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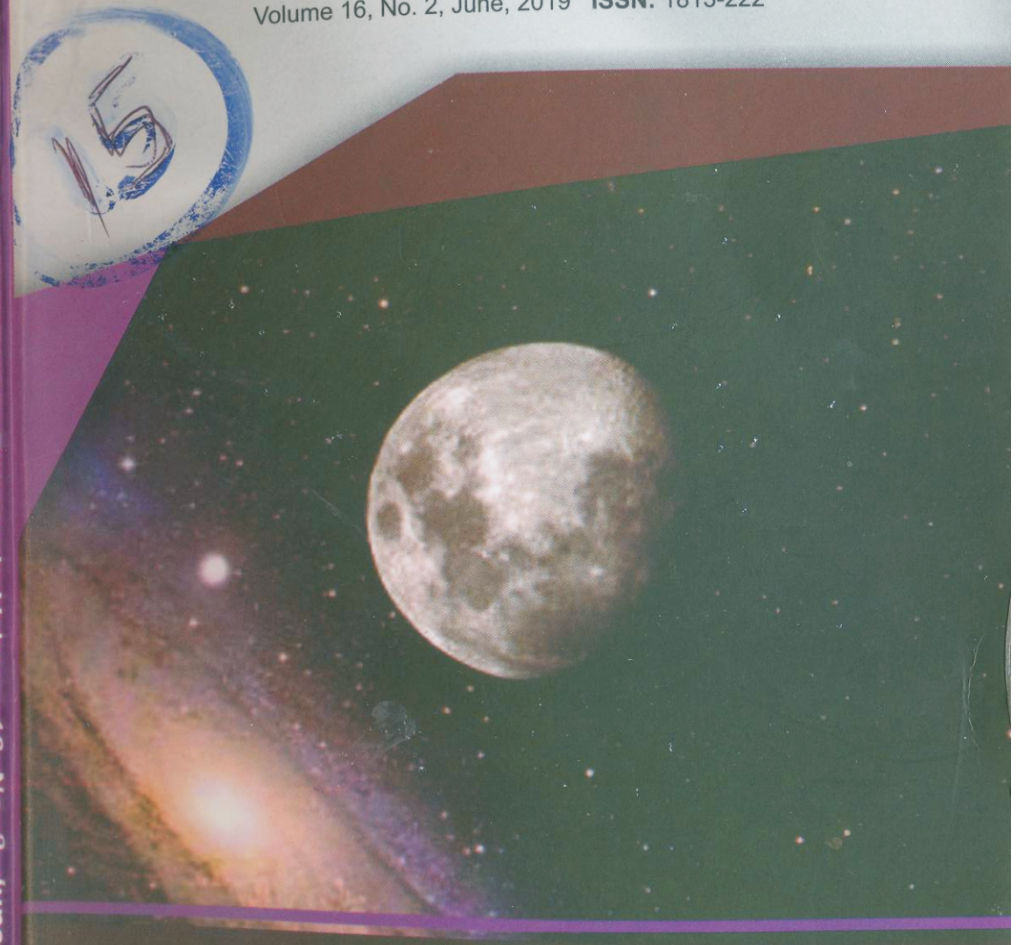
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Nigerian Proverbs as Integral Parts of Language and Culture: The Example of Ganmanganzhi (Nupe Proverbs) In Nigeria

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Abstract

Language is a living thing capable of being actively used to produce limitless expressions of thoughts in life. The dynamism with which language and proverbs in particular, yield themselves to various uses in man's attempt to communicate his thoughts and feeling is evident. Proverbs are old ways of expression developed to encapsulate and caption present new ways of life. This article attempts to examine proverbial language used in the Nupe community for communication and acculturaisation it serves as a supplement to the existing data in the area of poetry as a form of language use pregnanted with meanings and interpretable into many deep and surface structure levels. This studies on the poetry of an ethnic group is also an exposition into the linguistic contents and frames of the language of the Nupe ethnic setting. Part of the findings of this work is that from the exposition of the poetry of Nupe Language (Ganmangazhi), one can reconstruct the people`s world view, livelihood, existence, codes of conduct expected ways of behavior, taboos, tradition e.t.c

Introduction: What Is A Proverb?

A **proverb** (from Latin: *proverbium*) is a simple and concrete, popularly known and repeated, that expresses a truth based on common sense or experience. They are often metaphorical. Proverbs fall into the category of formulaic language.

Proverbs are often borrowed from similar languages and cultures, and sometimes come down to the present throsayingugh more than one

language. Both the Bible (including, but not limited to the Book of Proverbs) and medieval Latin. have played a considerable role in distributing proverbs across has concluded that cultures that treat the Bible as their "major spiritual book contain between three hundred and five hundred proverbs that stem from the Bible". In his list of the 106 most common and widespread proverbs across Europe and Africa. However, almost every culture has examples of its own unique proverbs.

The Nupe: Geographical Resources

This write up is on the language of a particular ethnic group i.e, the Nupe cultural group. Therefore, it becomes necessary to give an ethnographic background of the people whose language is being studied. The Nupes can be found generally in the present northern part of Nigeria, in Niger state, Kwara north, Kogi state and also in Lagos municipality and badagry. There are a group of people who dwell mainly in the trans Niger area. They speak Nupe as their first language. Others Nupes can be located in Nassarawa, Benue states and the federal capital territory.

They are primarily Muslims with a few Christians and followers of African traditional religion. They are both fishermen and farmers in terms of their social-economic reliance and there are also several sub groups of the Nupe people. These sub groups such as bassa-nge, kakanda, dibo, gbigidi etc. all speak related dialects of the Nupe language. S.F. Nadel (1942) and M. Manson (1932) are the major scholars who gave extensive geographical and environmental descriptions in their researches on the Nupe A.A Idrees (1988) observes the land as being redivided into almost two equal parts. He says:

> Along the Niger, Leaba and Yankyadya both situated on the north and west banks respectively. They form the north west boundary of Nupeland with the bargawa(borgu) on the south-west , Gidi and Eggan serve as the end point of Nupe territory. In the hinterland, Nupeland shared common borders with

> the Yoruba sub-groups of Igbomina, Yagba, owe, oworo on the west bank. South of Nupe is the Yoruba speaking emirate of Ilorin. Similarly on the northern borders are the kamuku, Gbagyi and the Kamberis who share the northern borders with the Nupe, all before the British intervention.

Aliyu Idrees(1988) geographical placement of the Nupes gives the pre-colonial structure form of the Nupe co-existence among its ethnic parts. However, since the study is neither a historical nor a geographical research per say, it is a study of a people's linguistic formations used to promote unity. It is believed that in Bida emirate (Niger State); in 1857, the missionaries for example, Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1864) who was the bishop of the Niger territory, produced notes on the Nupe orthography. Henry Johnson (1882) yet, was the first to develop the vocabularies of the Niger and Gold coast including from "English to Nupe words". This was expanded to Nupe grammar translations of the Gospel of John in 1887 for the use of schools in the Niger mission of the CMS by the same Henry Johnson, a Nupe linguist.

Nupe Language

The general notion about language is that every language is the center of the activities of the set of people who use it. This is to emphasis that languages are specifically coded to conceptualize certain natural meanings and understanding among its people. Hence, language denotes only not only the lexical (words), the syntax (phrases and sentences) the semantic (meaning) sense in which they are used; The culture sense of the use of language is known as the pragmatic use of language which is quite applicable to Nupe language like all other African languages. The context of every utterance matters for its overall meaning. For example, when a speaker says: yaminuwonfi (Give me water). The behavioural contextual response of the hearer is to act according to Nupe context.

A Pragma- Linguistic Approach to Nupe Language

Although, there exists various theoretical frameworks on African language, Amuta (1989) Eagleton (1976) and frye (1957), a pragma-linguistic theory of language should be considered for any language analysis involving a set of people in the same ethnicity. The current issue of dialectics in literary writings needs to be given special attention because archetypes of language and style are reflected from the traditional linguistic compositions. To be able to affect successfully, a change in the present status quo of Nigerian's Vis a vis the Nupe citizenry, for example, the language, which the Nigerians understand, must be used. The concept of dialectics itself is the use of cultural materialism for effecting a change in the society. It is good to note that language is a crucial material and this is clearly evident in the use of Nupe language by its natives who manipulate language aspects to suit contextual situations and experiences. Pragmatics is a distinct level of linguistic investigations that deal with utterances and the meanings of these utterances in the social context. (Korint 1992: 3 and Leech 1983: 24). The pragmatic theory is applicable to the instance of the use of Nupe language as can be observed in the data used for the analysis done here. This data is taken from the utterances of Nupe persons randomly chosen across Nupe settings in Niger state, Kwara state and Kaduna states. The analysis done here examines the cultural establishments, beliefs, practices, norms, custom, rules and regulations, views that dictate the meaning system of the Nupe language participants; the Nupe speaker and the Nupe recipients the listener.

From the study of the language forms in the data collected in Nupeland, one can deduce Nupe metaphysics, vision, beliefs, mannerisms, cosmology, entire practices and ways of life etc. and this is major reason why the language of a set of people becomes an imperative study for the revelation of the culture and tradition of that set of people, in this case; the primary question for the Nupe of this research becomes; of what socio-cultural significance is the Nupe language for the unification of the community? A study like this clearly gives traces to the Nupe geographical, economic and historical development, their collectivity and communalism. The argument here

is that Nupe from all parts of the country use Nupe language to verify the reason for their unity and advance in search for a common state like the 'Ndaduma State' one time agitated sameness of language remains the tool of identity of the Nupes all over.

Nupe language reaffirms Lakoff (1990: 43) description of language as " a grammar of formal systems; which transmits communcal symbols through internalized cultural roles of the language. This internalized, intra Nupe rules in the language are exposure of the Nupe aesthetic and the visionary world. Emphatically, language interactions are generated from man's experience in the environment. The presupposition posed here is that language is reflected through culture and used by the people in the same cultural group like the Nupe whose generic concepts are cognitively stored in memory, according to events, roles, images, emotions, propositions, logics, perceptions etc. A clearer picture of this can be seen from the analysis of Nupe grammatical parts listed below:

Nupe language can be divided into the following grammatical levels:

A) Phonological level
B) Morphological level
C) Lexical level
D) Syntactic level
E) Semantic level
F) Pragmatic level

Nupe Syntax and Community Proverbs (Ganmanganziti)

Syntax is the string of words put together to make meaningful a statement or a sentence. These include phrases, clauses, sentences and sentence types.In Isyaku Bala Ibrahim (2009) Understanding the difference between Eganmaganzhi (proverbs) and Eganchin in (Idioms) in Nupe language of Nigeria

It is established that breaking of the syntactic structures into parts is what enables better understanding of Nupe language. He delves into the proverbial meanings of statements in Nupe language. The function of these wise sayings (proverbs) is to educate, entertain,

teach morals and pull along the Nupe towards the right codes of conduct expected by the society. He made a list of some syntactic structures listed below distributable into their morphemic parts

1. Chinchin nna e tan gio A mother love affects the child
2. Eza e kpetso soko nikin nyia one who relies on God cannot fail
3. Batan naa wu ezu na, etsan A killer disease laughs at the herbalist

In the Nupe syntactic analysis, local imageries, iconic materials, domestic nuances are inserted to show case the aesthetic content of the society and to make the natives conversant with these cultural values.

The Speech Act Theory

In linguist pragmatics, according to Levinson (1980), speech acts, along with presupposition and implicature, is the major phenomenon that any pragmatic theory must explain.

Speech act theory is premised on the belief that engaging in speech act means performing the complementary acts of locution, illocution and perlocution (cf, Austin 1962). Briefly explained, the locutionary act is saying or uttering a sentence with determinable sense and reference, e.g. the fan is working.

The illocutionary act is the engagement in a rule-governed form of behavior. Different illocutionary acts include questions, assertions, requests etc. Traugott and Pratt 1980: 233; Adegbija 1987: 44). The perlocutionary act results from one's use of utterances. This is the intended or unintended consequence of or reaction to what is said (cf. Levinson 1980:5). This act is intuitively not part of the conventional meaning of the utterance, but derives from the context and situation of the utterance.

Principally, this theory deals with what speakers and hearers do with utterances in a discourse. A central element of speech act is that when utterances are made, there are intentions they have to fulfill. In

other words, utterances are goal-specific; not made in a vacuum. Traugott and Pratt 1980, Leech 1983, Adegbija 1987, among others list the different types of actions that constitute speech acts. These include statements, imperatives, verdictives, etc.

In performing these speech acts, the illocutors observe the co-operative principle (cp) (H. P. Grice, 1975). The cp is a quasi-contractual agreement entered into when one engages in conversation, other things belong equal. But things are not always equal. The cp agreement is often broken and conversational maxims flouted. This is because in the practical sense, language use cannot be so regimentally treated as to conform to a particular format. Thus, figurative features and rhetorical strategies like metaphor, sarcasm, irony, satire, oxymoron, hyperbole, litotes, and a host of others are major culprits in breaking the cp.These devices are pragmatic strategies. They are employed in speech acts to achieve better communicative effect. They are never intended to be interpreted literally. So, their interpretations are always at the master speech act level (cf. Adegbija 1985, 1987).

The question of implicatures and presuppositions (Grice 1975) is important to the study of cartoons. Implicature is the mid-way between what is said and what is implied but not overtly stated. It could be conventional (cf. Leech 1983) when an addition is made to the normal truth value of the utterance; or it could be conventional (cf. Grice 1975) when it derives from the general conditions which determine the conduct of conversations. Pragmatics is concerned with conversational implicatures.

Presuppositions are those items used by the author which he believes his readers already know through their shared background, either socio-politically or socio-linguistically. They condition utterances in discourse to avoid a 'merry-go-round' type of explanations. Better cohesion and understanding of the meanings of utterances are achieved when the writer and the reader have mutual understanding of the presuppositions. When there is a break in the circuit, communication is impaired. This happens more often when

metaphors or satires or sarcasms are interpreted as literal utterances. They are not literal utterances but belong to the group of indirect speech acts.

The selected Nupe proverbs are observed under the following speech act features;

A. The pragmatic presupposition

Pragmatics study how people comprehend and produce a communicative act and speech act in a concrete speech situation (conversation) as in J. L Austin(1962), H. P Grice(1975), J. Seale (1969), Yule (1996), P. Grundy(2000) etc.

Pragmatics involves a lot of concepts including the speech acts given focus in the write up; consist of interpretations within the context of speech. Linguistically, any speech act analysis would involve presupposition and implicature as major phenomena involving Austin (1962)'s locution, illocution and perlocution complementary acts.

B. Reference

This exists in the personified proverbial statement of no 4 chikalelezo yinsan.

Deliberate sleep is difficult to wake. The concepts of sleep and wake are references to human daily activities personified in this instance as indication of their importance to man's life. Hence, they are referenced like human.

C. Visual Imagery

Eye beye, Beye shigi

In open eyes, before dog eyes

Visual imagery is used to make comparism between human and non-human eye. The dog's eye is metaphorical of a sort of security watch over their land.

Findings and Conclusion

The general observation by language critics and scholars that language and society is inseparable is true of the Nupe society and its language (Nupe). These adaptations of linguistic forms into Nupe language therefore stand as a supplement to wide existing literature on the study of language and societies all over the world. Beneath the

use of Nupe language, there are some social factors that influence the appropriate use of the Nupe language structures. Each type of proverb use represent aspects of Nupe culture well coded and constituted in the utterance that specify the relationships between the Nupe speakers who use their language to represent their intuitive knowledge in the new world of plenty and environmental pollution. Nupe proverbs therefore serve as a strong hindrance to the destruction of the Nupe cultural values e.g, the word "esa" in Nupe represents 'chair' and the referential function of this word is the image of an object that has four legs and used for sitting down.

Apart from the referential function of Nupe proverbs, therefore, proverbs in Nupeland help to strengthen the ties of union created in Nupe greetings. Greetings on the land are signifiers of friendship and partnership. The Nupes use greetings in physical contacts with one another to ensure neighborhood well-being. Peace and tranquility of existence is ensured through the coded proverbial native form.

Despite language changes, each utterance is designed to perform certain functions such as informing the listener about some fact promising the listener that one will do something or ordering the listener according to cultural dictated to do something for you. Communal life experiences are explored in the interactive forums. Slight differences may exist in pronunciation between speakers that live at different geographical regions where the speakers come from. This may be as a result of the introduction of slangs and jargons into the language in an attempt to modernize the cultural terms. Nupe moderated words and phrases may also be the social class convergence to rate the categories of the language use. People on the high status group characterize their language use with unusual conventional words. There are also professional adaptations of Nupe language usage. These among other factors like age, sex, background created varieties of Nupe language peculiar to Nupe people from particular geographical regions of Nupeland; Kwara, Niger, kaduna, FCT, Kogi, Nassarawa state etc. The linguistic changes among the different sets of Nupe can be seen in Nupe proverbs, figures of

speech, symbols, metaphors and created auditory, visual, olfactory imagery.

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