

A Pragmatic Analysis of the Significance of Turkana Proverbs

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to pragmatically analyze Turkana proverbs. In pragmatics, meaning is not directly concerned with the word or sentence used but relies on the utterance and how it is used contextually. Turkana is a rich and dynamic language that has grown over the years. In Turkana community, proverbs remain powerful and effective in transmitting ideas, knowledge and social morality from one generation to another. The study embraced ethnographic qualitative research design against the backdrop of Relevance Theory by Deidre Wilson (2004). The sample used in this study was selected from speakers of the native Turkana language who formed the target population. A sample size of 90 respondents was used. It was selected through purposive sampling from which a random sample of 18 respondents was chosen. Respondents were randomly drawn from Kalokol village, in Turkana County of Kenya. It comprised of an equal number representing male and female aged between 30 – 65 years. The instruments for data collection comprised of oral face to face interviews and open ended questionnaires. This paper examined and analyzed the proverbs using Relevance Theory and concluded that their proper teaching and usage could be the right tools for enhancing morality, etiquette, hygiene and good health in the society.

Keywords: contextually, enhancing morality, humour, adultery, Turkana, proverbs

INTRODUCTION

A proverb is a short saying which takes the form of moral advice expressed in a clear form (Akporobaro, 2008). Through proverbs, ideas are expressed vividly. According Akporobaro (2008), a proverb is a short repeated witty statement of experience that is used to further a social image. Proverbs are the linguistic components of the African people employed in speech to provide excitement and interest (Jeylan, 2009).

Proverbs are succinct, poetic sayings that convey deep meanings and insights into the human condition. In the African culture, proverbs serve as a tool for communicating values, beliefs and traditions. Proverbs, especially African ones reflect the wisdom of the elders, guiding decision-making, encouraging critical thinking and teaching life lessons. Proverbs form an integral part of African oral tradition and are transmitted from one generation to another through songs, storytelling among other forms of communication.

Proverbs are based on metaphorical language which arouses curiosity about their meanings and exert pressure suggesting that ideas should be related to prior knowledge and experience (Entwistle, 2000). Through proverbs, communication is done in a symbolic way, which is neither direct nor literal. In African languages, proverbs are consciously used to educate, persuade and manipulate (Kuzwayo, 1998). Proverbs are key to abstract thinking and reasoning (Boateng, 1983). According to Boateng (1983), proverbs convey messages in a way in which a child or an adult also learns to reflect its possible meanings. It is a way of

teaching where people don't feel bombarded by rules.

Proverbs offer wisdom and also give contradictory advice (Daniel et al., 1987). According to Schipper (1991) women worldwide are projected negatively while men are not. As portrayed in her study, she could not find a single negative proverb aimed at African men. Sometimes proverbs are taken out of context without a good analysis of the full analyst hence complicating validity.

The functions of proverbs vary according to different cultures in the African society. According to the Zulu of South Africa;

“Language without proverbs would be like a skeleton without flesh.”

According to this Zulu proverb, proverbs spice up conversations and without them, conversations would not be palatable and unworthy listening to them.

According to the Yoruba of Nigeria;

“All lizards lie flat on their stomach and it is difficult to determine which has a stomach ache.

The interpretation of this proverb is that, from outside, everyone looks the same but everyone has problems that are not visible to the outsiders.

The Turkana are Nilotes and inhabitants of Turkana County in Northern Kenya. Turkana County borders Pokot and Samburu Counties, Uganda to the west, South Sudan and Ethiopia to the North. The Turkana people refer to their land as *Turkan*. Turkana people belong to one of the two major clans; the Ngirisai-Leopard and the Ngimor-Stone or mountain. According to one of the myths of origin, the origin of Turkana lies to the west of their current homeland. The ancestors of the Turkana people lived in a place known as Apuli, located in Southern Sudan. They began to migrate southwards through the Dodoth Escarpment in North Eastern Uganda to Kenya. They followed Tarach River and later southward towards the Turkwel and Kagwalasi rivers that flow into Lake Turkana.

Until today, proverbs are used in day to day communication, educating members of the community and warning them against misdemeanors. Songs and every other aspect of culture in the Turkana community are avenues of expressing proverbs.

The study of proverbs is referred to as paremiology. In the course of history, paremiology the study of proverbs and paremiology, the collection of verbs has attracted several scholars. The earliest interest in proverbs began with Sumerian Cuneiform tablets and later by King Solomon with 900 proverbs (Salwa, 2005). Subsequent studies and writings by Aristotle, the Renaissance scholars-Erasmus, folklorist Archer Taylor and Wolfgang followed.

There are different forms of proverbs which serve different functions depending on individual communities. This notwithstanding, proverbs are common as they reflect the cultural beliefs, wisdom and superstitions of a community. Proverbs are seen to reflect truthfulness and therefore their credibility is not questioned. The source of proverbs is credited to generations in a society from the ancestors to its current single members. Events such as famine, war, marriage, love, sicknesses and conflict are the sources of proverbs. A number of proverbs result from comments on experiences while others come from unconscious statements coined and frequently used, and eventually embraced by people as proverbs. In every society, proverbs are used to teach, advice and warn against misdemeanor (Dabaghi et al, 2011).

In the Turkana society, the survival of proverbs is in their usage as they orally shared from generation to generation. Proverbs reflect the real life situations in every society as they are associated with wisdom. They

show the ability of the human brain which relates events that happen in real life. Proverbs are cultural depositions common with any group of people (Mieder, 2004). According to Mieder, cultural expressions and elements are used within the context of respective cultures as they reflect life, the people and the environment they operate within.

Proverbs as items of folklore enrich languages by giving meanings to words as well as carrying moral and cultural values (Krasuska, 2021). Proverbs are rich with features of style making them stand out from plain statements and hence they are recognizable for their uniqueness. Proverbs have features of allegory, repetition, rhyme, ellipsis, alliteration and parallelism. According to Krasuska (2021), proverbs may contain alliteration, assonance, consonance and rhyme. He reiterates that rhetorical devices appear as contrast, repetition, parallelism, regression, ellipses and anadiplosis. In the lexical context, he adds that; proverbs contain devices such as metaphor, metonymy, paradox, synecdoche and simile.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been several studies in the past on proverbs;

In the study by Kobia (2016), he analyzed domestic animals in selected Swahili proverbs focusing on chicken metaphor. The research examined the socio-cultural and economic background that shapes the Swahili proverbs and their underlying meanings. The research revealed that Swahili proverbs are used metaphorically Swahili people to articulate their world view. From the metaphorical analysis of Swahili proverbs in regard to the chicken, proverbs can be used as a way of unraveling the morals, culture, education and philosophy of a group of people through contextual setting. In the study, chicken is mapped onto human beings to reflect their behaviors.

Ogembo et al in (2020) carried out a study on symbolism of a journey in selected Ekegusi proverbs. Their study examined the forms of imagery used in the representation of the journey and the symbolic meanings of the journey in the selected Ekegusi proverbs. The study revealed that the features used in the construction of the journey in the proverbs made reference to every aspect of nature and human life. The journey in the selected proverbs is prominently represented through the case of figurative language such as similes, metaphors and personification. According to the study, a journey is characterized with challenges or hardships demonstrating individual triumph and capacity to survive and sustain himself or herself during adversity.

Tesfaye and Mesfin studied socio-cultural functions of Kafa proverbs in 2014. Kafa people are found in Southern Ethiopia. The study revealed that the Kafa proverbs are used to emphasize the hard work required from the farmers in Kafa region to eradicate hunger and thus avoid catastrophe. Kafa proverbs reflect people's experiences, beliefs, lives and moral values. Proverbs are employed as tools for correcting insolence, immorality and other bad behaviors. Proverbs are used to promote and preserve values in any society. According to Tesfaye and Mesfin(2014), proverbs are about people's way of experiencing reality, rules and norms in society.

In the 2019 study by Dominica Dipio; African motherhood proverbs: A matriarchal perspective was carried out. The study analysed proverbs in relation to the role of a mother in African society. The study revealed that the body and soul of the family rests in the mother's hand as clearly reflected in the selected proverbs across Africa. In Africa, many proverbs focus on women than men. According to the study, life and culture revolve around the mother. Mother represents the gift of the economy, the family and community. All things that enhance and add quality to life are associated with her. In the study, many proverbs associate motherhood with food and wellbeing of the families within the societies.

Fancy Chepkoech in her study in 2004 analyzed Kipsigis proverbs. This was a stylistic and a pragmatic

study. The study used Relevance Theoretic approach to analyze various proverbs, focusing on the role, attitudes towards proverbs by different age groups of speakers and their relevance to the Kipsigis community. It was revealed that proverb use is all a matter of human cognition which is relevance based. Members of the community who find proverbs relevant are the ones who use them. Relevance theory is based on human cognition showing how his or her mind processes information to arrive at the speaker's intended meaning, sometimes even when the utterances are indirect. Whenever a proverb is quoted, the literal meaning may not give the meaning that a speaker intends (Sperber & Deidre, 1986/1995).

The study also used Relevance Theory by Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson (1986/1995). The theory was used to show how a listener bridges the gap that exists between literal meaning of the proverb and its intended meaning. It is important to note that proverbs have figurative meaning and that the speakers of any language employ them successfully in conversations.

Problem Statement

Several scholars in Kenya have previously studied and published on proverbs. However, there is a dearth of research on critical enumeration of Turkana proverbs pragmatically focusing on their various roles in the community. Further, the study endeavored to establish language styles in Turkana proverbs, their meanings along with structure and how they are applied in context. Gabriel Odiambo, in 2015 did a paper on, A Collection of Turkana Proverbs. In the paper, Turkana proverbs were analyzed with regard to meaning and moral lessons that they impart to the members of the community. The current study therefore sort to fill this knowledge gap by collecting Turkana proverbs and analyzing them in terms of language of style, context and their functions in the Turkana community.

Objective

The main objective of this study was to examine the functions of Turkana proverbs in the contemporary Turkana society.

METHODOLOGY

The study embraced ethnographic qualitative research design. Qualitative researchers aim to preserve and examine situated form, content and experience of actions within social domain (Lindolf & Taylor, 2002). The design was suitable to the current study because the research focused on analyzing Turkana proverbs pragmatically. The study utilized purposive sampling procedure as a process of selecting a number of individuals or objects from a population in the selected group represents the characteristics of the entire group. A sample size of 90 respondents was used. It was selected through purposive sampling from which a random sample of 18 respondents was chosen. Respondents were randomly drawn from Kalokol village, in Turkana county of Kenya. Kalokol village was preferred because it is inhabited by all clans from the Turkana community; the Ngirisai-Leopard and the Ngimor-Stone or mountain. The sample comprised of an equal number representing male and female aged between 30-65 years.

The instruments for data collection comprised of oral face to face interviews and open ended questionnaires administered to through a research assistant from the Turkana community. This research examined and analyzed data using Relevance theory by Deidre Wilson and Dan Sperber (2004).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study used Relevance theory by Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995). This is a Stylo-Pragmatic model. The theory is assumed to be a powerful tool for explaining the interpretation of all kinds of verbal communication, proverbs included. Pragmatics deals with meaning in context with its main concern being

issues of communication and interpretation. According to Wilson and Sperber (1986/1995), the essential feature of most human communication, verbally and non-verbally is the expression and recognition of intentions. Relevance is not only a potential property of utterances but also thoughts, memories and conclusions of inferences Sperber and Wilson, (1986/1995). According to Wilson and Sperber, the search for relevance is a basic feature of human cognition. An utterance is intuitively relevant to an individual when it connects with background information he has available to yield conclusions relevant according to him.

For an utterance to achieve relevance when it is made, it has to connect with a certain context. Context is the knowledge that the interlocutors bring to the conversation. According to Sperber and Wilson (1986/1995), context is the set of premises used in interpreting an utterance. Moreso, it is a psychological construct and a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the word. Courtesy of our cognition systems, humans have a tendency to maximize relevance. Our perceptual mechanisms tend to automatically pick out potentially relevant stimuli, our memory retrieval mechanisms tend to automatically activate potentially relevant assumptions and our inferential mechanisms tend to spontaneously process them in the most productive way, all in a bid to increase efficiency.

In order for any hearer to be able to achieve relevance from an utterance, he or she should take the decoded linguistic meaning by; following a path of least effort, enrich it at the explicit level until the resulting interpretation meets expectation of relevance. This is what is referred to as the relevance theoretic comprehension procedure.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data analysis started with the identification and selection of Turkana proverbs.

PROV 1

Abebet niebocia alodie ng'akilie ijulikakin toma.

(When a cockroach plays near the milk it falls into it)

The contextual implication deduced from this proverb is that when we put ourselves in difficult situations because of our association with people with questionable characters, then we are likely to land in trouble. This proverb aims to warn individuals against keeping wrong company us that when you are in accompany of people of bad characters there is high possibility that you will become part of the bad group. The deduction in this proverb is that a cockroach represents a human being who should be worry of his or her actions to avoid getting into trouble.

PROV 2

Achoikin mere akuren

(Caution is not a sign of fear)

This proverb teaches us that fear is real and it's not fiction. Self defense is acceptable. The proverb serves as a warning and advice to people in the Turkana community to exercise caution especially when dealing with enemies and strangers. It is in the world of knowledge that exercising caution could serve as a weapon to deal enemies during adversity.

PROV 3

Achwaanut a ekolia anakipi ikoni achwaanut aitwan eyei nawi, keng.

(A man in his homestead is like a fish in water)

According to this proverb, a man has many responsibilities which he will need to undertake whether in comfort or not. He has to survive and sustain himself and those he is responsible for like his family relatives and friends. The implicated conclusion about this proverb is that any man has no choice but to be responsible enough as the responsibility of taking care of his family lies with him and no one else.

PROV 4

Aelo a ngiputiro ejok noi kotere elose alogite

(Since warthogs lives in the forest, they must maintain close friendship with other animals)

The contextual implication brought forth is that Warthogs (human beings) are social beings. This proverb is used to help us understand the importance of coexistence. Human beings need one another regardless of difference in opinion, ethnicity, race and nationality. As human beings, we need each other because we are interdependent. No man is an island hence cannot stand alone.

PROV 5

Akeju ateger

(A leg is brotherhood)

This proverb is used to teach us that community is made up of various people but they form up one team or one unit. It is all the world of knowledge that unity is strength and that a household or community that is divided will not prosper. Countries and regions that don't exercise unity are always in conflict leading to political instability and unstable economies.

PROV 6

Akikwaan a akimuj echom ka naitwaan ileleunit atamar aria ngesi ekisikwanet itwaan

(Baboons eat nuts and berries with fingers as people do, so they must be related to us)

This proverb teaches us that we need to treat other people equally despite our different ethnic and cultural backgrounds because we are one people. The inference in this proverb is that all human beings are the same before God. They are wonderfully and fearfully made by the Lord and there is no lesser human being. All of them should be respected and treated equally.

PROV 7

Akutuk nakaliekon nyengopen

(The mouth which lies never hides)

According to this proverb, nothing lasts forever. From it we learn that a person's character is easily visible and he cannot hide forever. We can tell a lot about a person's character by observing how he/she treats

other people. This may include people he knows and those he doesn't know. It may be difficult to actually see how he treats different types of people if you only encounter him in a single environment, such as the workplace. It is often possible, however, to get some idea of his manner of interaction with different types of people through conversation with him.

PROV 8

Eketan niajoko deng eburuni tolot mawii

(Even the one who digs good soil gets tired and goes back home)

The inference of good soil is good work or tasks performed by different people. This proverb is used to teach us that even if you are doing well there will come a time that you will get weary and old that you will be unable to continue. Everything that has a beginning has an ending. Human beings are born and afterwards they pass through different stages in life. From being young, adolescent, teenage years, middle age and old age. The deduction in this proverb is that life is not like a clock and therefore no one can rewind it. People in the Turkana community are advised to use their time well for prosperity. Those in school, business and employment should work hard and save wisely to avoid suffering in old age after retirement.

PROV 9

Kitamak eroko nyesubakina ibone

(Think before having a desire to do anything)

People should always think before they speak. This should be the best practice anytime in order to avoid causing trouble in life, be it relationships, career or elsewhere. Speaking or doing anything before thinking may likely lead one to make badly informed statements and reduce his or her credibility, and end up hurting others even their intentions are genuinely harmless. The problem is that, once words exit our mouth, no amount of apologies will make them magically go back in. Blurting something out and then trying to retract it is like shutting the gate after the horse has bolted. More importantly, thinking before we do anything or speak always allows individuals time to consider the effect of the words we choose.

PROV 10

Kitodik ikoku ng`akiro na jokok na naronok,irai ekauren

(When you don't correct your child when he does wrong when young, you will have hard time when she /he grows up)

Giving instructions, correction, warning, and punishment to children when warranted, displays the right affection towards them. If a parent refuses to discipline an unruly child, that child will grow accustomed to getting his own way and develop an air of entitlement and get spoilt in the long run. This proverb bring the true meanings that you need to show your child good directions that he or she will not depart from when he grows old. Discipline always seem painful rather than pleasant but it later brings the fruit of righteousness to those trained by it.

PROV 11

Ngakipi napenyekuno yong nyikingede akure

(Water that you did not draw for yourself does not quench your thirst)

When someone does something for you it cannot be satisfactory than handling it yourself. There is always a sense of fulfillment when one handles tasks by himself or herself. The inference in this proverb is to encourage people strive to be self reliant. Be it at school, place of work or any other activity one is involved in, always give your best shot.

PROV 12

Ngaropeyai aureta ngichan

(Crimes and wickedness comes as result of money, making it a source of every evil)

The Turkana community is known for cattle rustling, so this proverb is used to teach them on the consequences of crimes and wickedness because they result to death. Cattle stealing missions many at times result in deaths. The practice of cattle rustling is motivated by earnings in terms of money and the love of money or an excessive focus on wealth can lead to negative outcomes such as selfishness, unethical practices and greed within the society.

PROV 13

Ngini amuri epuroti ngekenar epurotioa babaria

(The one who has prepared beer does not laugh at the beer which tastes bad)

This proverb is used in Turkana to help in raising up kids in that even if you have a child who is insolent, stubborn, ill mannered he or she still remains your child and you should not condemn them because it is your own flesh and blood. Parents should at all times strive to get the best out of their children and offer them support during difficult times.

PROV 14

Nimuji ibore keng nichaneneo

(One who eats his own things is never disturbed)

When you have worked so hard and accumulated wealth it does not worry you when you want to use it, it doesn't pain him. Young people are advised to work hard for a better future. Those in different undertakings should focus on success as a source of comfort in their old age. Summer seen is the youth of a man, where his life is young and bright, like the sunny weather. This is the time that one has to work hard for his future so that when it comes to old which is equivalent to autumn, he just enjoys life because there are enough resources at his disposal.

PROV 15

Ni eyieni apipie akwaan ngesi ilope.

(The patient knows the pains)

This proverb teaches us that the only person who can know the difficulties they are facing is yourself and implicitly, no one can wear the size of your shoes apart from yourself. Only someone directly afflicted by some source of pain or unhappiness can truly experience it. Everyone else is only able to sympathize or

empathize. If one is directly involved in something, he or she can identify the source of some trouble or stress associated with it.

PROV 16

Toem apokon, sodi, kit oemeta moi iyong ngide kon

(Honor your father, and your children will honor you)

According to this proverb, respect is an important virtue in life. Parents and elders should be respected and honored as they are a blessing to us. Their wise counsel due to lots of wisdom at their disposal is of benefit to children and the youth for generations ahead. Successful people in life always have others that they emulate. The encyclopedic implication of this proverb is that we should always do good to others just as we would wish the same to be done to us.

PROV 17

Tosubak erok emokaa.

(Quick people seize opportunity quickly than slow ones)

Great opportunities may come ones in a life time. This proverb teaches us to seize such opportunities when we come by them. Those who are slow in taking advantage of opportunities that come their way may end up relying on others for survival. Communities and countries where people don't size such opportunities, they are bedeviled in poverty.

PROV 18

Ngitunga kimekisi etobto.

(Closed mouth catches no flies)

The contextual implication of the flies are the gains that one is likely to get if he or she is out going and ready to embrace new ideas that are progressive. This proverb teaches us that when you are slow or you don't open up for new ideas then you will be passed by opportunities and you will not gain any experience or wealth. For instance computer technology makes things tick in today's world. This is the way now for every one globally whereby communication and running of machines has been computerized. Teaching and learning in institutions has not been left behind as learning is now ICT integrated; use of computers, projectors, smart boards etc.

CONCLUSION

Language is a powerful tool used in day to day life to transmit proverbs. Proverbs have a specific cultural orientation, significance and interpretation based on socio-cultural environment that makes the proverb. Turkana proverbs are products of socio-cultural and political experience of Turkana people over many years. The proverbs express human behavior and through them human beings failures, strengths, weaknesses, hopes, fears and aspirations are revealed. The Turkana proverbs analyzed in this paper are embedded in the mental capacity and their understanding depends on the culture and context in which they are produced, reproduced and used. Proverbs warn against immorality, adultery, incest and other social ills within the Turkana community.

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