

The Role of Referees in Research *

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All protocols observed!

Observed by His Excellency, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu of blessed memory, was a poignant point about the Igbo Ethnic Group. This he made when visited by a delegation from my neighbouring Oraifite, a Town linked with his own Nnewi Town and Ichi Town as the larger Anaedo Community. Indeed, this happened in those happy postwar days after his record return from abroad.

Abroad aspect of another type was recognized by great Ojukwu himself. This was to the effect that members of the West African Ethnic Groups had found themselves as slaves, and hence as mere commodities for sale in the American Plantations. Interestingly, as he divulged on the basis of museum evidence, the Igbo slave was sold at a higher price. In other words, the slave at disposal was not merely being labelled as an Igbo, but as a "genuine" Igbo!

Igbo academic arena deserves research from several angles. My own angle dated back to the early 1950s. In particular, those of us who passed the 2nd MB Examination from the University College, Ibadan, had to train abroad in Britain. As fate would have it, Glasgow University was my lot, while Professor D. F. Cappell of Pathology was my mentor. Having spotted me after a Class Examination, he arranged with the University Librarian for me to receive the Student Privilege of "Open Access to the Shelves!"

Shelves of the immense University Library were therefore available to poor me like the Academic Staff! Little wonder that, before long, I came across not only the book on *"History of Scottish Medicine"* but also the one on *"Niger Ibos."* The latter was written by Basden, a British anthropologist, who devoted a whole chapter to the similarities between the Israelites and the Ibos whom he considered to be actually the shortened form of Hebrews! For instance, the name of the Israeli Prime Minister is intoned as "Netanyahu." Actually, when split in syllables as "Ne-t-anya-hu," it is precisely the Igbo expression, "Look-with-eye-and- see"! Of course, examples abound as in the penultimate section of my 2005 book entitled "Topics in tandem English."

English of this type was introduced in it, as in the present Lecture in which a paragraph ends and begins with a particular word. Thus, I used it when I dared to draw attention to the proper definition of "elderly" in the 36th volume of the 2010 esoteric Journal called *"European Science Editing."*

Editing was at play when I submitted the manuscript comparing Hebrews and Ibos as to their old medical practices. This was done while I was still a medical student. Thus, I revealed them in 1955 in the *"Glasgow University Medical Journal:"* Entitled, "Indigenous medical practices of the Igbos of Nigeria," I dealt with both Igbo and Scottish practices. Incidentally, I discussed them under the following subtitles: Apprenticeship, Professional Practice, Consultation, Fees, Quackery, Drugs, Medical Treatment, Pre-Natal Care, Midwifery,

Child Care, Dentistry, Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Nursing Homes, Visiting, Foreign Influences, Prognosis, and Conclusion. I even hypothesized thus: "Is it all folk medicine or is a rich harvest blossoming unseen in the Ibo air, a possible cancer cure or a mere day dream?"

Dream is not why we nicely gathered here today in this envisioned emporium. In fact, let me dwell on facilitating academics. In particular, modern Igbo pathology was assiduously assembled when I assumed duty as the Pioneer Pathologist in charge of the newly established Eastern Regional Pathology Laboratory based at Enugu in 1963. Alas! When Enugu fell to the advancing Federal troops in 1967, I abandoned everything like everybody else! Then, with the cessation of hostilities, I resumed the careful collection of memorable materials from February 11, 1970. Thereafter, I began to publish feverishly so to say. Indeed, in recent times, Editors began to invite me to send them my manuscripts. For instance, on Tuesday, April 7, 2015, one Editor wrote thus: "I would cordially invite you to submit an article towards the upcoming issue of our International Journal of Cancer and Clinical Research."

Research, which I entitled "Comparative approach to the epidemiology of Wilms tumor," was duly sent. It is to be noted that this disease, which is named after Wilms, was actually and simply based on the scientific study of the Igbo Ethnic Group with special reference to childhood kidney cancer. I had amassed 58 cases between 1970 and 2000. Accordingly, I was able to compare my findings with European data. Unfortunately, the Editor, although anxious on Friday, December 18, 2015, "to look forward for (my) future submissions," turned round and rejected my article based on the advice of one referee!

Referee, it is to be noted, is not the football type but someone expected to make recommendations on a manuscript as an expert. Therefore, such a fellow must really acquit himself or herself creditably. As it turned out, that particular referee was incompetent, seeing that the evaluation consisted of 9/2 sentences out of which one of them had no verb! Moreover, it is relevant to quote exactly two grounds grudgingly given as follows:

"There are many different tribes in Nigeria. A better paper would survey the entire country, comparing different groups and areas."

Areas in this respect constitute what the subject of Epidemiology is all about. Please note that, according to the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, "epidemiology" was introduced into the English language in 1860 and had since then meant "a branch of medical science that deals with the incidence, distribution, and control of disease in a population."

Population here means the Igbos in terms of my researches. Surely, the so called expert referee was ignorant of the vastness of Nigerian tribes which are numbered in hundreds! For one thing, how many such tribes have the wealth of materials which I had gathered concerning the Igbos? For another thing, must an author first of all prosecute his or her research throughout the conglomerate country? Not at all! Surely, that referee failed woefully to even understand basic epidemiology.

Epidemiology, in contrast, has pleasantly been one of my research fields. Therefore, I propose here to demarcate 3 pure parameters of it in order to demonstrate my credentials in this singular subject not only sufficiently but also exclusively as follows:

(A) Igbo epidemiology data in Glasgow MD Thesis (1980)

Between 1974 and 1978, I published 36 Igbo papers. Although I did not apply, these were enough for a professorship! However, it is enough to provide at this juncture the long list of the individual journals which accepted them. In fact, they constituted my 1980 Glasgow University Doctorate Thesis in chronological order as

follows:

1. *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 1974;44:769-770.
2. *Tropenmedizin und Parasitologie*, 1974;25:433-436.
3. *Bulletin, Sinai Hospital of Detroit*, 1975; 23: 113-114.
4. *British Journal of Plastic Surgery*, 1975; 28:114-117.
5. *Journal of Laryngology and Otology*, 1975;89:657-661.
6. *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, 1975; 24:708-709.
7. *British Journal of Clinical Practice*, 1975; 29:290-291.
8. *Archives of Surgery*, 1975; 110:349.
9. *Oncology*, 1975; 32:145-150.
10. *International Surgery*, 1975; 60:410.
11. *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, 1976; 57: 1191-1192.
12. *International Journal of Dermatology*, 1976; 15:432-437.
13. *International Journal of Fertility*, 1976; 21:186-188.
14. *Journal of Pediatric Ophthalmology*, 1976; 13:165-167.
15. *Archives of Dermatology*, 1976; 112:1405-1407.
16. *Gynecologic Oncology*, 1976; 4:255-258.
17. *Indian Journal of Dermatology*, 1976; 21 :36-39.
18. *British Medical Journal*, 1977; 1: 22-23.
19. *Tubercle*, 1977; 58:113-115.
20. *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry*, 1977; 40:726.
21. *Diseases of the Colon and Rectum*, 1977; 20:679-680.
22. *American Journal of Surgery*, 1977; 134:564-565.
23. *Digestion*, 1977; 15:353-355.
24. *Acta Hepato-Gastroenterologica*, 1977; 24:24-26.
25. *Angiology*, 1977; 28:803-805.
26. *Archivum Chirurgicum Neerlandicum*, 1977; 29: 199-202.
27. *Clinician*, 1977; 41:9-11.
28. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 1977; 1 :886.
29. *Papua New Guinea Medical Journal*, 1977; 20:78-79.
30. *South African Journal of Surgery*, 1977; 15:67-69.
31. *Journal of Oto-Rhino-Laryngology*, 1977; 39:247-250.
32. *British Journal of Oral Surgery*, 1978; 15 :223-226.
33. *International Journal of Oral Surgery*, 1978; 7:73-75.
34. *Journal of Pediatric Surgery*, 1978;13:129-130.
35. *Journal of Reproductive Medicine*, 1978; 21 :249-250.
36. *Nigerian Medical Journal*, 1978; 8:270-271.

(B) Igbo epidemiology on just the albino skin cancer

This time, the emphasis is **not** on the Journals themselves **but** on the individual titles with which I explored only the albinos among the Igbos thus:

1. Comparative study of squamous cell carcinoma of the eyelids in blacks and albinos.
2. Three different carcinomas clustered in one facial focus in albino.
3. Eyelid cancer in an albino that progressed to exenteration indicates the failure of public health education in a Nigerian community.

4. Rhabdomyosarcoma followed six episodes of squamous cell carcinoma in a Nigerian albino.
5. No albino should suffer from extensive skin cancer let alone die there-from.
6. The influence of Pott's irritation theory of occupational cancer during the 19th Century: A review with hypothesis on albinism sunlight induced cancer.
7. Albinism cancer requires worldwide epidemiological research.
8. The recognition of a recurrent form of albino skin cancer.
9. Albino skin cancer will end if a community's cancer surveillance program is successful.
10. Adenocystic carcinoma as a molecular variant of albino skin cancer.

(C) Igbo epidemiology in the International Agency for Cancer Registry

The World Health Organization (WHO) has in Lyon, France, The International Agency for Research on Cancer. I have a recognized Registry in it. This covers the Igbos about whom I have been depositing all my epidemiology papers. For instance, that Agency published in 1985 the *"Directory of ongoing research in cancer epidemiology"* and listed my work as No. 57511985 ID:00661, its title being "Cancer in the Igbos of Nigeria." In the Agency's 1986 book entitled *"Cancer Occurrence in Developing Countries,"* my contribution was indexed on page 69 as "Biopsy Series, Enugu, 1976-1981." Incidentally, the Deputy Registrar had occasion to write to me as follows: "I take this opportunity to congratulate you on a very distinguished career."

Career advancement is what this Valedictory Speech is basically beamed at. I began intentionally with an interesting story concerning the Igbo giant who adorns the very name of our own University. I showed his interest in our people whom I have been researching on with reference to epidemiology. Incidentally, during a similar occasion at the Nnewi Medical School in 1958, "Patients are persons" took the pride of place. Another occasion witnessed "Hints on Medical Practice" at Uturu for the Medical Doctors in 1996, while the 2005 welcome for Doctors of Optometry was on "Professionalism."

Professionalism, purely speaking, remains important here. In fact, let me draw attention to how it must progress through clear thinking, clear writing, and clear refereeing! Unfortunately, I have just exemplified with my manuscript which was floored by an ignorant referee. Here, I have just criticized the fellow on three logical grounds. I did so by elaborating on my expertise in epidemiology in terms of just the Igbo ethnic group. Consequently, let me, at this juncture, warmly welcome not only this youngest group of doctors in this part of the world as well as those already full of years of experience. Yes! This Forum has given me, at the behest of Prof. Fidelis Okafor, the Vice-Chancellor, and Prof. Frank Akpuaka, the Provost, the optimal opportunity to formulate firmly a logical law for worldwide advance in scientific communication.

Communication, whether with a perturbed patient or with an erudite Editor, matters. Here, I vouch that the Editor of *"Archives in Cancer Research"* asked for my paper and I submitted it whole straightaway. Indeed, it was accepted last Friday! Therefore, my message is short and sharp. At least 3 referees must be used in adjudicating on the success or failure of a manuscript. This rule automatically ensures that this is the smallest number which will admirably give positive or negative answers. In all probability, this will lead to equity in the successful climbing of that difficult ladder which is the academic pursuit of paper qualifications! No doubt, this is for your teachers now and for your good selves in the years to come. Therefore, as lawyers, about whom I wrote my 2007 book, "Expert Evidence," would say in court, I rest my CASE! Furthermore, may I add that we should earnestly pray for the worldwide acceptance of this proposed CHANGE in the wide world of learning. Indeed, what remains is to do so through the merits of Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Saviour. Amen!