

The Tenacity of Akan Proverbs and their Contribution to the Development of the Ghanaian Language

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ABSTRACT

This investigation examined the tenacity of Akan proverbs and their contribution to the development of the Ghanaian Language. Akan proverbs have remained relevant and widely used in Akan society for generations. These proverbs are pithy statements that convey wisdom and moral lessons, often through the use of metaphors and analogies. They are typically transmitted orally from one generation to the next, and have been used to teach children and guide decision-making in various social contexts. The design adapted for this study was descriptive and the approach used was qualitative. Interview, observation and focused group discussions were the instruments used to collect data for this research work. Fifty (50) participants were interviewed for the investigation. The participants were drawn from Ashanti region to partake in this investigation. The investigation revealed that, in preservation of cultural heritage, proverbs play a significant role. It is one of the major tools for oral tradition and transmission. It was also identified that proverbs are supportive for Linguistic development and effective communication. The theories that underpinned this investigation are Richard L. Daft (1984) Linguistics richness theory and adaptability relevance theory.

Keywords: tenacity, effective communication, linguistic richness, decision – making, metaphors, generations, adaptability relevance

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Akan proverbs constitute integral part of the Akan cultural heritage. Akan proverbs are transmitted from one generation to the other by word of mouth as they form part of the Akan oral literature. They are not only a rich source of wisdom, but also reflect the values and beliefs of the Akan people in Ghana. Despite modernization and globalization, Akan proverbs continue to be highly valued and widely used in everyday conversations. But the question asked by the youth is: Do the proverbs have any linguistic value in Akan as a Ghanaian Language? This has become a source of concern to many Ghanaians especially the native speakers of the language. One of the reasons for the tenacity of Akan proverbs is their adaptability and versatility. They are able to convey complex messages or ideas in a concise manner thereby making them an effective tool for communication. Akan proverbs are also deeply rooted in the culture of the Akan people. They serve as a reminder of the cultural identity and cultural heritage of the Akan people.

INTRODUCTION

The Akan language, spoken by the Akan people of Ghana, is rich in oral tradition, folklore and proverbs. Akan proverbs have been passed down through generations, reflecting the wisdom, values, and cultural identity of the Akan people. The tenacity of Akan proverbs has made a significant contribution to the development of the Ghanaian Language. It suggests that, Akan proverbs serve as linguistic anchors, preserving linguistic structures and vocabulary, and act as cultural signifiers, reinforcing social norms, values, and historical experiences. Akan proverbs are known for their tenacity, as they have remained

relevant and widely used in Akan society for generations. These proverbs are pithy statements that convey wisdom and moral lessons, often through the use of metaphors and analogies. They are typically transmitted orally from one generation to the next, and have been used to teach children and guide decision-making in various social contexts.

Proverbs are generally regarded as repositories of folk wisdom (White, 1987). The study of proverbs (Paremiology) dates back to Aristotle (Dabaghi et al., 2010). Globally, proverbs feature prominently in everyday discourse. In particular, many African societies conserve and pass on beliefs, heritage, values, norms and other important information from generation to generation using proverbs (Brookman-Amissah, 1986; Lawal et al., 1997; Hussein, 2005). Despite the advent of modern technology and changing cultural norms, Akan proverbs continue to be valued and employed by many members of the Akan community. They are often cited in conversations, speeches, and writings, and are also incorporated into various forms of art and media. This enduring popularity can be attributed to the proverbs' ability to distill complex ideas into concise and memorable statements as well as their adaptability to changing circumstances. Akan proverbs are deeply rooted in the cultural and historical traditions of the Akan people, which has helped to sustain their relevance and resonance over time. They reflect the values and beliefs of the Akan community, and are imbued with a sense of cultural pride and identity. The tenacity of Akan proverbs can be seen as a testament to the enduring power of traditional wisdom and the importance of cultural heritage in shaping contemporary society.

Akan proverbs are not limited to the Akan-speaking communities alone. They have been translated into other languages and are widely appreciated and used by non-Akan speakers as well. This cross-cultural appeal is a testament to the universal nature of the wisdom and insights contained in Akan proverbs. The tenacity of Akan proverbs can be attributed to their adaptability, versatility, cultural significance and universal appeal. They continue to serve as a valuable source of wisdom and cultural heritage for the Akan people and beyond, and are likely to endure for generations to come. The societal impact of proverbs both in bygone and contemporary eras features prominently in the work of a plethora of Africanist scholars (Brookman-Amissah, 1986; Gyekye, 1995, 1996; Yankah, 2000; Odebunmi, 2008; Aguoru, 2012)

Akan proverbs embody the linguistic structures and patterns of the Akan language. These proverbs are often concise and metaphorical expressions that require a deep understanding of the language's grammar and syntax. They encompass various linguistic features such as wordplay, alliteration and rhymes, which help reinforce grammatical rules and linguistic creativity. The repetitive use of certain grammatical structures in proverbs helps to solidify these structures in the minds of native speakers and learners, ensuring their perpetuation in the Ghanaian language. Akan proverbs provide a vast repertoire of vocabulary that covers diverse aspects of life, culture and nature. These proverbs introduce specialized vocabulary related to agriculture, animals, weather, ethics and interpersonal relationships. By incorporating these proverbs into everyday language use, native speakers expand their lexicon, contributing to the linguistic richness and versatility of the Ghanaian language.

Furthermore, the integration of specialized vocabulary from proverbs into everyday discourse ensures that these words remain relevant and utilized, thus preventing their erosion or extinction.

Akan proverbs encapsulate the cultural, historical, and social experiences of the Akan people. They serve as cultural signifiers, reinforcing shared values, norms, and beliefs. Proverbs often convey moral lessons, traditional wisdom, and advice for daily living. By incorporating these proverbs into their speech, individuals perpetuate cultural practices, maintain intergenerational bonds, and reinforce a sense of identity and belonging within the Akan community. The continuous use of proverbs in various contexts, such as storytelling, ceremonies, and interpersonal communication, ensures the transmission of cultural knowledge, promoting the development and preservation of the Ghanaian Language. Akan proverbs play a crucial role in cognition and memory.

LITERATURE REVIEW THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The tenacity of Akan proverbs and their contribution to the development of the Ghanaian Language is a fascinating topic. Akan proverbs have played a significant role in the cultural and linguistic heritage of Ghana. There are a lot of theories but the background of this investigation, tenacity and its impact on the development of the Ghanaian Language, Linguistic Richness theory and Adaptability theory were adapted for the study. Akan proverbs are known for their linguistic richness and creativity. They often utilize metaphorical language, imagery, and wordplay to convey deeper meanings. The extensive use of proverbs in everyday conversations and discourse has enriched the Akan Language, providing alternative ways to express ideas and concepts. This linguistic wealth has contributed to the development and evolution of the Ghanaian Language as a whole. Adaptability and Relevant Akan proverbs have shown remarkable adaptability over time, allowing them to remain relevant in modern Ghanaian society. While the core wisdom and principles conveyed by proverbs have remained consistent, their application and interpretation have evolved to address contemporary issues and challenges. This adaptability has ensured the continued relevance and practicality of proverbs, contributing to their tenacity in the development of the Ghanaian Language.

Mieder (1993), posits that, a proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morality, and traditional views in a metaphor, fixed and memorable form and which are handed down from generation to generation.

Prahalad (1996) says: A proverb is a short sentence which is well-known and at times rhythmic, including advice, sage themes and ethnic experiences, comprising simile, metaphor or irony which is well-known among people for its fluent wording, clarity of expression, simplicity, expansiveness and generality which is used either with or without change.

Again, Mieder (1993) observed poetically that a “proverb is the wit of one, and the wisdom of many.

Finnegan (2012) argues that, it is not easy to have the exact definition for proverb however there is some general agreement as to what constitutes proverb. It is a saying in more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and salt, and distinguished by the truth tersely expressed in it.

Finnegan (1970:381) points out that, proverbs are well represented in Africa, especially in the South Bantu, Congo and West Africa areas, which by implication include the Akan and the Swahili ethnicities. That, both societies cherish the use of proverbs, is evident in the large collections of proverbs, and many scholarly works which investigate different aspects of proverbs (Diabah and Amfo, 2015; Agyemang et al., 2015; Appiah et al., 2007; Wamitila, 2010). In both Akan and Swahili societies, proverbs have played a vital role in the past and continues to do so today and hope to continue in future.

Agyekum (2005) considers proverbs as the salt of a language, without which the real taste of the language dish is not felt. Proverbs provide one snapshot into contemporary Ghanaian society. For instance, (Agyekum 2000; 2005; 2012) analyses proverbs as an aspect of Akan oral literature through mass media in contemporary times, most notably in the lyrics of contemporary Ghanaian music, aphorisms, and marriage proverbs.

Similarly, (Yankah 1986;1989;1999) discussed proverbs as part of the aesthetics of traditional communication in Ghana (1989) and as rhetoric in the context of the African judicial process (1986). The tenacity of Akan proverbs and their contribution to the development of the Ghanaian language can be attributed to their oral tradition, cultural significance, linguistic richness, communicative efficiency, role in cultural identity, and adaptability. They have served as a means of transmitting wisdom, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering unity within Ghanaian society, making them an integral part of the Ghanaian

Language's development.

Agyekum (2005: 9) opines that, "Proverbs are interpretations of traditional wisdom based on the experiences and socio-political life of our elders." In Akan indigenous communication, speakers' ability to use appropriate proverbs in right socio-cultural and pragmatic contexts depicts their competences and versatility in the language.

Hussein (2005: 61) discusses African proverbs and how African literary art scholars have placed premium on proverbs in communication. Hussein asserts the indispensability of proverbs and their strong links with philosophy and thought. He cited Finnegan (2012), Oluwole (1997) and Ssetuba (2002) as seen below. Oluwole (1997: 100) records that, among Africans, "Proverbs are the analytic tools of thought. When thought is lost, it is proverbs that are used to search for it". Ssetuba (2002: 1) opines that "The proverb is regarded as a noble genre of African oral tradition that enjoys the prestige of a custodian of people's wisdom and philosophy of life." Finnegan (2012: 380) posits that, "In many African cultures, a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs. Makinde (1987) explained proverbs as observations, knowledge and wisdom of our fore-fathers. The Tenacity of Akan Proverbs is due in part to the fact that these proverbs are deeply rooted in the Akan worldview and are based on the experiences and wisdom of previous generations. They have been passed down through the ages from one generation to the next and have become an integral part of Akan culture.

The tenacity of Akan proverbs has significantly contributed to the development of the Ghanaian Language. They serve as linguistic anchors, preserving linguistic structures and vocabulary, while acting as cultural signifiers, reinforcing social norms, values, and historical experiences. The integration of proverbs in everyday speech enhances linguistic proficiency, expands vocabulary, and fosters cultural preservation, making them invaluable to the development and vitality of the Ghanaian Language. Akan proverbs are a significant aspect of the Akan culture in Ghana. These proverbs are deeply embedded in the daily lives of the Akan people and are used to convey important messages about life, society, and culture. The Tenacity of Akan Proverbs refers to the enduring nature of these proverbs over time. Despite the changes in Akan society and the emergence of modern technologies and lifestyles, these proverbs continue to be relevant and are still used to teach important life lessons.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adapted for this investigation is descriptive research design. It is a type of research which specifies the nature of a given phenomenon. It determines and reports on how things look like. This design involves observing and describing the behaviour or characteristics of a population, without manipulating any variables. It recognizes the natural setting as the direct source of data. Purposive sampling technique was adapted to elicit significant information for the analysis. The approach of the study was qualitative by nature. In all, fifty (50) participants were observed and interviewed. The breakdown of the above is as follows: twenty (20) aged, twenty (20) Youth, and (10) young men in the (middle class) all from Akrokerri community. Primary data were used though some scholarly works were reviewed to support the investigation.

Instruments for data collection

The significant information for the analysis was obtained through observation, focused group discussion and interview. In each of these driving instruments, the operation was based on an ethical consent. The purpose of using interview and the other tools was to obtain information directly from the respondents since tenacity of Akan proverbs and their contribution to the development of the Ghanaian Language is seen as integral part of them. Therefore, deeper understanding of the concept has direct relationship with the town folks. It

can also provide valuable insights into the nuances of language use and how it reflects cultural values and practices.

Table 1. Sample Size

Gender	Number
Male	40
Female	10
Total	50

Table 2. Distribution of sample by participants and age bracket

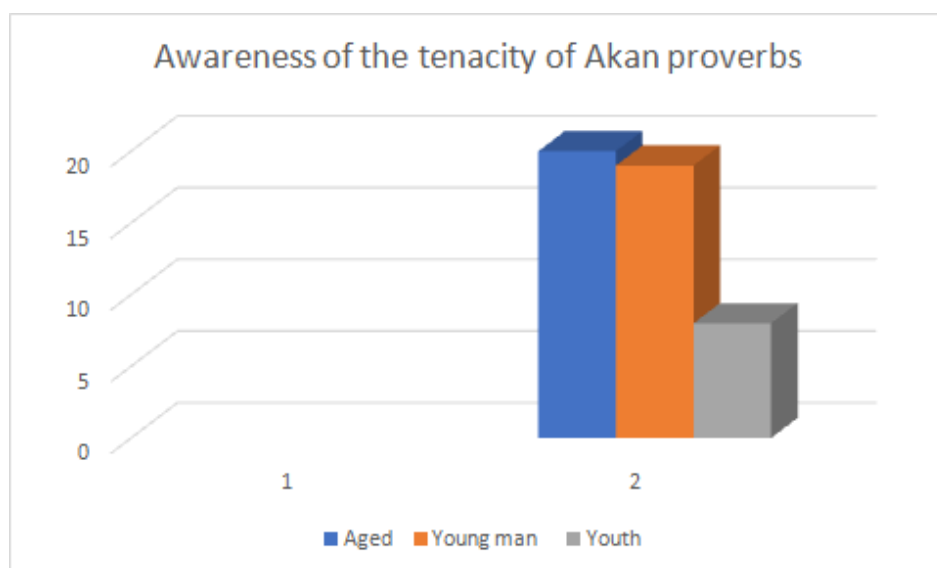
Akrokerri	Number of respondents	Age bracket
Aged	20	50- 75yrs
Young man	20	30- 48yrs
Youth	10	18-29yrs
Total	50	—

ANALYSIS/ DISCUSSION

Table 3: Awareness of the tenacity of Akan proverbs

Akrokerri	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Aged	20 (20)	43%
Young man	20 (19)	40%
Youth	10 (8)	17%
Total	50 (47)	100%

The table above shows that, out of fifty (50) respondents, 47 of them, representing 94% were aware of the tenacity of Akan proverbs. Pictorial representation as an evidential weight was the support.



Akan proverbs have proven to be resilient and adaptable. They continue to be used in modern Akan society, not only as a means of communication but also as a way of preserving and celebrating Akan culture. As such, the Tenacity of Akan Proverbs is a testament to the enduring nature of the Akan people’s beliefs and traditions. Akan proverbs often emphasize the importance of perseverance, resilience, and persistence. For example, the proverb, “S? wo wer? fi na wosan k?fa a, y?nkyiri” which literally translates into, “It is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten”, reflects the idea that, it is better to correct a mistake or retrieve a forgotten item than to give up and accept the consequences of failure. Another proverb, “Aboa bi b?ka wo a, na ?firi wo ntoma mu”, which literally translates into “If an animal will bite you, it is from your clothes”, emphasizes personal responsibility and the need to learn from mistakes. In both of these examples, the proverbs reflect the importance of perseverance and the belief that setbacks and challenges are opportunities for growth and learning.

Table 4. Akan Culture and Tenacity

Does tenacity have anything in common with Akan culture?	No of respondents	Percentage
Yes	20	43%
No	27	57%
Total	47	100%

From the above table, it is explicitly clear that out of forty – seven (47) respondents twenty (20) affirmed the assertion that tenacity and Akan culture have a relationship. The age bracket of the said social status was (50-75yrs). Where as twenty – seven (27) who were youths and the young man responded (No) to the assertion. The tenacity reflected in Akan proverbs is also evident in other aspects of Akan culture. The Akan people have a strong tradition of entrepreneurship and trade, and many successful Akan business people attribute their success to their ability to persevere in the face of adversity. This resilience is also reflected in Akan music, dance and art, which often characterize the celebration of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity. The Akan people have a strong sense of community and social responsibility. They believe that, everyone has a role to play in contributing to the collective well-being the people. This sense of responsibility is reflected in the proverb “Woforo dua pa a, na y?pia wo”, which literally translates into, “When you climb a good tree, you are given a push.” This proverb emphasizes the importance of working together and supporting each another to achieve success. Linguistics Richness theory support this assertion that, Akan proverbs are known for their linguistic richness and creativity. They often utilize metaphorical language, imagery, and wordplay to convey deeper meanings. The extensive use of proverbs in everyday conversations and discourse has enriched the Akan language, providing alternative ways to express ideas and concepts. This linguistic wealth has contributed to the development and evolution of the Ghanaian language as a whole.

Table 5. The tenacity of Akan proverbs reflects the cultural values of the Akan people

Does tenacity of proverbs reflect the cultural values of Akan people?	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	38	81%
No	9	19%
Total	47	100%

From the table 5, the respondents who answered (Yes) to whether the tenacity of proverbs reflects the cultural values of the Akan people were thirty – eight (38) representing 81% out of forty – seven (47), whereas nine (09) representing 19% answered (No). Here, most of the youth appreciated the tenacity of Akan proverbs and their contribution to the development of the Ghanaian Language. Akan proverbs have

shown remarkable adaptability over time, allowing them to remain relevant in modern Ghanaian society. While the core wisdom and principles conveyed by proverbs have remained consistent, their application and interpretation have evolved to address contemporary issues and challenges. This adaptability has ensured the continued relevance and practicality of proverbs, contributing to their tenacity in the development of the Ghanaian Language. Language is the primary means of communication within a society. When people speak the same language, they are better able to communicate with one another, understand each other's needs, and form social bonds. The tenacity of Akan proverbs reflects the cultural values of the Akan people and their beliefs in the importance of perseverance, resilience and social responsibility. These proverbs are a valuable resource for communicating complex ideas in a concise and memorable way, and they continue to be an important part of Akan culture today. By studying the tenacity of Akan proverbs, we can gain insight into the beliefs and values that have sustained the Akan people for generations.

Table 6. Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving

Do you agree or disagree that tenacity of proverbs provides critical thinking?	Number of respondents	Percentage
Agree	19	40%
Disagree	28	60%
Total	47	100%

From the above table, the number of respondents who agreed that tenacity of Akan proverbs bring about critical thinking and problem-solving were nineteen (19) representing 40% while 60% disagree with the statement. Akan proverbs encourage critical thinking and problem-solving skills. By presenting thought-provoking analogies and metaphors, they challenge individuals to reflect on various aspects of life, make informed decisions, and develop creative solutions to problems. The use of proverbs stimulates critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and linguistic creativity. Proverbs are often succinct, memorable and metaphorical which requires individuals to interpret and apply their meaning to real-life situations. This cognitive engagement fosters linguistic proficiency and enhances language retention. Moreover, the memorable nature of proverbs aids in information recall and facilitates intergenerational transmission of knowledge, ensuring that the Ghanaian language and cultural heritage remain intact.

FINDINGS

These findings were identified in this investigation; preservation of cultural heritage, Akan proverbs have played a crucial role in preserving the cultural heritage of the Ghanaian people. These proverbs encapsulate the wisdom, values and traditions passed down through generations, providing a means for cultural continuity. Oral tradition and transmission were another strong pillar this investigation has revealed. Akan proverbs have been an integral part of the oral tradition in Ghana. They have served as a vehicle for transmitting knowledge, moral lessons and societal norms from one generation to another by ensuring the preservation and dissemination of Ghanaian linguistic and cultural heritage. Linguistically Akan proverbs have contributed significantly to the development of the Ghanaian Language. They have enriched the vocabulary, syntax and linguistic structures of the Akan language by fostering linguistic diversity and complexity. Akan proverbs are known for their concise yet profound nature. They provide a concise and memorable way of expressing complex ideas and situations. Their widespread usage has improved communication efficiency among Ghanaians by promoting effective and concise expression of thoughts and emotions. Akan proverbs encourage critical thinking and problem-solving skills. By presenting thought-provoking analogies and metaphors, they challenge individuals to reflect on various aspects of life, make informed decisions and develop creative solutions to problems. Akan proverbs serve as a source of cultural identity and pride for Ghanaians. They remind individuals of their roots, heritage and the uniqueness of their

culture. By using proverbs in everyday conversations, Ghanaians assert their cultural identity and affirm their belonging to the Ghanaian linguistic and cultural community. Akan proverbs are valuable educational tools. They are often used in schools and educational settings to teach language, morality and social values. Their concise and memorable nature make them effective for educational purposes thereby enhancing learning experiences and promoting cultural understanding. Akan proverbs have gained recognition and admiration beyond Ghana's borders. They have been translated into various languages, contributing to intercultural exchange and understanding. Additionally, they have been studied and researched into by linguists, anthropologists and scholars, and further enhancing the appreciation and understanding of Ghanaian culture and language.

CONCLUSION

Akan proverbs are an essential part of the cultural heritage of the Akan people in Ghana. These proverbs are known for their depth of wisdom, wit, and metaphorical language, which make them a powerful tool for teaching morals, values and life lessons. The tenacity of Akan proverbs lies in their ability to withstand the test of time and retain their relevance in contemporary society. These proverbs have been passed down from generation to generation and continue to influence the way people think and behave. Akan proverbs have transcended geographical and cultural boundaries and have gained recognition and appreciation beyond Ghana. They have been used in literature, music and other forms of art, and have become a source of inspiration for many. The tenacity of Akan proverbs is a testament to the enduring wisdom and cultural richness of the Akan people. These proverbs are an invaluable resource for anyone seeking to gain insight into the Akan culture and human experience as a whole.

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