

Indigenised Critical Thinking and Epistemic Cognitions: An Ethnopragmatic Analysis of Tshivenda and Yorùbá Proverbs

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Abstract

This article examines the nature, use and meanings of proverbs as both tools of discourse and for expressing the ideological outlook among the Vhavaṅḁa of South Africa and the mores of the Yorùbá of south-western Nigeria. Within the Vhavaṅḁa and Yorùbá cultures and traditions, proverbs, as a form of folklore, are verbally expressed and transmitted from one generation to another. Inherent in these elements are the cultural and ideological traits that are easily identified by both the native speakers and listeners of the two cultures. To satisfy its exegetical and hermeneutic ambitions, this article analysed a selection of Tshivenda and Yorùbá proverbs, with the analysis undergirded by ethnopragmatics and the contextual theory of meaning. The proverbs were selected on the basis of a predetermined set of themes, namely, proverbs about cooperation and interdependence, nature, trees and other plants, animals and reptiles, people, body parts, children, craftiness and consequences, ingratitude, obstinacy and pride as well as didactic, motivational and reassuring proverbs. Tshivenda and Yorùbá proverbs were found to be both direct and indirect tools that are used to bring out the Vhavaṅḁa's and the Yorùbá's cultural identity and the inherent traits of their ideologies. It is recommended that paroemiology be considered in the various spheres of "formal" African epistemologies and pedagogies.

Keywords: proverbs; language; culture; ideology; folklore

Introduction

Like other African societies that regard orality as a vital instrument of their indigenous knowledge systems (Makamani 2012), the Vhavenḁa of South Africa and the Yorùbá of south-western Nigeria have since time immemorial created and transmitted time-honoured oraloric modes of knowledge production (Ademowo and Balogun 2014; Adeyemi 2005; Mafela 2008; Mugovhani 2016). Consequently, the Vhavenḁa and the Yorùbá have a myriad of folkloric elements such as proverbs, idioms, riddles, metaphors, and symbols that help project the various creeds of their cultural identity, history, heritage and knowledge (Mugovhani 2016). Of particular interest in this article are the Tshivenḁa and Yorùbá proverbs. For the Yorùbá in particular, proverbs are essentially appreciated through the adage (cf. Delano 1979; Harris 1992; Ibrahim 2016):

Öwe l'ẹsin ọrọ
Ọrọ l'ẹsin öwe
B'ọrọ ba sọnù
Owe la fi n'wa

[Proverbs are the horses of words
 Words are the horses of proverbs
 When words are lost,
 Proverbs are used to look for them.]
 (Ibrahim 2016, 76)

In the above excerpt, the Yorùbá liken the proverb to a horse, foregrounding the idea that proverbs not only carry along the subject under discussion, but also, in instances where the interlocutors veer off from the subject matter, the proverb is used to track it. Thus, the practical extrapolation of a proverb recounted above is that proverbs essentially serve as vehicles, like horses, through which ideas are communicated and shared (Ibrahim 2016). Among the Vhavenḁa and the Yorùbá, proverbs, as folkloric elements, are used as tools for providing direction, counselling, support, castigation, remedies and admonishment, among other purposes.

The fact that the Vhavenḁa's and the Yorùbá's social interactions are inundated with proverbial expressions makes the analysis of proverbs a valuable endeavour in the identification of varied aspects of social discourse in the African context. The examination of Tshivenḁa and Yorùbá proverbs in this article is based on the conviction that, in these languages, proverbs are truly the prismatic verbal expression of the substance of folk culture. Therefore, the wealth of knowledge provided by the Tshivenḁa and Yorùbá proverbs needs to be continually acknowledged to avert a monumental wastage of knowledge and understanding (Ibrahim 2016). In an effort to prevent this wastage, this article presents Tshivenḁa and Yorùbá proverbs as among a variety of vital indigenous modes that African societies tend to employ to underscore the significance of their experiences, ideological outlooks and other accentuations of their consciousness. The article proceeds into a critical exegesis of the general nature,

meaning and significance of Tshivenda and Yorùbá proverbs, with the aim to highlight a dialectical relationship between these languages in terms of their unique instantiation and espousal of societal values, vices and virtues through proverbs. The article further appreciates that this relationship is reflective of the cross-border ideological resonances that African languages share, an aspect that should encourage the valuation of African traditional folklore in the design and production of epistemologies and pedagogies across the continent.

The Definition and Nature of Proverbs

Although proverbs are a phenomenon that most people are familiar with, it is still difficult for most scholars to arrive at a universal definition of proverbs (Ebonso et al. 2012; Fasiku 2006; Mieder 1989, 1993; Trench 1905). Although it is difficult to arrive at a universally accepted definition of proverbs, people know what is meant by the term, because proverbs are a universal phenomenon (Adewoye 1987; Fasiku 2006). What differs from one culture to the other is the meaning that is attached to proverbs. Hence, proverbs and proverbial sayings are used in different settings, and consequentially, the appropriateness of each proverb depends on the context. This is why a proverb must be analysed in each of its unique social contexts (Ibrahim 2016). When deciphering the semantic aspects of a proverb the contextual understanding is important, because the proverbs of a community or nation are actually an ethnography of the people. Thus, if systematised, such a people's proverbs can provide a penetrating picture of the people's way of life, their philosophy, their criticism of life, moral truths and social values (Akporobaro and Emovon 1994).

Ebonso et al. (2012, 210) regard proverbs as “metaphorical statements of the folk, which are incisive in their propositions, terse in their formulations, and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth they express.” For Taylor (2003), proverbs are the simple truths of life that contain the ethical and moral values of a society. Therefore, beside their connotative and aesthetic significance, proverbs mainly present graphic statements that express a truth of experience (Ademowo and Balogun 2014). The beauty and to some extent enchantment of proverbs lie in that they say what is often readily perceived and accepted as an indubitable truth. This truth is normally premised upon and derived from the people's experience of life, human relationships and interactions with the world of nature (cf. Yusuf 1997).

Functions of Proverbs

Proverbs are social modes of communication; they not only have a dominant role in most African societies, but also have a different function and level of theoretical meaning that make them key contraptions as well as expressions of a culture's viewpoints on a variety of important topics and problems (Barry 2000; Finnegan 1970). Mafela (2008) adds that proverbs are techniques for reflecting meaning and culture as well as the experiences of a given society. Proverbs are also prescriptive because they have the power to determine human conduct in a multitude of contexts and situations

(Ibrahim 2016). According to Ibrahim (2016), proverbs are used to avoid being blunt, which is culturally appropriate when elders are addressed, even when elders requested one to speak in the first place. Typically, proverbs are employed to alleviate obscure points in arguments. Bascom (1984, 98) asserts that proverbs, by virtue of their expression of morals and ethics, become convenient standards for (1) appraising behaviour, (2) expressing social approval of those who conform to accepted conventions and ridiculing deviants, (3) warning against defiance or derision of an enemy or rival, and (4) counselling against actions that cause social friction, open hostilities, or direct punishment. Proverbs also serve to protect the self against feelings of inadequacy, allowing rationalisation of beliefs, attitudes, and actions that would otherwise be socially unacceptable (Ebonso et al. 2012, 211).

The Use of Proverbs among the Vhavenḁa and the Yorùbá

Most of the Vhavenḁa people currently inhabit the north-eastern part of the Limpopo province (South Africa) in the Vhembe District along the Soutpansberg mountain range, northwards into the southern part of Zimbabwe. This area is just south of the Limpopo River, which is the border between Zimbabwe and the Republic of South Africa. The Vhavenḁa ethnic group is endowed with a wide range of ingrained precepts and understandings, which are often embedded in their proverbs, riddles, folktales, poetry, songs and various ritual performances. Thus, the philosophies, motives, attitudes, values, beliefs and notions of the Vhavenḁa are entombed in various oral resources and literary corpuses. These resources contain the wealth of indigenous traditional knowledge among the Vhavenḁa people. Tshivenḁa proverbs constitute the key structural materials of the Tshivenḁa language. Just like other forms of traditional knowledge, Tshivenḁa proverbs provide insights into the attitudes, behaviours, practices, motivations and salient issues; they are also omnipresent in the Tshivenḁa social life.

The Yorùbá, who also form part of the subject of this article, constitute the majority of people in south-western part of Nigeria, and are also found scattered in diverse countries all over the world (Fasiku 2006). The Yorùbá people “are highly culturally refined, a fact that is attested by their conduct especially during face-to-face interaction across various age groups” (Fakoya 2007, 3). Fasiku avers that one of the distinctive features of the Yorùbá is their language, and proverbs further give it an aesthetic quality. Hence, the proverb, for the Yorùbá, constitutes a powerful rhetorical device for the shaping of moral consciousness, opinions and beliefs (Akporobaro and Emovon 1994). Among the Yorùbá, proverbs have become so interwoven with living speech that they can be heard at any time and occasion (Fasiku 2006). Proverbs among the Yorùbá also serve as a means of achieving clarity and conciseness in discourse. Thus, in their general day-to-day language, the Vhavenḁa and the Yorùbá have their own philosophy to explain life and living. This implies that there is always a close connection between knowledge encapsulated in the proverbs and the day-to-day lives of people in traditional African societies.

Theoretical Considerations

As the primary vehicle through which societal ideologies, values, etiquettes, belief systems and cultural mores are transmitted from one generation to another, language is indispensable to a given people (Olanrewaju 2020). In fact, “African languages thrive on the deployment of proverbs to ground the social import of numerous conversational exchanges” (Fakoya 2007, 1). Since every language has its own culture-laden meanings, it is imperative to rely on a theoretical framework that can abet the translation and decryption of Tshivenda and Yorùbá proverbs into English. For that to happen, the adoption and application of a theory of meaning cannot be overemphasised. Hence, to achieve its exegetic and hermeneutic ambitions, this article employs the context theory of meaning. This theory is an aspect of pragmatics studies (the invisible meaning), which provide frameworks from which meaning can be ascribed and deduced (Olanrewaju 2020). Generally speaking, pragmatics, as the study of language use, is concerned with the meaning of utterances rather than grammatical sentences or propositions. Through pragmatics, it is possible to focus on the meaning in use, that is, what is meant by the speakers in their utterances, and how speakers can allude to a variety of aspects in their utterances and yet listeners firmly grasp what is meant (Olanrewaju 2020; cf. Kubayi 2013). Thus, language users are able to connect sentences with the contexts within which they are appropriate. It is therefore safe to conclude that (ethno)pragmatics is not only the study of language usage but also a description of language from the vantage point of the users and how these users ascribe meaning(s) in conversational situations. This also implies that language is used in situational contexts, and that certain meanings are attributed to utterances produced in a variety of contexts. The contextual theory of meaning becomes helpful in the analysis of proverbs because, as a pragmatic theory of meaning, it mainly focuses on what the linguistic form is used for, and not necessarily what the word actually means. This shores up the notion that the most important fact about language is its social function.

Methodology

This article adopted a qualitative approach and a descriptive design. It provides a systematic analysis of purposively selected day-to-day proverbs from both the Tshivenda and Yorùbá languages and subjects them to critical analysis. Although proverbs essentially come from day-to-day anonymous sources, Milubi’s Tshivenda grammar book, *Ngoma ya Vhatei* (2004), and Owomoyela’s (2005) book, *Yoruba Proverbs*, served as primary sources from which the analysed proverbs were harvested. Furthermore, the authors intuitively identified and added synonymous proverbs to the ones collected from the aforementioned sources as well as other Tshivenda and Yorùbá proverbs. This became possible because one of the authors is a native Muvenda while the other is a Yorùbá native speaker. As such, the study of proverbs in these two cultures assumed an intuitive method in that the analysts also identified Tshivenda and Yorùbá proverbs and their interpretations based on their sociological/cultural understanding of the proverbs (cf. Ntshisaulu 2012, iii). Furthermore, access to previous ethnographic research and literature searches provided this article with the cultural knowledge

embedded in both the Tshivenḡa and Yorùbá proverbs. The analysis entailed a content analysis of the selected Tshivenḡa and Yorùbá proverbs, particularly those proverbs whose subject matter centred on these themes: cooperation and interdependence, nature, trees and other plants, animals and reptiles, people, body parts, children, craftiness and consequences, ingratitude, obstinacy and pride as well as didactic, motivational and reassuring proverbs.

Proverbial Propositions, Translations and Implications in Tshivenḡa and Yorùbá Cultures

While quite a number of proverbs are considered for analysis in this article, it must also be acknowledged that numerous others are not covered here due to spatial limitations. Thus, only a few Tshivenḡa and Yorùbá proverbs are foregrounded in this article to advance the notion that most African proverbs, irrespective of ethnic and geographical boundaries, are in consonance thematically and philosophically. In the following sections, the Tshivenḡa and Yorùbá proverbial propositions, translations and implications are presented and discussed to validate this claim. The subsections commence with a comparison between the Vhavenḡa's and the Yorùbá's espousal of collectivism and interdependence and culminate in the didactic, motivational and reassuring proverbs among the Vhavenḡa and the Yorùbá.

Proverbs that Promote Cooperation and Interdependence in Tshivenḡa and Yorùbá Cultures

Among the Vhavenḡa and the Yorùbá there are proverbs that promote solidarity, unity, cooperation, reciprocity and collective action. Such proverbs are used to enforce, reinforce and even remind people about the necessity of creating and sustaining a harmonious co-existence. Examples of such proverbs include:

(a) Tshivenḡa Proverbial Propositions: *Munwe muthihi a u ḡusi mathuthu / Mulenzhe muthihi a u tshiimbo / Ḥanga nthihi a i lidzi tshikona / A dzimana u ḡa malombe, mukosi wa lila a a phalalana / Vhana vha muthu vha kovhana ḡhoho ya nzie* (cf. Milubi 2004, 151).

Proverbial Translations: One finger cannot pick up grain / One leg cannot dance to a song / One reed flute does not perform *tshikona* [*Tshikona* is the Tshivenḡa royal music and dance] / People may begrudge one another the victuals, but in trouble they rally to help one another / Children of the same descent share the head of a locust.

(b) Yorùbá Proverbial Propositions: *Agaga owo kan jo gbe eru de ori / Owo omode ko to pepe, ti agbalagba ko wo akeregbe / Ole ti o gbe kakaki oba, ibo ni o ti fon? / Omode nise, agbalagba nise ni a fi da Ile-Ife / Ogun omode ki se ere ka ogun odun* (cf. Owomoyela 2005).

Proverbial Translations: One finger cannot lift a basket / Just as the child's hand cannot reach the rooftop, the adult's cannot fit into the gourd / The thief that stole the king's trumpet, where would he play it? / The child has his duty, the adult has his/hers too, that is how we created the ancient city of Ile-Ife / Twenty children cannot play together for twenty years.

The five sets of Tshivenḡa and Yoruba proverbs in example 1 above all signify the same thing, that is, the significance of teamwork, which further evinces a peaceful co-existence of people in society. Thus, among African societies such as the Vhavenḡa and the Yorùbá, it is common to find people who live together as a social unit striving to help one another in trying times. The emphasis in these proverbs is that one should not insist on executing Herculean tasks alone or suffering alone because in a social unit where collectivism is valued, people will always try their best to assist those in need of help. For this reason, isolation is discouraged in a communal society. Moreover, in a society where collectivism is promoted, individualism and selfishness are often frowned upon. Therefore, through the sets of proverbs recounted above, it is safe to assert that both the Tshivenḡa and Yorùbá proverbs promote solidarity, collective action and interdependence.

Tshivenḡa and Yorùbá Proverbs about Nature

(a) Tshivenḡa Proverbial Proposition: *No ruḡwa mvula na vhuya na ḡumbu* (Milubi 2004, 159).

Proverbial Translation: You were sent to bring rain but you brought back a storm.

(b) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Eniti a ni ko wa wo gobi, ti o nwo gobigobi.*

Proverbial Translation: You were sent to bring rain, but you brought back a storm.

The proverbial implications of the Tshivenḡa and Yorùbá proverbs cited above emphasise the necessity of listening carefully and doing as instructed. Through these proverbs, people are encouraged to focus solely on executing the task or running the errand at hand to its maximum accuracy, as per the requirements of an instructor. Consequently, the proverb dissuades a messenger from falling prey to idleness and distractions, because these might result in him or her engaging in activities that misalign with the primary assignment. To avoid this, one must focus on what he or she is sent to do and nothing else. The words "rain" and "storm" in the proverbial translations serve as indications that, as a result of either not listening attentively to the sender or the messenger's idleness in the process of executing the delegated task, the messenger ended up failing to do as instructed.

(c) Tshivenḡa Proverbial Proposition: *Shango a ḡi ḡahali, hu ḡahala muthu* (Milubi 2004, 159).

Proverbial Translation: The earth does not expire, people do.

(d) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Aiye ni a ba ola, aiye ni a o fi si lo.*

Proverbial Translation: We found everything on earth; on the earth we will leave everything.

The above proverbs are often proposed by or ascribed to a person who is fed up with the pleasures of the world. The proverbial proposition is followed by the conclusion that one cannot exhaust the pleasures that the world has to offer, precisely because the earth (world) always outlives human beings. Through this proverbial proposition, people are informed that it is not only unnecessary but also unwise to live for nothing else but mere pleasures of the world. The proverbial proposition does not suggest what one should live for in order to avoid coming to this conclusion—it leaves it to the listener to decide what truly matters in life.

(e) Tshivenda Proverbial Proposition: *Tshisima tsha phanda tshi vhulahisa dora* (Milubi 2004, 160).

Proverbial Translation: A distant fountain keeps one in perpetual thirst.

(f) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Omi ti a ba mu ki san koja eni* (Owomoyela 2005, 33).

Proverbial Translation: Water that you are destined to drink would not flow away from you.

The central idea expressed in the proverbs above is that being anxious or nervous is not helpful. Furthermore, the proverbs foreground the notion that one's heart is never at ease, especially when one waits for the fulfilment of a promise. In addition, in an instance where one's lover is in a distant land, the longing for him or her is perpetual and results in the person living in anxiety about the prospects of the relationship continuing.

Trees and Other Plants as Themes in Tshivenda and Yorùbá Proverbs

In the Tshivenda and Yorùbá oraloric transfers, there are proverbs that also draw their thematic interests from trees and other plants to transmit social mores and ideologies. This is evident in the proverbs below:

(a) Tshivenda Proverbial Proposition: *Muri u vhavhaho u bva tsindeneni* (Milubi 2004, 160)

Proverbial Translation: The bitterness of a tree comes from its stem.

(b) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Omo osan lo nko ponpo ba iya re.*

Proverbial Translation: It is the orange fruit that invites attack onto the parent tree.

(c) Tshivenda Proverbial Proposition: *Ńwana wa mbevha ha hangwi mukwita* (Milubi 2004, 164).

Proverbial Translation: A rat's pups never forget the path that leads home.

(d) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Owu ti iya gbon ni omo yio ran.*

Proverbial Translation: The needle threaded by the mother will be knitted by the child.

The implication here is that a child inherits unruly behaviour from its parents. As a result, parents take responsibility for their children's unruly behaviour, an idea further captured in the translation of the Yorùbá proverb, "an unruly child brings shame to its parents." All the above proverbs attribute children's unruly behaviour to the parents' inability to inculcate good morals in their children. Most importantly, children behave in an anti-social manner because they learnt such behaviour from their parents. If the former assertion is true, the opposite should also be true; if children exhibit good morals, they must have been groomed well by their parents. Implicit in the proverbs is the idea that parents have a significant role to play as far as the establishment of children's ethical conduct is concerned. Therefore, parents should try to establish a good ethical conduct in their children essentially because charity begins at home.

Proverbs about Children in Tshivenda and Yorùbá Cultures

(a) Tshivenda Proverbial Proposition: *A u laṭi ṅwana nga phaḍi.*

Proverbial Translation: You do not disown your child because it has scabies.

(b) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Omo eni ki buru ka fi fun ekun pa je.*

Proverbial Translation: A child cannot be so unruly that we feed it to a lion.

The implication of the above proverbs is that a parent does not disown his or her own child because the child has scabies. This means that a minor defect in another should not be taken as a reasonable cause to make a complete break with the person (Mafela 2008, 33). If there is room to overlook the defect and still maintain social harmony, then harmony should be preferred over separation. This, however, does not mean that the defect should be left unaddressed. The emphasis is placed on the need to preserve the relationship over the desire to cut ties with someone who might have committed mistakes to the possible detriment of the relationship.

Animals and Reptiles as Themes in Tshivenda and Yorùbá Proverbs

(a) Tshivenda Proverbial Proposition: *A ri dzheni nari ri si na mmbwa.*

Proverbial Translation: We never confront a buffalo if we do not have dogs.

(b) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Ti aja ba ni eni lehin a pa obo.*

Proverbial Translation: If the dog has good backers, it will outsmart the monkey.

The proverbial propositions above warn against the habit of involving oneself in other people's issues without sufficient knowledge of the whole story. If one gets involved in other people's problems without adequate knowledge, one may be caught in the middle and end up accounting for what one did not fully understand to begin with. It also means that one must never start a fight without enough resources or power to win it. Therefore, when one starts a fight, victory must be certain; if not, one must refrain from the fight altogether.

(c) Tshivenda Proverbial Proposition: *Li naka li tshi hoha linwe didinngwe, li tshi hohwa li ri mavhala anga.*

Proverbial Translation: The leopard enjoys mocking another leopard's spots, but when it is mocked, it takes offense.

(d) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Ki a le akata lo tan, ki a to kilo fun adie.*

Proverbial Translation: Let us chase the vulture away first before admonishing the hen.

The idea entombed in the proverbs above is that people take delight in hurting others, but are unable to take it when the people they hurt avenge themselves. The proverbial implication is that one must never do to others what one would not want others to do to one. Therefore, treat others as you would want them to treat you.

Proverbs about People in Tshivenda and Yorùbá Cultures

(a) Proverbial Proposition: *Mutsinda ndi khwine, shaka ndi bulayo.*

Proverbial Translation: A stranger is better; a relative is death.

(b) Proverbial Proposition: *Eyin kule ni ota wa, ile ni aseni ngbe.*

Proverbial Translation: The enemy is outside, but the slanderer lives inside the house.

The implications of the proverbs recounted above are that one should prefer a stranger to a relative because a relative may be the death of one. It must be emphasised here that

the proverb is not necessarily encouraging social fragmentation or internecine clashes, but rather encourage people to be cautious around those with whom they are familiar. Caution is emphasised because people tend to let their guard down around the people they know and in the end suffer betrayal by those very people. By virtue of being close, kinfolk may know one's weakness and take advantage of that weakness to one's demise. Thus, to avoid betrayal and hurt, one should opt to work with unknown people.

(c) Tshivenda Proverbial Proposition: *Musheleli wa mushonga a si muvhulahi, muvhulahi ndi muputululi.*

Proverbial Translation: The murderer is not the one who put in the poison, but the one who untied the pouch (the supplier).

(d) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *A ko tete mu ole, ole nmu oloko.*

Proverbial Translation: If the farmer is slow to apprehend the thief, the thief might turn around and accuse the farmer of stealing.

The above proverbs imply that if something goes wrong, people should look for the root cause. This means blaming a person for committing a crime will not solve the problem; the best way to solve the problem will be to establish why the crime was committed in the first place. By determining the root cause, it will be easier to deal with the main problem effectively.

(e) Tshivenda Proverbial Proposition: *A hu aluwi muthu, hu aluwa mbilu.*

Proverbial Translation: It is not the person that grows but the heart.

(f) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Ti omode ba mon owo we a ba agba jeun.*

Proverbial Translation: If a child knows how to wash his hands clean, he will dine with elders.

The idea expressed above is that when a young person accumulates wisdom, he or she is likely to outrank the elderly people who might not be as wise. This is understandable considering that idiots also grow old. Therefore, age and experience should not be taken at face value as determinants of wisdom, because one might be old and experienced in foolishness whereas the other might be young but possessing the wisdom that might even help the ancient ones. If such a young person who is wise is noticed, he or she will outrank certain foolish elders, or he or she will be invited into the elderly people's discussions to contribute insights. The wise person, irrespective of whether they are young or old, will, however, always bear in mind that:

(g) Tshivenda Proverbial Proposition: *Mutukana ha endi, hu enda mukalaha.*

Proverbial Translation: The boy does not travel, the old man does.

(h) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Omode ba ni aso bi agba, ko le ni akisa bi agba.*

Proverbial Translation: If a child has more clothes than the elder, can he have as many rags?

The proverbial implication above is that old people know many things. Therefore, the elderly should not be despised in society because they possess the knowledge that might help the society in general. In essence, elderly people have lived long enough to transfer the knowledge, experience and wisdom that they gathered over the years to the benefit of the upcoming generation. Heeding the counsel of the elders might help the youth not to fall prey to avoidable mistakes and misfortunes. This is why in both Tshivendā and Yorùbá, it is strongly held that:

(i) Tshivendā Proverbial Proposition: *Tanzu liswa li ima nga lilala.*

Proverbial Translation: A new bush is supported by the old one.

(j) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Omo ti o ba si ipa ni a ma ngbe.*

Proverbial Translation: A child that shows wisdom will be lifted by the elder.

The above proverbs mean that, by virtue of desiring and heeding counsel from the elders, a young person will be both preserved and sustained by the counsel.

Contemptuous and Condemnatory Proverbs in Tshivendā and Yorùbá Cultures

(a) Tshivendā Proverbial Proposition: *Funguvhu lo ri a thi laiwi la fhira muḍi lo kovhela.*

Proverbial Translation: The crow did not heed advice against moving about at night, and as a result, flew past its home after dark.

(b) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Ti ara ile eni ban je kororo, o ye ki a tete so fun.*

Proverbial Translation: When your neighbour indulges in eating strange insects, you should warn him/her.

(c) Tshivendā Proverbial Proposition: *Tshilamba u vhudzwa ndi tshilila u vhona.*

Proverbial Translation: One who rejects counsel will experience self-inflicted calamities.

(d) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Eniti a nbawi ti o nwa orun ki yio parun ni ojiji.*

Proverbial Translation: One who rejects counsel will experience self-inflicted calamities.

The above proverbs imply that when one does not heed advice, mistakes and misfortunes are bound to happen. Therefore, if one does not heed counsel, calamities will be the consequence. The Vhaventḁa and the Yorùbá believe that one who does not heed wise counsel will learn eventually to heed it the hard way, i.e., on the sickbed. It is therefore unsurprising to find the Vhaventḁa and the Yorùbá taunting a person who rejected advice, which has led to times of self-inflicted agony.

Proverbs about Craftiness and Consequences

(a) Tshiventḁa Proverbial Proposition: *Khumbana vhulaelo, ntsa i vhuya nga vhuṭala hayo.*

Proverbial Translation: An antelope is bound to use the same path over and over again.

Proverbial Implication: When a person is caught in his or her own craftiness.

(b) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Ole lo nmo ese ole to lori apata.*

Proverbial Translation: Only a thief can trace the footsteps of a thief on a rocky surface.

Proverbial Implication: When a person is caught in his or her own craftiness.

Captured in the foregoing proverbs is the notion that one who has developed a habit of craftiness will eventually be caught in his or her own deviousness. This is because, in the process of being crafty, the person will create a pattern of a method of operation. This method of operation will eventually aid detectives to devise strategies on how to catch the person. Thus, both the Vhaventḁa and the Yorùbá believe that the unjust will ultimately be caught, and justice will be served to the victims.

Proverbs about Ingratitude, Obstinacy and Pride

(a) Tshiventḁa Proverbial Proposition: *Nyavhumbwa wa dagaila, wa kanda vho u vhumhaho.*

Proverbial Translation: The one who was helped has now turned against his/her helpers.

(b) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Igberaga lo nsiwaju iparun.*

Proverbial Translation: Pride comes before destruction.

The above proverbs warn against people's ingratitude, particularly towards the people who might have helped them to succeed in life. The proverb is recounted on the premise of the observation that people who are helped by others tend to despise or forget their helpers. This attitude also emanates from a sense of pride, which, according to the proverbs above, leads to a fall or destruction. The warning is also extended to those who might insist on doing things that will not yield any good results. Such people are told that their insistence will inevitably end in misery if they do not desist. Therefore, people should not insist on doing what is doomed to end in calamities.

Didactic, Motivational and Reassuring Proverbs in Tshivenda and Yorùbá Cultures

(a) Tshivenda Proverbial Proposition: *Maña a mutukana a si vhumatshelo hawe.*

Proverbial Translation: A boy's cracked heels are not necessarily his future.

(b) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Oju eni ti o ma la, a ri iyonu.*

Proverbial Translation: Whoever would prosper would endure hardship.

The proverbs cited above are used to inform people that, however gloomy it may be, there is always a light at the end of the tunnel. Therefore, people should not lose hope when facing times of distress. In addition, people are warned that they should not look at a poor person struggling today and write him or her off because one who is poor today might be prosperous tomorrow. This, however, is not left to chance, but is predicated on people's willingness to work hard and seize opportunities, as the subsequent proverbs emphasise:

(c) Tshivenda Proverbial Proposition: *Tsha kule tshi wanwa nga muhovhi / Mułakhulu u a fhinduwa.*

Proverbial Translation: That which is far is only accessed by those who reach out for it / The earliest bird catches the fattest worm.

(d) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Eniti o ya ara ni Ogun ngbe.*

Proverbial Translation: Whoever is swift would receive help from the gods.

According to the above proverbs, those who prepare and strive for them are the best at seizing opportunities. People are therefore encouraged to avoid indolence; instead, they should work very hard at attaining their dreams and goals. At some point, such hard workers will have to face times of difficulty. However, despite the difficulty, the Vhava and the Yorùbá would probably tell the person that:

(e) Tshivenda Proverbial Proposition: *Muhulwane u kanda mupfa a tshi u vhona.*

Proverbial Translation: A mature person steps on a thorn when they see that they are stepping on one.

(f) Yorùbá Proverbial Proposition: *Oju ti a ba ni di ale, ki ti aro se ipin.*

Proverbial Translation: The eye that will endure would not gather dirt at dawn.

Such proverbs purport the notion that one must endure times of distress. The basis of such endurance should be the reward that one hopes to receive at the end of the difficult journey. Therefore, among the Vhavenḡa and the Yorùbá there are proverbs that encourage resilience and hope, thus becoming motivational tools to those who might be on the verge of giving up on life, dreams and hopes of a better future.

Conclusion

This article aimed to highlight that proverbs remain a significant oral form with consistent relevance to the modern Vhavenḡa and Yorùbá people. Proverbs are also an effective and efficient tool in the transmission of cultural values, social mores and ethnic ideologies from one generation to another. It was found that there are resonances between thematic foci of Tshivenḡa proverbs and that of the Yorùbá. Based on this finding, it is recommended that proverbs form an integral part of sustainable pedagogies and epistemologies at primary, secondary and tertiary institutions of South Africa and Nigeria. Such pedagogies and epistemologies should highlight proverbs that encapsulate African selfhood, Afrocultural values and nation building. Furthermore, various stakeholders, including the custodians of the Tshivenḡa and Yorùbá languages such as cultural experts, lecturers, teachers, governments and language research centres, should collect, document and publish Tshivenḡa and Yorùbá proverbs. This will boost the indigenous knowledge base of both the Vhavenḡa and the Yorùbá people.

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