



A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Selected Historical and Non-Historical Proverbs in Yorùbá

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Abstract. Existing works on Yorùbá historical proverbs submits that such proverbs are a veritable source of history which emphasises various moral and ethical values while studies on non- historical proverbs dwell on their different uses and functions ranging from role relationship in the society, morality, decency, caution and peaceful co-existence. None of the existing works has addressed a comparative analysis of historical and non-historical proverbs, the language choices and their sociolinguistic implications. This study investigates a sociolinguistic view of historical and non-historical proverbs. It analyses the genealogy of the Yorùbá proverbs from the historical and non-historical perspectives, explores the use of the proverbs in everyday discourse and how they shape the attitudes, perception and worldview of the Yorùbá people. Emphasis is placed on the social, cultural, and the linguistic contexts of the proverbs. The study also examines how the proverbs are used to articulate collective values and beliefs, and how their meanings are modified and transferred over time. This study adopts Dell Hymes (1972) ethnography of communication for its analysis. The data for this study were obtained from native speakers of Yorùbá in their towns and villages such as Òsogbo, Òyó, Ìbàdàn, Ìkírè, Ògbómòşó, Òfà and Ìjábé. Proverb texts were also used for clarification on meaning and explanations. This study is partly a reaction to Lucas (1965) claim that proverbs are anonymous wisdom. Findings in this study show that historical proverbs are product of historians who witnessed the events that are used as references before they became proverbs. The study also argues that non-historical proverbs are products of creativity and deep thought. This study calls for a dichotomy in the acknowledgments rendered before relating the two proverbs (historical and non-historical), such that tributes given to the historians who witnessed the history and those to whom they handed them over to should differ from the creative

thinkers who through their ingenuity, invented proverbs. This study contributes to knowledge by recommending different pre-proverbs acknowledgments rendition before the historical and non-historical proverbs to show their sources.

Keywords: Historical Proverbs, Non-Historical Proverbs, Sociolinguistics, Historians, Creative Thinkers, Yorùbá Language.

1. Introduction

Proverbs are witty sayings that encapsulate truth that shows the world view, customs, traditions, culture, beliefs, history and the ways of life of a people (Adeoye, Taiwo and Adeseke 2022). Fasiku (2006:25) notes that proverbs encapsulate the worldview of a people, and serve as a means of arousing, defining, manifesting and establishing the expectations, aspirations and consciousness of a people ... proverbs serve as a linguistic confirmation of the totality of a people's worldview and the epistemic cognition of this world-view.

A proverb, according to Medier (1993) is a short, generally known sentence from the folk tradition that contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form, and which is handed down from generation to generation. Proverbs can reference historical facts or well-crafted words of wisdom from creative thinkers. Thus, Yorùbá proverbs are generally divided into historical proverbs and non-historical proverbs. The historically-induced proverbs are words of wisdom that emanated from historical events that were witnessed by ancient Yorùbá people. The rich historical antecedents of the Yorùbá people make their proverbs relate to the present, past and make projections for the future.

Historical proverbs and history are inseparable because historical events gave birth to them. Carr (1961) asserts that history is an unending dialogue between the present and the past. He explains further that historical facts and historians are intertwined and would be meaningless in the absence of each other. According to Marwick (1970), history is the body of knowledge about the past produced by historians together with everything that is involved in the production, communication of, and reaching about that knowledge. The non-historical proverbs, on the other hand, are products of insightful thoughts, keen observations and critical thinking that led to the inspirational words that are regarded as proverbs because of the deep thought, the logic in their presentations and relevance to the society. These types of proverbs may not have historical antecedents as they may not be historically induced but are borne out of the creativity and ingenuity of old folks.

The use of proverbs in day-to-day conversation and activities of the Yorùbá people such as: commerce, occupation, ceremonies, festivals and child training among others shows their relevance, in making reference to people, places and situations. Thus, the elders are regarded as the repository of the proverbs. Rumide (2013) advances that the Yorùbá people believe strongly in the tradition of proverbs, hence, they use them in their day-to-day activities. Adegboyega (2017) asserts that among the Yorùbá people, proverbs are believed to be a convention used to flavour speech, taking into consideration its cultural and moral relevance. It is important to note that a skilled person in the use Yorùbá proverbs is revered, and respected for having native education and intelligence because he/she possesses the wisdom and lore of the race. Moreover, the interjection of proverbs in conversation is considered as part of the ethics of traditional communication, since it emanates from their perception and keen observation of natural situations, human relations and animal behaviour. In the Yorùbá settings, proverb are used to rebuke, encourage, admonish, warn, enlighten, explain, and educate people.

2. Literature Review

There are a good number of scholarly works on Yorùbá proverbs. They include Abiodun (2018), Olaiya (2020), Akintoye, Ojo & Olatunde (2021), Adeoye, Taiwo & Adeseke (2022), among others. Abiodun (2018) examines proverbs that revere elders in Yorùbá society. He notes that the positions of elders are vital in society because they are the custodians of culture. He explains that age, beards, accomplishments, marriage, chieftaincy titles, and childbearing are some

of the qualities of elders among the Yorùbá. He explains further that elders in Yorùbá, as depicted in proverbs, are expected to possess wisdom, deep thought, patience, perseverance, experience, cheerfulness, and the ability to settle disputes. Olaiya (2020) explores proverbs that relate to security among the Yorùbá. She explains that peace and tranquility are highly valued among the Yorùbá people. She maintains that the issue of security starts from the nuclear family, extended family to the street and the entire town. She concludes that security proverbs in Yorùbá are mainly for caution and alertness. Akintoye, Ojo & Olatunde (2021) focus on proverbs that expose ethnic rivalry among the Ekiti people, and demonstrate that Ekiti people use derogatory proverbs to scorn one another and foreigners living among them. They conclude that derogatory proverbs are borne out of a deep reflection on the speech forms, occupation, history and religion of the affected people. The work of the scholars show that derogatory proverbs are forms of hate speech which have the tendency to generate disharmony in the society. Adeoye, Taiwo & Adeseke (2022) examine animal totems in Yorùbá proverbs. They establish that the philosophy of the Yorùbá people shows that animals and human beings share some characteristics in common. They explain further that the relationship between ancient Yorùbá people and animals brought about some proverbs. They claim that animal proverbs are used to reserve information for the wise and veiling information strangers for strangers. Dipak (2021) examines proverbs as sources of historical facts using selected proverbs from short stories. The study explains the interrelation between literature and history through the use of proverb. The study relates how historical events are turned to proverbs. The paper concludes that proverbs are a source of age-long facts stated in anecdotal stories. It is further established that proverbs can be meaningful by themselves yet they need stories to complement their meaning. This study only discusses historical proverbs through short stories but never compares them with non-historically derived proverbs.

3. Theoretical Framework

This research work deploys ethnography of communication in analysing its data. The choice of this theory is borne out of its relevance to the ethics of Yorùbá communication. The theory places premium on settings, participants, genre, and norm which are relevant ingredients to the proper explanation of proverbs. The ethnography of communication handles the communicative expressions as well as the world view of the Yorùbá through the proverbs.

3.1 Ethnography of Communication

Ethnography of communication was advanced by Dell Hymes (1972). The theory lends credence to communicative competence of the native speaker of language in relation to his/her language, that is, the conventional rules guiding the use of linguistic utterance. The communicative competence as stipulated by the theory entails the requisite knowledge which includes not only rules for communication and shared rules for interaction but also the cultural rules and knowledge that are the basis for context and content of communicative events and interaction process (Saville-Troike, 1989). Thus, communicative competence guides the speakers on the understanding of what to say, when to say it, how to say it, and where to say it. This portends that linguistic competence is not enough but the understanding of the socio-cultural norms and ethics of communication within the ambit of culture rules and the culturally shared knowledge as the basis for effective communication process in the society. Saville-Troike (1989:15) states that many of the functions of language are universal but the manner in which communication operates in languages or society differs. The immediate or context of situation is the

specific circumstance in which communication occurs in relation to time, place, events and other conditions. The components of situation by Dell Hymes (1972) include: setting/scene, participants, ends, act/sequence, key, instrumentalities, norm and genre. These components determine context of situation and the way utterances are used in conversation.

3.2 Method of Data Collection

The data for this research were sourced from informants and textbooks. The informants' recordings which forms our primary data emanated from six towns namely Òşogbo, Òyó, Ìbàdàn, Ìkirè, Ògbómòşó, Òfà and Ìjábé. The informants (who are aged people) were consulted in the six towns mentioned have sound knowledge of Yorùbá proverbs and their usage in different context. They rendered proverbs, told us their meanings, the historical facts that relate to them and their uses. The non-historical proverbs were also rendered; their meaning and usage were also elaborated. The importance of context in the use proverb was taking into consideration, as a results, the interviews were conducted in such a way that explanations were provided on the context of use of each of the proverbs.

4. Data presentation and Analysis

4.1 Historical Proverbs

Máa wí máa wí, ọba kì í p'òkọrin “Keep saying it! The king does not kill a singer”

The proverb originated during the reign of during the reign of Aláàfin Siyanbola Ladigbolu I. In Yorùbá culture, words carry power, especially in the mouth of an artist. For generations, masquerades, bards, and court poets have served as fearless voices of the people, using satire and performance to challenge even kings. This tradition is captured in the saying: Ọba kì í pa ọkọrin” — The king does not kill the singer.”

This saying is linked to an incident in Òyó during the reign of Alaaafin Siyanbola Ladigbolu I (1911–1944). His royal messengers, known as ajélé, became notorious for oppression and abuse of power. The excesses became intolerable. But no who could challenge the king's messengers without risking the wrath of the palace. However, Àgbórákò, a famous Egungun (masquerade) troupe of Òyó, led by a bold oral artist known for his sharp tongue and fearless performances. Àgbórákò decided it was time to speak truth to power in the only way the people understood: through theatre.

When this news got to Aláàfin Ládìgbòlù, he was furious. He gave the immediate order to arrest Àgbórákò. The arrest was swift, but the backlash was explosive. The people of Òyó were not prepared to watch their beloved artist silenced. Within hours, a massive demonstration erupted in the streets. Thousands poured out, chanting and demanding the immediate release of the masquerade singers. At this point, elders reminded the king of an enduring principle: “Ọba kì í pa ọkọrin”, a king must not kill or silence an singer/artist. Recognising this cultural boundary, the Alaaafin released them.

As Àgbórákò regained freedom, the people chanted: “Máa wí! Máa wí! Ọba kì í pa Ọkọrin!” Since then, the phrase has remained a powerful reminder that in Yorùbá society, artists have the right—and duty, to speak truth to power. This proverb is rendered to those in power that are trying to silence pressure groups or artist.

A kì í dáké á ù wí, a kì í wò sùn-ùn á dáràn “one cannot make verbal errors when silent just as one cannot get into trouble by merely watching”

This proverb has its origin in the Òyó empire during the reign of Alááfin Sàngó. Alááfin Sàngó incited disagreement between Gbònká and Tímí àgbàlé. He ordered Gbònká to travel to Èdẹ to fight with Tímí àgbàlé. On the order of Alááfin Sàngó, Gbònká travelled to Èdẹ. He fought and defeated Tímí àgbàlé, and later brought him to Òyó for Alááfin Sàngó. Despite the presence of Tímí àgbàlé at Òyó, Alááfin Sàngó was not satisfied with the outcome of the fight. He ordered that a fresh contest should be conducted at Akèsán market. The fight was reconvened but Gbònká still became victorious. He beheaded Tímí àgbàlé and threw his head at Sàngó. Gbònká after disrespecting Alááfin Sàngó by his action, told the king that he (Gbònká) should be thrown into fire for seven days. The king ordered his servants to fetch fire wood that would be used to burn Gbònká and he was thrown into fire. Gbònká was burnt in the fire for seven days but came out of the ashes. After the incidence, he gave Alááfin Sàngó five days ultimatum to vacate his throne otherwise he would use ordinary stone to kill him. When Sàngó heard this, he was silent for a moment and the Òyó mèsì inquired from him if he had something to say about what Gbònká said. Sàngó told them that he had nothing to say that he regretted his wrong decisions which had already boomeranged. He also told the Òyó mèsì that he was happy that Gbònká gave him five days to abdicate the throne. Alááfin Sàngó, after a sober reflection, told the Òyó mèsì that one could not be silent to commit blunders, and longtime of observation cannot amount to crime. It was after this incidence that the proverb became wide spread in Yorùbá land. This proverb is rendered to someone to caution his/her steps and utterances before it is too late.

Àifète méte àifèrò merò lómú ọmọ ìyá “Lack of cooperation makes six siblings to die in the same slave market”
méfà kúsí oko ẹgbẹfà

During the reign of Alááfin Abiodun in Òyó, there lived a man named Abogunrin from Òkè Èsò. He had six children, but they were constantly in conflict with one another. Their father repeatedly warned them to end their hostility and live in unity, but they refused to heed his advice. After the death of their father, each of the six children independently borrowed ẹgbẹàá (six pence) from the same moneylender in order to finance his burial. This action contradicted the traditional practice, which required that only one sibling be chosen to take responsibility for the loan, while the others engaged in their personal occupations to assist in repayment. Instead, all six siblings worked simultaneously for the same moneylender in an effort to repay their individual debts. They labored from morning until afternoon before they could eat, leaving them with little time to attend to their personal livelihoods. As time passed, they became unable to endure the physical demands of working on the lender’s farm. Eventually, all six of them died in the process of repaying the loans they had collected. This proverb is used to promote unity and cooperation among friends, communities, groups, and towns where disunity or hostility exists. It serves as a reminder that lack of cooperation and mutual support can lead to collective failure and unnecessary suffering.

Èni tí yóò bá pé láyé ojú rẹ yóò ríbi “Whoever desires to live long, should be ready to witness horrible things”

History has made us to understand that Alááfin Olúàso was the sixth king who reigned in Òyó. Some historians say he lived up to four hundred years before he died. His panegyrics below confirmed that he actually lived long.

Olúàso, ọgbọgbọ ìyàwó	‘Olúàso, with many wives’
Ó ọ̀sàrẹ̀wà, ọ̀sàkín	‘He displayed beauty and bravery’
Ó gbó, gbó, gbó	‘He lived a long live’
Ó ọ̀mọ owú pa tírà sọ̀rùn	‘He used iron melting instrument to design his neck’
Ọmọ owú jẹ, jẹ, jẹ ó di abéré	‘The iron melting instrument reduced to a needle’

The panegyrics above are a testament to the fact that he lived so long that no one could determine his age. On one fateful day, his remaining grandchildren approached him, to ask about the secret of his longevity. He greeted and showered praises on them. He asked them of their parents who were his direct children, they told him that they were all dead. He told them that anyone who wants to live long must be ready to witness horrible things. This proverb is similar to another proverb that states that one cannot desire a long life and at the same be afraid of witnessing horrible events; one must choose between the two. This proverb is rendered to elderly people who see horrible things and trembled.

Ìjà olúbàdàn àti Olówu kò ní tán láíláí

‘The feud between Olúbàdàn and Olówu can never be resolved’

This proverb emanated from the feud between Olúbàdàn and Olówu in the ancient time. Olúbàdàn was a warrior and war monger. He was going to war on a particular occasion, and passed through the Ọbà-river. He pleaded with the river goddess to assist him and promised to give the river goddess n̄nkan ‘something’ after the war. On his way back home, after the war, he got to Ọbà-river and it was filled to its capacity. In order to fulfill his promise, he offered male and female slaves to the river, they were rejected. He offered money, clothes and expensive beads, they were also rejected. He consulted his Ifá for the way out. The priest informed him that he had not fulfilled his promise to the river goddess. The Ifá priest told him that his wife who happened to be Olówu’s daughter was the sacrificial lamb. He threw the wife inside the river. The news of what transpired got to Olówu and he demanded for his daughter from Olúbàdàn. This incidence led to an unresolved crisis between the two monarchs for a long time. Right from the period, the incidence became a proverb. This proverb is rendered to people who are fighting because of an unpardonable experience they shared with each other.

Àisòrò yán ọ̀rò ló pa Elénpe isáájú tó ní igbá wúwo ju àwo lọ.

‘Lack of explicitness killed the Elénpe who claimed that calabash is heavier than an earthen plate’

The proverb emanated from Ijelo kingdom where Elénpe was king. During one of his festivals, Elénpe summoned all his chiefs to his palace. He gave them drinks and during the merriment they were all drunk including the king himself. The chiefs were engaged in discussions before Elénpe cut in and told them, to pay rapt attention to what he wanted to say. He told them that he and his chief Àgòrò had divergent opinion on a particular issue for a long time and that it was time for it to be settled permanently. He informed his chiefs that whoever lied between the two of them should be beaten to death. The town people and the chiefs agreed to the term and they asked them what they were arguing about. The king said that he told Àgòrò that calabash is heavier than the earthen plate but he disagreed. The chiefs knowing full well that the king wanted to kill Àgòrò, brought dried calabash and earthen pot for the king to weigh the one that is heavier. That was the time the king remembered that he was not specific about the type of calabash that is heavier than earthen plate, but before he could open his mouth to retract his statement, the chiefs and the town people beat him to death. The chiefs knew that the King wanted to kill Àgòrò that was why he brought the argument. This proverb is rendered to caution people to be explicit in their utterance by clearly stating their terms and conditions.

A kí ni n̄jé a kí ni, afihàn n̄jé afinihàn èwo ni pèlè ará ìjàyè tí n kója lójúde Ògúnmólá

‘Let the greeter remain a greeter, and an exposor remain as exposor, what is greeting Ìjàyè man going in front of Ògúnmólá’s house’

Ògúnmólá was an Ìbàdàn warrior that was captured at Ìjàyè during war and imprisoned at Kúrumí prison. ògúnmólá escaped from the prison and ran to Ibadan. After this, one Ìjàyè man who happened to be Kúrumí’s son was passing in front of Ògúnmólá’s house in Ibadan. One of Ògúnmólá’s servants who knew the man started shouting at the top his voice “the Ìjàyè man going” so that Ògúnmólá could hear. The man did not respond but it got to a time that everybody in the market focused their eyes on him. The man was furious and wanted to pick up a quarrel with the servant. The man was later taken to Ògúnmólá who the servant thought would avenge his torture on him but Ògúnmólá instead took good care of him. He gave him food and told him that he was not involved in his feud with Kúrumí. The servant who exposed the man became ashamed because his scheme did not work out. This proverb is rendered to someone who is using cunning method to expose his mate to their superior.

Bí a bá fẹ̀ rẹ̀nìjẹ̀ ní káwí èwo ni Ọba n̄ pè ọ̀ lỌyò

‘If cheating is the intent, let it be known, but it should not be attached to King’s summon at Oyò’

This proverb emanated from Ìláró Kingdom. There was a stingy businessman named Okanla Alao. He was not a native of Ìláró but had strong business exploits and achievements more than that of the natives. The indigenes were jealous of him; they cooked up a story to implicate him. They told him that he was summoned by the Aláàfin at Ọyò. After a careful and thorough check of his character he discovered that he had not done anything to warrant the summon. He then told Olú of Ìláró and his chiefs that if they wanted to cheat him, they should let him know but should not include the King’s summon at Ọyò. This proverb is rendered to discourage anyone who wants to cheat another person through cunning means.

Dàda kò lè jà, ó ní àbùrò tó gbójú

“Dada cannot fight but has a brave brother”

After the demise of Ọ̀rànmiyàn, Dàda Àjùwòṅ also known as Àjàkà who was the heir to the throne was made king. He was a weakling who could not fight any war as a result all the town that were under the control of Ọ̀rànmiyàn were taken over by Olówu Ogúnjà. This made the Ọ̀yó people to dethrone Àjàkà and enthroned Sàngó his younger brother. When Sàngó became the king, he waged war against Olówu Ogúnjà and won. He took back all the towns that were under their control. This proverb is rendered when an elderly person has no power, wisdom or means to solve problems but has a younger sibling who possesses the means to do what the elder brother lacks capacity to do.

Bí Onírèsé bá kò tí ò fin gbá mó, 'If Onirese refuses to design calabash, the one he
èyí tí ó fi sílẹ̀ kò lẹ̀ parun had produced will never perish'

Onírèsé (Elésèè) is the foremost calabash carver or designer of his time at Ọ̀yó. He was known for his dexterity in calabash carving. Thus, people from far and near normally patronised him. He was the one who shut the menace of the Nupe (Tapa) people. As a result, Aláàfin made him a king in a town that is very close to the Nupe (Tapa) people. As soon as he became king, he had no opportunities to continue in his former trade because of the new responsibility. This proverb is rendered when someone who had excelled in his field of endeavour but does not continue in the line of trade again but his antecedents remain relevant.

4.2 Non- Historical Proverbs

1) Èfí ni iwà rírú ní í rú 'Character is like smoke: it fumes'

This is an observational proverb; it was created through the keen observation of an entity and the study of its reactions to certain elements over time. Yorùbá are keen observers, they noticed that smoke cannot be curbed or confined. They also noticed that smoke determines what is being cooked, because it carries the aroma of the delicacy. The Yorùbá, out of their ingenuity, likened human character to smoke which cannot be confined without taking its natural course in the life of the owner. The metaphoric use of character and smoke in the proverb shows the creativity and sense of comparative analytical minds of the Yorùbá people. This proverb simply means that character cannot be confined, over time it will show in the way of life of the owner. This proverb is rendered to someone who is pretending to be nice.

2) Àtijó tí alákan tí n sepo rẹ̀, kò tó ó se ọ̀bẹ̀ ' Since the crab has been making its
oil, it is no ingredient for cooking'

The Yorùbá people, through their keen interest in studying the behaviour of insect, animal, living and non-living things around them, noticed that crab produces a kind of emission in its hole that looked exactly like the palm oil they use in food preparation. They also noticed that the emission cannot be used for cooking human meal because it is not the same with palm oil. The proverb has four symbolic elements: epo 'oil', akàn 'crab' se ọ̀bẹ̀ 'cook soup. The oil means resources that are produced by an entity, individual or group. The crab symbolises the person/persons or group who are asserting efforts to produce something. The negative marker kò in the proverb indicates that the product is not useful for the purpose it ought to serve in their domain. This proverb is rendered to rebuke someone who cheating or making earnings from dubious means without nothing to show for it.

3) Adiyẹ̀ n láagùn, iyé ni kò jẹ̀ ká mọ̀ 'The chicken's sweat is veiled by its feathers'

The ancient Yorùbá people observed that sweating is common to human beings and mammals. They also draw the inference that sweating may not be limited to human beings and mammals alone. They hypothesised that birds may also sweat but their covering feathers may not make it visible. The Yorùbá people noticed that the innermost parts of the chicken's feathers are exactly like the wool that can absorb sweat coming out of its body. There are three symbolic items in the proverb: adiyẹ̀ 'fowl' is metaphorically used to represent a human being that is struggling to make a head way in life. Ilaagun 'sweat' is the efforts that the person is putting in place to make it in life while Iyẹ̀ 'feathers' are the obstacles or challenges that are preventing or limiting the efforts from showing or paying off. This proverb is philosophical and as well as sociological. The society wants to see a struggling person showcasing worthwhile achievements that correlate with their efforts without having deep thought of the impediments that prevent or restrain their successes. In real-life situation, the society expects that a newly married couple should put to birth very early but there may be sicknesses which may prevent conception that might not be opened to the society. In another parlance, a man who earns good salary but could not afford basic necessities of life because he has spent his money on his children

may be seen as an unserious person without considering his expenses. This proverb is rendered when someone is still struggling without any tangible evidence of success or breakthrough.

- 4) Ààrò tí kò bá ní iná nínú ni adiyẹ́ ń yé sí ‘A tripod without fire is where chicken lays egg’

A typical Yorùbá tripod that is used for cooking on daily basis is always very hot as a result of constant cooking. Often times embers are left in the tripod to facilitate further cooking without stress. The heat emitted by the tripod will not allow chickens to move near it let alone laying eggs there. The observation of the Yorùbá people is that chickens normally lay eggs where it is cool. This proverb has three symbolic elements: ààrò ‘tripod’ which stands for place, domain or even human being, iná’ fire’ symbolises chaos, violence or power (physical or spiritual) and adiyẹ́ ‘symbolises an innocent person looking for where to succeed or a rude person who wants to advantage of other people. In real-life situation, it is only in peaceful environments that innocent people realise their potential, that is, peace and progress work hand in hand. However, iná’ ‘fire’ symbolises power (physical or spiritual) to resist attacks or incite violence which can prevent insults or rude behaviour from anyone who does not know their boundaries. This proverb is used to charge an individual with authority to avoid being too lenient or soft.

- 5) Aáyán fẹ́jé jọ, adiyẹ́ ni kò jẹ ‘The cockroach wants to dance but the chicken does not allow it’

Cockroaches are insects that dwell in the refuse or hidden parts of a house. Whenever they come out of their hiding places to look for food, their zig-zag movements resemble dance in the sight of the ancient Yorùbá people. While they are looking for food, the predator, chickens normally cut-off their journey. This proverb is philosophical and it has sociological implications. This proverb has two symbolic words: Aáyán ‘cockroach’ which is metaphorically used to mean life, existence, joy, youthfulness or strength. While, adiyẹ́ ‘chicken’ means death, old-age, sadness or sickness. In real-life situation, the cockroach has the connotations of life, existence, joy, youthfulness or strength that can be cut short by the chicken, which are sadness, sickness, death, infirmity. The Yorùbá people through their insightful thought noticed that aspirations, projections, plans, thoughts are good when time permits them, but as good as they seem to look certain things may prevent their realizations. This proverb is rendered when sad events happened, most especially when young person with bright future died unexpectedly or when bad circumstances hinder the success of an individual.

- 6) Adùn ní gbèyìn ewúro ‘Sweetness is the after taste of bitter leaf’

This proverb depicts the keen observation of the ancient Yorùbá people. Bitter leaf is used for different purposes, prominent among which is cooking of delicious soup. The leaves will be squeezed thoroughly with water to reduce the bitterness. The squeezed leaves are used directly as vegetable with melon or added to another soup to spice it up. After, the initial bitterness of the leaves when it is consumed, sweetness comes after it. This proverb is symbolic in the sense that ‘Ewúro’ bitter leaf can be likened to legitimate human struggles to achieve success which often times have a rough or harsh beginning but with a happy ending. Sweetness’ Adùn’ signifies the positive results of hard work. So, the proverb is rendered as an admonition to young people to be patient, that success will be the end products of their struggles. This proverb can also be rendered to encourage industrious people to persist on their trade or endeavours since it would end in joy.

- 7) Bí a bá jẹ̀kọ́ tán àá dárí jì ewé ‘After a meal of corn meal, the leaves are spared’

This proverb is derived from direct observation of the eating habit among the ancient and modern Yorùbá people. Most of their foods are served in calabash or plates but pap is wrapped in leaves. After eating the pap, the leaves are of no use and are thrown away. The fact that the leaves are not consumed alongside with the pap means that they are pardoned. There are two symbolic words in this proverb: èkọ́ ‘pap’ and ewé ‘leaf’. The pap as used in the proverb can be likened to someone who has no power to protect himself, thus whenever he/she misbehaves there will be stringent consequences. However, the leaf as used in the proverb indicate somebody who will be pardoned because of his/her nature. In such instances, forgiveness is automatic whether one likes it or not. This proverb is used among the Yorùbá people to advice people to forgive someone who they cannot punish or harm with their positions. It can also be rendered to seek for forgiveness from elderly people or authority after showing remorse.

- 8) Bí ajá kò bá rí kì í gbó ‘A dog does not back without a cause’

Dogs are domestic animal that have natural hunting instinct. They are used for different purposes in the ancient time as well as the present time. In the Yorùbá setting, dogs are used to hunt games, ward off thieves or miscreants. The only method used by a dog to alert its owner is barking which signals different things based on the setting. In the farm, during hunting, barking may indicate that the game is near or the dog has killed a game. At home, the barking of a dog may mean that a strange fellow is around the vicinity. The Yorùbá people also believe that dogs have supernatural vision of seeing spirits and demons, and so, bark when they feel the effect or the presence of one around their domain. Barking of a dog may also signal threat to it or show its presence. The Yorùbá believe that dogs do not bark without a cause, meaning something must have triggered its reactions. In common parlance, actions may cause counter reactions, that is, something must trigger certain reactions in an individual. For instance, in Yorùbá settings, marriage is a family matter thus the parents of both the groom and the bride must agree to the union. However, if one of the parents disagrees with the union, it is believed that the elderly folks have seen something untoward to necessitate the disapproval. This proverb is rendered to caution against an imminent danger that is not immediately visible.

- 9) Bí iná kò bá tán láṣò èjè kí tán léèkán ‘If lice are not exhausted in clothes, blood stains will never leave the nails’

This proverb is a product of the keen observation of the Yorùbá people about happenings in their immediate environment. This proverb showcases the sequence of things in life. That is, one event conditions another event. It may also be likened to the instance of cause-and-effect reactions. The proverb is a conditional statement, it presupposes [+ condition, + existence] as well as [- condition, - existence]. The proposition in the proverb is that the presence of lice necessitates the occurrences of the blood stains. This proverb is rendered to acknowledge the preponderance of one event that eventually led to another.

- 10) Ebi kì í wọ nú kí ọrọ mīràn wọ ọ ‘Hunger distracts attention’

This is an observation proverb. It emanated from personal feeling that hunger can disrupt one’s thinking and this is buttressed by another Yorùbá adage: bí ebi bá kúrò nínú ise, ìṣé bùṣe ‘satiety assuages poverty’. One thing about hunger is that it only affects the person that is hungry. As a result, it would block his reasoning as long as the hunger persists. It is not unlikely that hunger could prevent comprehension, attention and effective listening. Thus, the only solution to an hungry man is not advice or words of encouragement but food. This proverb is rendered to prevent unwanted talks when better solutions can be provided.

4.3 A Sociolinguistic Overview of Historical and Non-Historical Proverbs

From the data in 4.1, it is logical to argue that historical proverbs were not originally witty sayings. They were inferences drawn from events that actually happened to people and/or communities in the past but with lessons that could be used for admonition before they became proverbs. Thus, historical proverbs serve as a means of preserving history, body of knowledge and events that happened in a particular Yorùbá kingdom that have future significance. Most of the historical proverbs depict the life style of the ancient Yorùbá, their world view, settings, perception about life and people around them. For instance, the proverb that demonstrate the virtue in silence to avoid trouble or taking unwarranted actions that will have grave implications (see 4.1, (2), (3) and (5)). It is a form of reference to the past lives of Yorùbá ancestors in their developmental stages. Historical proverbs are the aftermath of events, circumstances, situations and happenings whose bearers were entangled by circumstances. The Yorùbá people who witnessed the events at the time of occurrence used them for admonitions, allusions and illustrations. As time goes on, their use/usage for inferences became prominent and they served three purposes: àríkọgbón, ‘lessons’ àwòkọṣe ‘worthy of emulation’ and àkàwé ‘inference’ among the Yorùbá.

This present study disagrees with Lucas (1965) claims that the inventors of the proverbs are unknown. It is argued here that the person who witnessed the events, memorised what transpired and used them for admonition are the inventors of the proverbs; this implies that historians are the inventors of historical proverbs. This fact is corroborated by the sayings that: Bí ọmọde bá kọ iyán ana, àwọn àgbá a’ fi itàn balẹ ‘If a child forsakes the stale pounded yam, the elder will provide historical antecedents.’ In the opinion of the researcher, the elderly are the historians (eye witnesses) who can relate what happened to the person who did the same thing in the past. It is logical to say that if historical events that became proverbs did not occur historical proverbs may never exist. Non-historical proverbs are

products of keen observations of events/ phenomena, in-depth reasoning and creative thinking. Thus, creative thinkers are the inventors of non-historical proverbs due to their deep insight of events happening in their environment. It must be noted that without history, historical proverbs cannot be in existence. However, creative thinkers may still come up with witty sayings due to their observational adequacy and accuracy. Thus, it is also argued that references given to historians who may likely be eye witnesses of historical events that became proverbs should be different from creative thinkers. The historians witnessed the events while creative thinkers observe both events and phenomena. Although, the Yorùbá society owns the two types proverbs enumerated (see Abiodun, 2000). This study suggests that the acknowledgments below:

Àwọn àgbà ló sọ pé ‘The elders say that’
 Gégé bí òwè àwọn àgbà ‘According to the proverb of the elderly’
 Kí iyeṅ maa jé ti èyin àgbà ‘I give the credit to you elders’

should be used restrictively as prefaces to pay homage to elders on historical proverbs alone. However, inventors of non- historical proverbs may not be known because they are not tied to any Yorùbá kingdom. Thus, the acknowledgements:

Yorùbá bọ wọṅ ní ‘upon reflection the Yorùbá people say ...’

should be used as a preface for the non-historical proverbs, since the witty sayings are products of keen observation of events, persons and the immediate environments of both ancient and modern Yorùbá people. It must be noted that historical proverbs differ from non-historical proverbs based on some facts. The language of historical proverbs is narrative as shown in the proverbs in 4.2 (1-10) while the choices of words in non-historical proverbs are analytic. Historical proverbs are sealed because events that led to them are not likely to exist again, since the happenings at the period shows the developmental stages of the ancient Yorùbá people. Non-historical proverbs are open ended and new events may trigger a creative thinker to formulate another one. For instance: Èni tí ò simi owó wíwá kó má fi èlẹ̀wọ̀n sẹ̀ yẹ̀yẹ̀, ìgbàkúgbà ni òrò ti è náà lè jàsi agodi ‘whoever that has not stopped chasing money should not make mockery of prison inmates because at any time their fate can lead them to prison’. This proverb is a product of a creative thinker who is in tune with contemporary societies and their craving for wealth and luxury. The simple analogy that can be drawn from this witty saying is that, creative thinkers can still create new proverbs to meet the exigencies of current realities of time.

5. Conclusion

In this study, we have examined both historical and non-historical proverbs. It is argued that the historical proverbs are events that were not originally witty sayings but became one from the inference drawn from them to teach moral values, culture and tolerance. It is also shown that non-historical proverbs are products of creativity in the use of words through the keen observation of people, things and happenings. This study disagrees with Lucas (1965) on the inventors of proverbs, arguing that historians are the inventors of historical proverbs while creative thinkers are proponents of non-historical proverbs. This study concludes that there should be a dichotomy in the acknowledgments used to preface the two types of proverbs. This study recommends that acknowledgments should be selectively rendered, as clues to the proverbs being rendered.

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