



A Classificatory Analysis of Fulbe Proverbs

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Abstract

This research is conducted purposely to investigate Fulbe proverbs and its classificatory analysis, and it is mainly limited to the three main dialectal zones of Fulfulde speaking in Nigeria such as Sokoto, central and Adamawa dialect. Fulbe proverbs have not been investigated extensively by previous researchers particularly for the three dialects. Therefore, this research is one of the major investigations of Fulbe proverbs specifically in terms of its classification. The work of Mohammed et al (2010) dwells strictly on proverbial names reflecting the concept of God and a bit of their morphological composition. There are also small collections of Fulbe proverbs by Ishak P. K. Mbáya (n.d.) which fails to go beyond mere listing of the proverbs of the language only. However, it has contributed to documenting some of them. Therefore, this study is intended to fill this gap by classifying the Fulbe proverbs.

Keywords: *Fulfulde Language, Proverbs, Rhetorical type, Epistemological proverbs, Philosophical proverbs,*

Introduction

Daudu and Yahaya (2008) in Harsunan Najeriya noted that Fulbe people are associated with the use of proverbs and who have good mastery

of speech. The authors further lamented the different forms in which Fulfulde proverbs can take such as: Rhetorical type B. Epistemological

and Philosophical proverbs. Daudu (2012) classified Fulfulde proverbs according to the following species as: Animals, Birds, Human, Insects, Liquid and plants. Examples;

- i. On liquids: naa narginolfuu toBata that is not every cloud bear rain
- ii. On plants: as binaandi Buri aawaandi. “That is transplanted being better than the sown one”
- iii. On humans: Bii bone sey bone “the son of adversity knows only adversity”

Therefore, based on the classification above we can notice that the proverbs are more on the concepts and things its formed.

Jauro (2011), classified Fulfulde proverbs and idiomatic expression based on the following such as: man, animals, nature, religion and society. However, the description in nature is limited to the major areas which did not capture much desired classification of the teaching of proverbs as the replica and wisdom of the people from generation to generation. In Bwala (2005) Kelson's (1971) definition of proverbs fits well with the perception and understanding of the word 'proverb' as meaning 'a wise saying with hidden meaning which usually has to be guessed'. Proverbs are often used to economize language use in forms of oral discourse. It is not surprising therefore, that term proverb has for a long time been receiving attention from scholars concerned with the field, among different communities in the world, including Fulbe community.

Historical Background

As claimed in Davies (1954), Badejo (1987), Mohammed and Badejo (2000) and Mohammed et al (2007) the word Fulfulde refers to the language, while Fulbe refers to the people speaking the language speaking different dialect. The distinct dialectal variation in the Nigeria among the speakers of the language include the following: Sokoto, central and Adamawa dialect of Fulfulde. Sokoto dialect constitutes areas like Sokoto, Zamfara and Kebbi state in Nigeria. Central Northern Nigeria dialects comprises places like Katsina, Kano, Kaduna, Jigawa, Yobe, Borno, Bauchi, Gombe, Plateau, Nasarawa, and Taraba states. Adamawa dialects comprises of the following areas Adamawa state, Sardauna local government and Gashaka local government area in Taraba state. Also in Chard Republic, Cameroun Republic and Central African Republic also,

including some parts in Benin Republic, Burkina fasso and western Niger Republic.

Literature Review

Fulfulde proverbs have not been extensively investigated which nearly contributed to the dearth of its literature on the subject matter. To that effect, general works on proverb from other languages are reviewed.

Proverb as has been described by many scholars in an economic way of saying something usually lengthy but in a short form full of intelligences drawn from the culture and experiences of the speakers perpetuated and accepted as a speech norm either in written or oral texts. According to Adejumo (2009:451) proverb is a universal phenomenon which is highly valued from the ancient times to the modern age. However, each scholar has tried to give a definition of this term according to his/her interest and scholarship bias. Whitting (1932:273-307) noted that proverb is "a short saying of philosophical nature of great antiquity; the product of the masses rather than classes, constantly applicable and appealing because it has been a semblance of the universal truth." Ojoade (2004) in Arinpe Adejumo (2009) expands Whitting's submission above by asserting that "Proverb is an international phenomenon and bearer of philosophical insight. In his opinion, through proverbs man can describe and understand the world in which he lives. "According to Sheba (2006) cited in Arimpe (2009) proverbs can be described as "apparent truths reflecting human experiences" conforming to the insinuation that they more often denote the philosophical views of a people through verbal and literary communications. Here we are enriched further to understanding the philosophical value placed on proverbs in terms of usage and appropriateness in describing vividly and succinctly, the norms accepted by a people. Durotoy A. Adeleke (2009) in his discussion of "Aspects of FulBe History in the area of Proverbs" explains that proverbs "apart from the complementary value which oral traditions serve different aspects of oral traditions such as myths, legends, folktales, and other verbal arts which include poetry, song and proverbs, are geared towards specific historical reconstruction."

For instance, Vanisa (1985:11) cited in Adeleke (2009) states that proverbs "express the experience of contemporary situations or events, morals to be drawn from such occurrences or situations, or express intense emotions with them." This may be true of other oral traditions, but more than any other;

proverbs are more or less a sort of brief compass that comes handy in everyday discourse of a group of a people. Trench (1905, rpt. 2003) cited in A. Alabi (2009:515) assert that proverbs can be explained lightly as “condensed quintessential wisdom. “Alabi further explains that proverbs are viewed largely and used as a form of an ancient art or instrument that is readily useful in many cultures and languages all over the globe. Most scholars therefore agree that proverbs are like the antiquities or reservoirs of the literary traditions of a speech community. Commenting on the functions of proverbs, Yusuf (1995:207) quoting Kirkman (1985:58) cited in Alabi (2009:515-516) affirms that “with the aid of a proverb, one can aim to promote an endorsement to statements and opinions forecast something express doubt reproach someone accuse someone of something, justify or excuse somebody, mock somebody, jeer at somebody's misfortune, repent something, advise against something, or interdict somebody from doing something, and so on, and so forth.”

Victoria further adds that proverbs are highly held in high esteem by Africans and the custodians of this rich tradition are largely the elders. Quoting Finnegan (1970:421) she observes that the Zulu of South Africa "are exceedingly rich in proverbs." In fact, this is also true of many African languages. As for researches into proverbs, Adeyemi (2009:531) has rightly noted that “critical works on proverbs abound all over the world. Wolfgang (1975) states that philologists, literary critics, folklorists, sociologists, anthropologists and others have investigated proverbs in Western world. He located 144 proverbs (in his) investigation of Anglo-American authors, 122 German authors and 69 of Roman authors. He then concludes that 'about 325 investigations of proverbs in the works of authors' writing in a Western language represent an impressive number.

Methodology

The data that was used in this study were primary and secondary sources of data, the primary sources of data were collected from the (10) native speakers of the language from the three dialectal zones of Fulfulde speaking in Nigeria, who are competent in speaking the language both oral and writing, with age ranging from 45-and above. The secondary sources of data include published materials, articles, journals, and books related to research topic “Fulbe proverbs” enable the researcher to get fuller grasp of each proverb in terms of its semantic and structural content.

Analysis

Based on the proverbs collected the researcher is judgmentally observed them and linguistically was able to come up with the following classifications:

➤ **Rhetorical type:** Alabi (1997) noted that this type of proverb is concerned with using the language in expressive manner in order to influence people to take step or act in a particular manner. Rhetoric proverbs are thus pithy saying that are geared toward persuading or influencing people to do certain things. Example:

i. Vinngel be kuroori soobaajo Yadav mawve

The literal translation of the proverb is: “the young carrier of flour is the friend of elderly travelers. Which is semantically portrays the honor and dignity attributed to responsibility. It thematic ‘Binngel’ meaning ‘a boy’ and; kuroori’ ‘flour;

ii. Lugga giteejo fuzzes bojji law:

The literal translation of the proverb is: One with deep eye should have to start weeping earlier:

This implies that someone who is lazy and can not always get prepared to face challenges as they come, but always wait for intervention from anywhere. Therefore, the proverb emphasizes the need for early preparation of whatever one wants to do.

iii. Tidfo yo dad do

The literal translation is: the industrial excels.

The semantic meaning of the proverb indicated that man should prepare to face the challenges of the world around him if he needs to succeed.

➤ **Epistemological proverbs:** These are proverbial whose origin lies in history, stories folklore, myth, legend and other oral traditional sources. They tell a story or narrate an incident at a glance. Some epistemological required commentary for their meanings and import to be understood. Examples:

1. Debbo be gorko Baaru tan woni wola.

The literal translation is: A woman like a man, she lacks only the quiver.

The proverb comments on the bravery of a woman, it also justifies the saying of what man can do a woman can do even better. The proverb also derives its message from history that is from the time of immemorial when a woman fought a battle and won.

2. Liingu wii no godfo ekkirta tuufugo nonnon ngu ekkirta luutugo.

The literal translation: Fish says since the man have learned how to trap, it has learned how to escape.

This proverb derives its message from folklore in which human attributes are given a animals/non-human creature. That means changing situations gives birth to innovations. For example, if a student develops means of cheating in the examinations, referentially the authorities also develop new strategies of apprehending or detecting the cheating.

3. Didactic proverbs: they are proverbs that teach oral lessons. They are meant to install some moral training or disciplines. In the hearer especially the children by exhibiting virtues and extolling them and identifying vices as well as condemning them from going astray. They are considered as teaching proverbs. Examples:

- a). Binngel yoBataa kosam dada mu'um.

The literal translation is: A child cannot pay back its mother's milk.

The proverb anchors an axiomatic fact, certain things are unquantifiable or priceless. No matter much the child gies the mother later in life, such is not worth her milk, given the child at infancy. By extension kindness, love and such virtues cannot be fully reciprocated as they are inestimably valuable.

- b). Soynde anndaagal wadi mbeewa aati fowru.

Literal translation: it is out of ignorance that make the goat attack the hyena

Best on our knowledge in relation to the two animals 'goat and hyena' our knowledge of the world makes us understand that it is ignorance that would make a person attack a more formidable enemy for such will be tantamount to his summary execution or punishment. The inference made here is that a wise man will always avoid having any direct encounter with his powerful adversary so that the latter does not liquidate him.

- c) jorngal anndi ko keccal wontiri.

Literal translation: Dry tree knows what is on fresh one.

The proverb is a didactic one address to the child. In FulBe culture where age is often considered a major determinant justifying one's attainment, the context of the proverb is revealing. The meaning evoked is that a young person should not be too ambitious to acquire all that the elderly one's have acquired. This instructing them situates the proverb within the context of advice, passed from the old to the young.

4. **Philosophical proverbs:** these are proverbs that are rooted in the study of the cosmos, the universe and the study of the world. They portray self-evident, truth, observable, discernible, empirical and philosophical that are often used as

veritable house by which words are conveyed and for emphasizing words, they will serve didactic purposes too. The following are some of the examples:

a). Fabru doggataa nder nyalooma mere.

Literal translation: A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing.

The proverb takes our mental conception or general knowledge of the toad as nocturnal animals. The sense of the proverb is that there must be a cause for everything strange that happens, there must be reason, at least no smoke without fire.

b). Mbaata dum iyeende.

Literal translation: Epidemic is like a rain.

The proverb emphasized the universality of ill-health. It is among the phenomena that go round, like the rain that falls on the roof of everybody. In essence, as rain does not discriminate sickness also visits all people. The tragedy that befalls one group, will befall the other group.

c). Jawmu suudu anndi ha ndu si'irta

Literal translation: the owner of the house knows where it's leaking.

The proverb states the principles of administration within the family context. Information is implicitly suggested as a social function which should be disseminated along the vertical axis. The message is that the leader or head of the house hold 67i.e., the husband should be the first recipient of sensitive information of the home.

The earlier works of Bwala (2005) has adequately dealt with the semantic content and contextual usage of FulBe proverbs. Therefore, the present paper focused on classifying the proverbs. This has further given insight on previous studies of FulBe proverbs.

Conclusion

This study of FulBe proverbs has revealed its characteristics of being rooted in the oral tradition of the speakers of the language in terms of their perception and experience of the world around them. The use of such oratory witticisms in any textual form by speakers of the language reflects the degree of their mastery of the language and its usage in discourse variety. The use of these artistic wise sayings adds tasteful colorations and flavor to texts in order to keep the audience alive throughout a text without losing interest in the discourse.

Principally in this paper we have seen that FulBe operates four (4) types of proverbs viz: Rhetorical, Epistemological, Didactic, and

philosophical/Analytical. However, the short coming of the work hinges on a limited scope of the sources of data for this study. Probably the instances of fewer cases of some of the FulBe proverb class like Rhetorical and Epistemological, types might have been richer than presented here. However, that is another area of investigation into FulBe proverbs. The varieties of the class types of FulBe proverbs suggest the rich semantics of the language which reflects indication of the possible turns in text.

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