turned out so, due to some environmental factors beyond their control (National Youth Service Corps - NYSC, joblessness) eventually becomes one. This later group picks up pedagogic careers just to provide for their families, and in so doing, get stuck in the teaching profession. For each of these category of pedagogists, the moment they find themselves in the pedagogic profession, they begin to align their mind-set and character to fit into the fixated identity the society has already created for the (pedagogist) group, thereby fitting into the 'in-group' (while acting in loco-parentis) and psychologically fraternizing with other

members of the in-group (colleagues in the same profession). Anyone in other businesses outside the pedagogist profession is then immediately categorised and labelled as a member of the 'out-group'.

Language is usually the chief tool for identity categorisation and labelling. The concept of language here does not merely refer to just words stringed together in the form of an expression but a set of principles that reveals societal values, beliefs, and worldviews as well as a set of guidelines that underpins social roles and identities of members in a given society (Ghevolor et al, 2021). The characteristic manner of speaking (idiolects) is also a means of identity construction, since the way a person speaks showcases the person's persona and how he/she views other things and people through his or her lenses (life experiences). To this end, the idea of identity in this study is "the subjective way in which an individual or a group sees and categorises themselves" (Ellah, 2021, p. 77) and other persons who are not perceived as being members of their group. This categorisation of the 'self' is often objectified in human interaction with other people in society.

4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars of Identity studies have in the past, examined a wide range of identity constructions and social issues that bedevil human experience, but the search for identity in the Igbo literature of Igbo language expression, through the lenses of social theories is yet to be given the needed attention. Salinas and Ayala (2018) examine EFL Student-Teachers' Identity Construction in Chile, using a qualitative approach that used personal narratives, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews to elicit data. Focusing on two student-teachers of English language as a foreign language in Chile, the study examines the processes of their identity construction. It found that the professional identity construction of student-teachers is dynamic and shaped by external and inter-related factors like their self-image learning environment where they practice as well as practicum experiences.

Sayuti (2019) in his study provides the justification for the exploration of literature in search for various identity constructions. He sees literature as a field of Identity Construction because it showcases the collective ideas of people who are culturally bound to real-life contexts, and as a result, the issues discussed therein can be imitative, direct, and symbolic. He believes that when learning and literary education is seen as a holistic civilizing process (not as a sociocultural taming), it can be tactically positioned. Sayuti submits that since a literary text embodies groups of humanity, once learners come in contact with them it helps them acquire more knowledge. This is because when they read the works of literature, they do not only learn the literature in itself but also learn the culture and community upon which the literature is based in a broader sense. This position, perhaps provides the reason for different identity studies in literature.

Vestli (2019) looks at how the Australian author Julya Rabinovich constructs literary identity in her novels, *Spaltkopf*, *Dazwischen*, and *Die Erdfresserin*. Evjenth (2020) investigates how constructed identity is expressed in contemporary Norwegian literature, written by the children of migrants. The work focuses on two anthology books, showing how ethnicity and culture play a huge role in determining how identities are constructed in literary works.

Ugwuibe and Onah (2019) probe into the emergence of an identity crisis in Nigeria's federalism, detailing the impact on (Nigeria's) national integration. The study believes that most of the political structures in Nigeria are formed based on identity through a custom-made patronage system. It concludes that these identities spoken of are a steady source of crisis and cleavage in the nation. The study therefore recommends "fairness and equity in appointments to political positions especially at the top echelon of government to reflect Nigeria's federal character (p. 1).

Ogbazi and Onyeachulam (2020) study focused on the search for Identity in Chimamanda Adichie's *Americanah* and Odili Ujubuonu's *Pride of the Spider Clan*. The work found that the characters in the two novels studied were influenced by their (foreign) environment and racial problems, hence these two

significant issues became the main causes of the characters' search for their identity in the texts studied. This study can be considered important in the study of identity in literary texts, but not without its limitations as regards the present study. Its theoretical focus was not connected to any theory of social psychology, and neither did it mention anything about the representation of pedagogists in the texts.

In their work, Ghevolor, Ellah, and Ushie (2021) examine the construction of Gender Identity in Sefi Atta's novel, Everything Good Will Come, showing how language was used to construct gender identity. The study sees gender as multiplex, one which can take different forms, based on the socio-psychological that influence it. It listed several factors that impact upon individual gender identity.

Lasisi (2021) studies Identity construction in a Yoruba group project and focuses on ways whereby five young Nigerian-American women who took part in a Yoruba group project that was conducted between 2018 and 2019 abroad used language in the construction of their ethnic, personal, and national identities. The study submits that the manner participants placed themselves in their linguistic expressions portrayed them as people with multiple identities. They showed themselves as self-driven and active cultural agents.

Pavlović (2003) studies the nexus between literature, social poetics, and identity construction in Montenegro, a country in South-eastern Europe. The study lays out the contended form of identity in Montenegro, detailing its varying phases of development. Pavlović in the study problematizes the nature of efforts made to mechanise civil societies through what he terms Politics of Identity in contemporary Montenegro.

Altun (2023) examines the role and influence of literature in moulding the cultural and individual identities. Altun in the study, believes that upon reading works of literature, readers can use literature as a transforming tool to enhance their knowledge of self. We agree with Altun's submission that literature is able to act as a transformational tool in the hands of its readers because readers take characters in the texts and their acts as facets of their very own identities. This is because, as typical of literature, the characters represent real life experiences, cultural origins, and personal growth. This is akin to Sayuti (2019) submission where he submits that literature is a field of identity construction due to how it showcases the collective ideas of people who are culturally bound to real-life contexts as earlier discussed.

While all these studies provide insights into the level of research carried out so far on identity construction, the lacuna in studies on Igbo literature in the area of understanding the image of pedagogists in works of Igbo literature is yet to be filled, hence this study is considered timely to help understudy the cause of the precarious state of pedagogists in Nigeria.

5.0   DATA ANALYSIS
The data used in this study suggest that the type of pedagogist identity created in written Igbo Literature is the negative social identity. Strategies for the construction of Negative Social Identity for pedagogists in written Igbo literature include self-pity, jocular mockery and the use of derogatory markers.

5.1   Self-Pitying
Self-pity is "a sympathetic, heartfelt sorrow for oneself prompted by one's own physical or mental suffering, distress, or unhappiness" (Stoober 2003, p. 185). In Ikwubuzo's poem "Eluigwe ga-akwụ ụgwọ" (Heaven will reward) in *Omenkà* the poet constructs a negative identity of pedagogists by showing them as a weak, helpless group that is incapable of changing their lot, and as such the poem evokes a feeling of pity for the in-group.

Odibo ọha   (Servant of the masses
Ndị gị na ha chụrụ oké   Those that chased rat with you
Amalitela ịchụ ngwere   Have started chasing lizard

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Ndị i bu ụzọ gbawa ọsọ	Those you started the race earlier
Na-asịzị gị bịasiwe ike	Now tell you to come faster
Odoziobodo	Repairer of city
Onye ị pịara ụtarị ụnyaahụ	The person you flogged yesterday
Na-achụ gị n'ọrụ taa	Sacks you from work today
Onye i sekpuwere ala ụnyaahụ	The person you knelt to yesterday
Ka ị na-aza saa taa	Is the one you respond Sir to today
Ka o bulie gị n'ọkwa	So he can promote you
Onye ọzụzụ atụrụ ọma	A good shepherd
Maa ajị n'ume	Take heart
Nwee olileanya	Have hope
Echi, mbuli n'ọkwa ga-adị	Tomorrow, there will be promotion
Echi, nkirimentị ga-adị	Tomorrow, there will be increse
A kwụọ ụgwọ ezumike nka	When gratuity/pension is paid
I wube ụlọ nke gị	You start building your own house
Echi a, ole mgbe ọ ga-agwụ?	This tomorrow, when will it end?
Ụgwọọrụ nkuzi dị n'igwe	Pedagosist reward is in heaven)

(Ikwubuzo, in Omenka, 1992, pp. 51-52)

Here, the poet paints an erroneous picture of an unproductive pedagogist, and a representative of an in-group that is averse to self-development but must postpone their desires till their retirement age. The poet agrees to the professionalism of the pedagogist as loco parentis, represented in the remark, 'Onye ọzụzụ atụrụ ọma' (A good shepherd), but then despite this good virtue as life moulder, the pedagosist is penniless, and should never expect anything because he/she has accepted a life of poverty by the design of his profession and must suffer, even in the hands of those that were once his pupil.

5.2   Jocular Mockery

Another strategy employed by Igbo writers in their construction of negative Social Identity for pedagogists as a form of social categorisation is jocular mockery. Jocular mockery is defined by Haugh (2010, p. 2108) as social actions by which the speaker reduces the value of something that is of relevance or value to self but does so within a frivolous or jokey framework. It is a subtle attack on the 'face' of anyone it is used for. In the context of this study, jocular mockery is employed as a strategy by Igbo writers in constructing the identity of a group that is mocked due to its low-income state. For instance, in the novel, *Ọkụkọ A Gbatara n'Afa*, while two characters (father and mother) were discussing a pedagogist's interest in their son, the following discourse was observed:

> Ebe ọchị dị buru nna Ogbonnaya bụ na nne Ogboannaya jụrụ ya ma ọ maara ma Maazi Okoro ọ ga-azụ Ogbonnaya n'akwụkwọ. Ọ chịchara ọchị ahụ sị ya; "Ndị nkuzi anaghị agbajinye mmadụ ọka ga-azụ nwa abụghị nwa ya na Kọleji". (*Ọkụkọ A Gbatara n'Afa*, p. 28)

> (Where Ogbonnaya's father bust out in laughter was that Ogbonnaya's mother asked him if he knew whether Mr. Okoro would send Ogbonnaya to school. After laughing he said to her; "Teachers that share a stick of corn will send his non-biological child to the college?".)

A person who hears this comment about Mr. Okoro, the pedagogist being spoken of, and has not met him will automatically assign him the identity of a stingy man whose stinginess is inspired by his lack of resources, due to his group (his profession). The remark here is not much about the character Mr. Okoro, but a general jocular mockery posed towards the whole group of pedegogists

'ndị nkuzi' (teachers) to attack their faces. In Igbo culture, sharing a stick of corn with another is seen as an act of love and generosity, even though corn is considered cheap relative to other staple foods of the Igbo like the yam, cocoyam, cassava, and the rest. When one is described as a person who cannot share his corn stick, the identity constructed about such a person is that of a miserly fellow. As seen in the data, the remark that teachers (as a group) do not share their corn, alludes to the fact that teachers always have so little that even when they manage to get the cheapest things, they cannot afford to share of it because it is usually insufficient both for themselves and their families who are in penury, yet they love their jobs. As regards excerpt 2, the reason the speaker bust out in laughter when the wife jokingly told him whether Maazị Okoro, may wish to train their son Ogbonnaya in school is that he understands the general notion, which is an identity the society already constructed for pedagogists, that they are a poor group of people, though dedicated to their profession.

Similarly, jocular mockery was also employed by M. N. Eze drama text *Mmakwaara* when she writes about the dialogue between two interlocutors (characters – Ezinne and Obieze) in the text, who were advising their son (Chike) against studying in a Collage of Education as doing so can only lead him to becoming a pedagogist which they strongly believe is a terrible idea. The mother Ezinne, in a meeting with both the husband and the son, asks:

> Ezinne: Nna anyị biko iwe ewela gị. Ka m juọ Chike ajụjụ ọzọ. I chere na ị ga-abụ nnukwu mmadụ n'obodo ma i mechaa ihe ọmụmụ a?
> (Our father please don't be angry. Let me ask Chike a question again. Do you think that you will be a great person in the town after studying this course?)
> Obieze: Nke a ị na-ajụ ya ọ bụ ajụjụ. Ndị nkuzi ole bụ ọgaranya n'obodo anyị a? Ndi nkuzi ha na-enwe ego? Ka ọ bụ ka m zụchaa nwa na-azụkwu na-aga n'ihu. Chukwu ekwela.
> (This one you are asking him is it question? How many teachers in our town are wealthy? Do teachers get rich? Or should I raise a child and still continue to train him. God forbid.)

Here (excerpt 3), the identity constructed by pedagogists of being a group of poor people becomes vivid. This image of pedagogist here raises serious concern about the image the society has about the pedagogist over the years and which has come to be accepted by the pedagogists themselves as their faith.

5.3   Use of Derogatory Markers

The negative social identity of pedagogist over the years has come to affect the psychology of the pedagogists. It has caused them to accept their fate in life, that is one made to be void of physical enjoyment, and which confines them, especially those teaching at the lower level of education (secondary and primary schools) to the mercy of the parents of children to whom they are loco-parentis by hoping to receive favours from them. This further emboldens the parents to continue to look condescendingly on the group, and see them as beggars. This explains why they often use derogatory expressions sometimes in referring to some pedagogists. For instance, in I.U. Nwadike's *Nwata Bulie Nna Ya Elu* a derogatory marker 'nwa Miisi' (p.4) was employed in addressing a female pedagogist (Nneezi). In the text, the pedagogist had gone to the house of parents to report their son's excessive and reckless spending in school when the pupil's father 'Iloka', after inquiring of the lady's name, still went ahead to call her 'nwa Miisi' meaning 'school mistress':

> Iloka: ...Ị bụkwanụ onye? (Who are you?)
> Nneezi: Aha m bụ Nneezi (My name is Nneezi)
>   Ọ bụ m na-akụziri (I am the one teaching)
>   Emuka nwa gị ihe n'ụlọakwụkwọ (Emuka your son in school)
> Iloka: Chei!   (Chei)
>   Ya bụ na Ị bụ nwa Miisi (That means you are a mistress)

The use of the derogatory term 'nwa miisi' here with its sarcastic undertone reinforces the negative social categorisation of the pedagogist group in the society. Of a fact the writer's use of this expression in the manner it is used in the above context is a direct mirroring of the expression, the way it is being used in the Igbo society today in chatting about young female pedagogist. More attention should be drawn to the psychology of the pedagogist in question here is a life representation of the long-term effect of negative identity construction of the pedagogist identity which the pedagogists have come to accept as a true definition of their in-group.

6.0   Summary/Conclusion

This study examined and identified the type of identity assigned to pedagogists in written Igbo literature, bearing to bare the processes used in such construction and the impact it has on the real-life situations of the present day pedagogists living in Nigeria. One fascinating thing about the pedagogist identity projected in the texts is that all the works were written by pedagogists themselves. As exemplified in the data shown above the fact is that they are all objects of the persona of the writers and somewhat one can say that writers air their views and frustrations about the limitation of their group. However, unknown to them, even though they are expressing their authorial rights, the construction of their profession in such a helpless manner frightens and does not encourage the readers to aspire to join their group (pedagogist profession) in the future. This might help to explain why many students do not want to become pedagogist. The pedagogists identity they have been showing, is one of a poor, wretched, self-sacrificing, and a non-rewarding group, occupying the lowest rung of the socioeconomic ladder and as such are not respected by other members of the society.

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