

PROVERBS IN THE TIMES OF HARDSHIP: AN ANALYSIS OF MOTIVATIONAL FUNCTION OF HAUSA PROVERB

Abubakar Mohammed Gombe, PhD¹ & Ibrahim Lamido, PhD²

¹ Department of English, Gombe State University, Gombe – Nigeria

² Department of Languages and Linguistics, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe – Nigeria

Abstract

Hausa traditional society remains dependent on oral literary provisions especially in times of hardship when people need consolation, motivation and encouragement to accept reality. This work presents a literary analysis, meaning and motivational function of selected Hausa proverbs. The selected proverbs are presented in table and numbers to ease referencing and presentation of analysis to readers. The paper also applies proverbs to contemporary society where patience is highly needed to tackle hardship that may lead to immoral decision and solution. It presents proverbs in three stages: the Hausa version, translated version and surface and implied meaning. The paper adopts functionalist theory as its theoretical framework to affirm contemporary relevance of proverbs in modern societies. The work collected its data (proverb samples) from individuals and groups. They were obtained through physical contacts, phone calls, WhatsApp groups and Facebook interactions. Sixteen proverbs were selected, transcribed, translated and presented in table with analysis under consolation, encouragement and motivation functions. Proverbs provide psychological solace through raising hope and communal harmony in facing socioeconomic challenges. The paper promotes proverbial role in sustaining oral literary relevance in the prevention of mental disorder in times of hardship.

Key Words: Proverbs, Hausa, Hardship, Motivation, Society

Introduction

In line with the existing research works on proverbs like Amali (1999), Briggs (1985), Dundes (1965 and 1980), Finnegan (1970), Ong (2002), Tadi (2013 and 2016) and Yankah (1989) among numerous works, this paper contributes to the debate on proverbs in modern society. Proverbs are properties of oral societies where the inhabitants are mostly farmers. Hardship among farmers is mostly recorded at a period when the grain storages (*Rumbu*) are emptied and the new harvest not yet ready. This is recorded during the rainy season, unlike annual experience among farmers in modern societies; such hard times are recorded monthly among salary earners whose monthly income hardly exceeds two weeks. It is observed by business men when markets are deserted by customers as a result of cash scarcity or cashless policy as observed recently in Nigeria. It is observed among laborers who find it difficult to be engaged at the labor camp or construction site.

The Hausa people retain most of their pagan cultural practices despite the influence of Islam and western cultures. They also adopt the culture that eases life

and living. The average Hausa man believes in the Islamic power of *Allah Ya isa* (Allah is sufficient for me) which makes him hard to revolt against communal socio-economic hardship. To entertain himself, he adopts and domesticates *indiyan Hausa* (translated Indian film into Hausa) and initiates dramatic performances that are accompanied with songs like that of Indian films. He initiated and retains *Zaman Majalisa* (afternoon road site gathering) which gives him an opportunity to discuss issues, share ideas and pour out his grievances. He also adopts *Kallon Kwallo* (watching live western football matches), these seem addictive. The Hausa man also domesticates birthday and smuggles it into the religious circle. He calls it Maulud and celebrates it in honour of the Prophet and for almost all the prominent figures of the Darika sect. In line with celebration to while away time and pretend all is well, *Takutaha* (a procession like that of Maulud in honor of the Emir) is celebrated a week after Maulud.

Methodology

This work collected proverb samples from individuals and groups. They were obtained through physical contacts, phone calls, WhatsApp groups and Facebook interactions. The researcher called for contribution from his audience and readers and many responded in line with the sample proverbs he provided. Out of many received proverbs, sixteen were selected and used for this paper. The proverbs are transcribed, translated and presented in table while their analysis is presented under consolation, encouragement and motivation against depression within the body of the paper.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopts the Functionalist (functionalism) approach as the selected proverbs try to satisfy socio-cultural and psychological function (Glazer 1987). This highlight and stresses the role of oral literature (orature) in contemporary Hausa society. The functionalists believe that orature can fully be understood only through the knowledge of the people's culture (Glazer 1987) and it is seen as a means of maintaining social structure of a given society.

Proverbs though lack specific author but, they functionally considered as part of the contributions of individual members of the society (Raddiffe-Brown 1958) in their sincere attempts to serve the social system. The functionalists maintain that cultural systems like orature are needed for stability and cohesion (Hatch, 1974). The selected proverbs, functionally, try to provide stability in contentment in times of socio-economic hardship.

Functionalism has its strength and weaknesses. Its strength includes recognising family, school, and religion as influential social institutions, promoting and maintaining social solidarity and order and helps people understand how different parts of society interrelate. Its weaknesses include ignoring social class inequalities, ignoring gender inequalities and prevent social change.

Review of Literature

This paper studies selected proverbs that try to encourage people in hardship to keep walking on their feet. It is therefore scholarly to establish the previous studies on proverbs that cover African and western works on proverbs. These include the early scholarly works that concentrated on collecting proverb and the recent ones that analyse proverbs with diverse approaches. Tadi (2016) collected Tangle proverbs and attempts to give their perceived meanings. Gyula. (1997) document proverbs from fifty five languages of Europe. Mieder (1993) focuses on wit and wisdom inherent in proverbs. Zolfaghari and Ameri (2012) focus on definition and characteristics of proverb with reference to the "Persian Proverbs".

Aku. (2014) studies the contextual usage of proverb in prose fiction with reference to Achebe's *"Things Fall Apart"*. Ezenwamadu (2017) also studies the employment of proverbs in modern literary text with reference to Zulu Sofola's *King Emene* and also Ezenwamadu and Ojiakor (2020) investigate the proverbs and post proverbial stance in selected plays of Emeka Nwabueze and Zulu Sofola. Others like Leger and Mohammad (2000) analyze the concept of *pulaaku* as mirrored in Fulfulde proverbs of the Gombe dialect.

While previous works focus more on collections and contextual usage in modern literature, this paper focuses on the proverb use and its effect in times of hardship in contemporary society.

Proverbs in Times of Hardship

Despite political promises by politicians and political parties during campaign rallies and as recorded by political singers like Dauda Kahutu, popularly known as Rarara in songs like *Talaka Sai ya sha Jar Miya (the poor will have access to better food)*, Nigerian electorates are faced daily with abnormalities of price hike of food stuff, school fees, transportation and with increased unemployment and loss of jobs. Nigerians are faced with insurgency, displacement, subsidy removal and banditry among others. To console, encourage and motivate one another against depression, Hausa people use proverbs. These proverbs include:

SN	Hausa Proverb	Translation	Meaning
1	Wuya ba ta Kisa	Hardship does not kill	One must not lose hope
2	Bayan wuya sai dadi	After hardship comes enjoyment	There is always a way out
3	Mahakurci Mawadaci	The patience is the contented	With patience life is fulfilled
4	Mai haquri shike dafa dutse har ya sha romon sa	The patience can cook stone and lick its soup	With patience the difficult is overcome
5	Komi nisan dare gari zai waye	No matter long the night, there will be dawn	Nothing lasts forever
6	Komi nisan jifa qasa zai fado	No matter how high one throws stone will fall on ground	Nothing lasts forever
7	Ba kullum a ke kwana a gado ba	Not every day that one sleeps on bed	One should learn to endure trials in life
8	Duniya juyi juyi: kwado ya fada ruwan zafi	World is rotational as lamented by a frog when it jumped into hot water	One should expect the disappointment
9	Komi na duniya mai qarewane	All earthly acquisition will finish	Worldly possession is temporary
10	Komi yayi farko zai yi qarshe	Whatever has beginning must have an end	Nothing lasts forever
11	Idan ka ji wane ba banza ba. In ba a sha dare ba an sha rana	For one to be addressed as famous, it is not as easy. It's either one suffers in the day or at night	Nothing comes easy
12	In da rai da rabo	The living has hope of good time	One must not end his life
13	Bawan Damana Baturen Rani	Servant during the raining season becomes the master during the dry season	One must suffer to enjoy
14	Sarki goma, Zamani goma	Ten rulers ten regimes	There are good and bad leaders
15	Talaka bawan Allah	The poor is the servant of his maker	All that the poor needs is to serve his maker
16	Allah gatan kowa	The maker takes care of human being	His maker will see him through difficulties

Consolation, Encouragement and Motivation against Depression

In times of hardship, people need consolation, encouragement and motivation from family members, relatives, friends and well-wishers. Despite hardship, women meet at naming and wedding ceremonies and also gather to mourn a deceased member of the society. These take place regularly considering the population of Hausa communities. On the other hand, men, in addition to wedding and mourning gatherings, meet five times daily at mosques. They try to give themselves hope of better tomorrow. The popular proverbs of *Wuya ba ta kisa* (Hardship does not kill) and *Bayan wuya sai dadi* (After hardship comes enjoyment) remain popular even among the children of the poor. Primary school teachers who are awarded with heavenly reward are synonymous with *Mahakurci Mawadaci* (With patience life is fulfilled) while *Tsangaya* teachers who live on no specific income believe in *Mai haquri shike dafa dutse har ya sha romon sa* (The patience can cook stone and lick its soup). These categories of people live an exemplary

life of practical proverbs. They seem contented and with large polygamous families. Despite their condition, school teachers live long even after retirement. Proverb number one to number four point at the importance of keeping hope alive for a hopeful living. Keeping hope in people deter them from committing suicide.

Proverb five (*Komi nisan dare gari zai waye*/ No matter how long the night, there will be dawn) and six (*Komi nisan jifa qasa zai fado*/ No matter how high one throws stone will fall on ground) take a step ahead of hope into reality of nothing last forever. Proverb five and six use contrasting realities of night and dawn and of plotting object in the sky which must come down. Hardship is compared to night which gives way to sun shine and a thrown object is logically known to end on ground. These do not only give hope but portray known realities of sunlight after darkness and of grounding of a thrown object after plotting. In reality, people have seen the poor become rich and the rich become poor. This seems to

say there is nothing new on earth. It only depends on how one handles it.

The Hausa society through the use of proverbs reminds its inhabitants that no condition is permanent. Proverb number seven (*Ba kullum a ke kwana a gado ba/* Not every day that one sleeps on bed) and eight (*Duniya juyi juyi: kwado ya faxa ruwan zafi/* World is rotational as lamented by a frog when it jumped into hot water) call for public attention to deeply digest human condition that changes with gaining, losing, aging, marriage and divorce, birth and death, admission and graduation, health and sickness. They advise on endurance during trials as well as nursing expectation for disappointment. When these trials already hit, these proverbs console and also point at the rotational nature of life, thereby, given one opportunities to recall good days and to imagine better future as against the bad time.

The Hausa community finds it convenient to remind its inhabitants of the temporary nature of possessions. Proverbs are employed to do so. Proverb nine (*Komi na duniya mai qarewa ne/* All earthly acquisitions finish) and ten (*Komi yayi farko zai yi qarshel/* Whatever has beginning must have an end) seem to have been constructed to give assurance to people on several issues affecting them. If their problem is leadership, their leaders' tenure will end. If it is insurgency, its era will end. If their problem is hardship, it will surely come to an end.

To avoid hardship, proverb eleven (*Idan ka ji wane ba banza ba. In ba a sha dare ba an sha rana/* For one to be addressed as famous, it is not as easy. It's either one suffers in the day or at night) tries to give solution. It means nothing comes easy. So, to avoid hardship, one must work hard day and night. It is assumed that famous people do not suffer much in times of hardship. They are the ones given assistance to the needy. This proverb encourages toward hard work to excel and to further encourage people to work hard, proverb number twelve (*In da rai da rabo* (The living remains hopeful of good time). This proverb says it all by implying that all one needs to achieve success is life. Therefore, without life, nothing can be achieved. It is an encouragement to fight depression and stay alive in times of hardship.

In modern day, proverb number thirteen (*Bawan Damana Baturen Rani/* the rainy season servant becomes the master during the dry season) still remains relevant in the struggle for self-reliance. In modern day, unemployment can lead to depression and suicide. The poorly employed person who

compares his earning with others finds it difficult to be happy. Utilising rainy season which has potential of enriching the utiliser. This must not always involve going to farm but one can also engage in farm related businesses of selling seeds, fertilizer and other farm chemicals.

Hausa people have the belief that leadership and leaders have impact on their socio-economic wellbeing. There are proverbs on leadership such as *Ba a mugun Sarki sai Mugun Bafaje* (A leader is determined by those surrounding him), *Sarki baqon dole* (A King visit must be welcomed), *zaman lafiya yafi zama dan Sarki* (It's better to live in peace than to be King's heir) and many others. These indicate how leaders are regarded in Hausa communities. Our focus here is not to elaborate on the status of a leader but to analyse proverb number thirteen (Sarki goma, Zamani goma/ Ten rulers offer ten regimes) which tries to suggest that leaders have impact on the livelihood of their subjects. Good leaders provide good regime while bad leaders offer bad regime. No matter how praise singers try to present their lord in good image, his regime presents his reality in character, leadership style and governance. In time of hardship, the leader is seen as incompetent and his subjects identify with their maker. Hence the proverbs *Talaka bawan Allah* (The poor is the servant of his maker) and *Allah gatan kowa* (The maker takes care of everyone). While the poor suffer, it is believed that leaders enjoy by taking care of themselves leaving the poor to revert to his Maker in prayers and hope.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Proverb remains essential tool in Hausa contemporary societies; specifically, in locations where socio-economic challenges are high. They are used to lower tension among the unemployed, those who lose their trading due to price hike, those whose wages or salaries lose value due to influence of foreign currencies like Dollar and among farmers and family pillars who can no longer feed their families. In times of hardship, Hausa people employ the services of proverbs to console, encourage and motivate family members, relatives, friends and well-wishers. They try to retain lively hope of a better tomorrow. They keep reminding themselves that no condition remains permanent. They advise one another on endurance during trials as well as nursing expectation for disappointment. They remind themselves of the temporary nature of possessions. Hausa people have the belief that leadership and leaders have impact on their socio-economic wellbeing. Good leaders provide good regime while bad leaders offer bad regime. In time of

hardship, the leader is seen as incompetent and his subjects identify themselves with their creator. While the poor suffer, it is believed that leaders enjoy by taking care of themselves leaving the poor to revert to his Maker in prayers and hope.

REFERENCE

- Adamo D.T. 'Ancient Israelite and African Proverbs as Advice, Reproach, Warning, Encouragement and Explanation', 2015
- Adams S.L. 'Wisdom Literature in Egypt', in Adams S.L., Goff M. (eds.). 2020
- Aku, Adjandeh Evelyn. *A study of Proverbs in "Things Fall Apart" and "Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali (Sundiata). MPhil thesis, University of Ghana.* 2014.
- Amali, Idris O.O. 'Sources of Idoma Proverbs: A Guide to Paremiographers'. *Proverbium 16: Yearbook of International Proverbs scholarship.* 1999
- Anand Prahlad. *African-American Proverbs in Context.* Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. 1996.
- Beryl Ehondor. *The Concept of Proverbs as a Theoretical Category in Communication in Africa.* Pan-Atlantic University. 2017
- Briggs, C.. "The Pragmatics of Proverbs Performance in New Mexican Spanish" *JSTOR: American Anthropologist.* New series. 1985. Vol.87 no.4: p793-810.
- Dundes, Alan. (Ed.) *The Study of Folklore.* Eaglewoodcliffs. NJ. Prentice-Hall Inc. 1965
- Dundes, Alan. *Interpreting Folklore.* Bloomington. Indiana University Press. 1980
- Ezenwamadu, Nkechi Judith. "The Use of Proverbs i Zulu Sofola's King Emene." *Online Journal of Arts, Management & Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2017).
- Ezenwamadu, Nkechi Judith, and Chinyere Theodora Ojiakor. "Proverbs and Postproverbial Stance in Selected Plays of Emeka Nwabueze and Zulu Sofola." *Matatu* 51, no. 2 (2020): 432–447.
- Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Literature in Africa.* The Saylor Foundation, 1982.
- Glazer, Mark . *A Dictionary of Mexican American Proverbs:* Bloomsbury Academic. 1987
- Gray, Martin. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms.* Immeukle Essily. Place Rind Soil. Beirut. Longman/york Press. 1992
- Gyula, Paczolay. *European Proverbs in 55 Languages.* Veszpre'm, Hungary. 1997
- Hatch Elvin . *Theories of Man and Culture.* columbia university press. 1974
- Mieder, Wolfgang. "The wit of one, and the wisdom of many: General thoughts on the nature of the proverb. *Proverbs are never out of season: Popular wisdom in the modern age* 3–40. Oxford University Press. 1993.
- Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word.* 30th Anniversary Edition. With additional chapters by John Hartley. London and New York. Routledge. Taylor and Francis Group. 2002
- Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. *Method in Social Anthropology.* University of Chicago Press. 1958
- Rudolf Leger and Abubakar B. Mohammad. 2000. *The Concept of Pulaaku Mirrored in Fulfulde Proverbs of the Gombe Dialect.* *Berichte des Sonderforschungsbereichs* 268, Band 14, Frankfurt a.M. 2000: 299–306.
- Tadi, Nereus Yerima *Sam Kwi Bolji: Tangle Proverbs and Their Contexts.* Zaria. Ahmadu Bello University Press. 2013
- Tadi, Nereus Yerima. *Theoretical Approaches to Paremiology in Africa.* Ahmadu Bello University Press. 2016
- Yankah, Kwesi. "Proverbs: The Aesthetics of Traditional Communication". *Research in African Literature.* 1989. Vol.20. No.3 Pp. 325-346.
- Zolfaghari, Hassan and Ameri, Hayat. "Persian Proverbs: Definitions and Characteristics". *Journal of Islamic and Human Advanced Research.* 2012. 93–108.