

Thematic Analysis of Some Selected Hausa Proverbs

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Abstract

Proverbs as a form of oral Literature are the most consistent and most employed by the Hausa people than folktale, songs, chants, myth etc. They are frequently used in everyday situation. Hausa people as a society have their own culture which is strictly followed according to its doctrines that are strongly rooted in morality. In Hausa society, proverbs express morals and ethics of the people. Hausa proverbs maintain conformity to cultural values and accepted pattern of behaviour. Thus, proverbs are filled with allusions to several aspects of life. Proverbs are employed in different kinds of situation in Hausa society to control several activities without the use of force or harsh language. The themes which feature in Hausa proverbs are characteristically the same ones that form the basis of other literary forms. There are the theme of human vices, nature, social norms, good manners importance of children, nature of women and routes to successful life. There are many proverbs that relate to situation of despair, hope, courage, poverty and others. They are also use to caution, advise, praise and educate. Thus, this shows the extreme diversity of themes which feature in Hausa proverbs. This paper views some of the themes of Hausa proverbs.

INTRODUCTION

The study of proverbs offers a useful means of transmitting culture, social morality, manners and ideas of a people from one generation to another. Proverbs expresses the folk ideas, which underlie the thought and action of a given group of people. Abrahams (1973:117) define proverb 'as a short and witty traditional expression that arise as part of everyday discourse as well as in the more highly structured situations of education and judicial proceedings. Each proverb is a full statement of an approach to a recurrent problem. It presents a point of view and a strategy that is self sufficient, needing nothing more than an event of communication to bring it into play.'

A proverb is such a saying popularly known to express simple and concrete truth base on common sense and the experience of people. According to Bascom (1964:438) 'proverbs which are the most important type of aphorism in Africa have a deeper meaning than is stated literally; a meaning which can be understood only through the analysis of the social situations to which they are appropriate.

Hausa proverbs are also known as *Karin Magana*. The Hausa proverb is said to be the oldest and the most important genre of folklore which is used by the people in many contexts. Hausa proverbs give answers to recurrent problems; these proverbs are also used to revive history, to develop language, to entertain and to educate. Hausa proverbs touch on almost every aspect of the people's life. Akporobaro (2005:89) rightly observes that 'proverbs in Hausa language manifest the same wide range in topical interest and close attentiveness to the facts of human life, as do the proverbs from other major social ethnic groups. In addition, Hausa proverbs reflect the religious temper and heritage of the Hausa people.'

Hausa proverbs are used to express social approval and disapproval praise, criticize, warn and also advice. *Karin Magana* is very valuable to preliterate people, for whom words cannot be read, they are more valued when heard.

In many African societies the instinct for language, foe imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through concise and allusive phraseology can be seen particularly in proverbs. Finnegan (1970:390). *Karin Magana* can be seen to have an immense value to speakers and orators.

THEMES AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF HAUSA PROVERBS

Difficulties abound in the categorization of proverbs according to themes. Finnegan (1970:404) rightly observes that: 'Some proverbs can refer to practically any situation, it would be impossible to give a comprehensive account of the content of African proverbs.' This is absolutely true for there is no any aspect of life for which at least one Hausa proverb cannot provide an appropriate remark. In examining the themes of Hausa proverbs therefore, we shall limit our discussion to the major ones that are frequently used. In all, seven themes will be examined. The procedure here is firstly discuss each theme and secondly, list some examples that are relevant to the point being made under each theme. Thirdly, the applicable proverbs are quoted in the original texts, followed fourthly by their translations which are rendered as literal as possible in the process of translation. The

literal translation will make the subject matter readable and whoever is reading the work may find a certain touch of 'local colour' in phraseology...' Rattray (1913:xiii)

HOSPITALITY

The Hausas are well known for their hospitality. Some examples of Karin Magana based on this theme are *Shimfidar fuska tafi ta tabarma*.

A smiling face is a better welcome than the offer of a mat.

This Karin Magana implies that a welcoming face is better than the entire offer that will be given.

Ba bako ruwa ka sha labara

Give a stranger water and he will tell you the news.

This proverb gives the importance of a guest, meaning that if a guest is well taken care of he will give all the information needed

Bako rahama ne

A guest is a blessing

This proverb draws attention to the benefit of receiving a guest adding that welcoming a guest is such a blessing.

TRUTH AND SINCERITY

Among the virtues most cherished by the Hausa people is truth. Some of the proverbs associated with this theme include:

Gaskiya dokin karfe, makaryaci ba zai hau ba.

Truth is an iron horse,

a liar will not climb.

This proverb gives an insight into the power of truth.

Tsare gaskiya ko da wuta aka saka ka.

Keep to the truth even if they put you in the fire

This proverb insists on telling the truth without minding the consequences.

Gaskiya daci gareta

The truth is always bitter

This also shows the importance of telling the truth no matter the situation.

WOMEN

There are many Hausa proverbs that discuss the role of women in Hausa society, how they are perceived by the society, the men folk and how they also perceive the men. Examples of such proverbs include;

Matar na tuba bata rasa mijin aure

A woman who says I am sorry would always have a husband to marry.

Some women are strong headed while some are not. This proverb posits that those who ask for forgiveness when they make any mistake do not lack husbands.

Ba'ayi komai ba mace ta haifi mace

Nothing has been done a woman gave birth to a woman.

This Hausa proverb makes clear the point that in Hausa society, male children are preferred to female children.

Zaman ka kai kadai yafi zama da muguwar mace.

Living on your own is better than living with a wicked woman.

A wicked woman is avoided at all cost. This proverb explains that some men would rather live alone than marry a wicked woman.

SOCIAL CONTROL

Hausa proverbs are very useful in exercising social control. 'They are used to maintain conformity to the accepted patterns of social pressure as well as exercise social control.' Bada(1995:169)

Abinda mutum ya shuka shi zai girba.

What you sow is what you reap.

This proverb is used to counsel someone who is behaving in a bad way. Whatever someone does in life that person must accept the consequences of the action either good or bad.

In za ka gina ramin mugunta gina shi gajere.

If you are going to dig a hole of wickedness, dig a shallow one.

This proverb is against wickedness. If a person has to lay a trap for others, he is advised not to overdo it because he might be the one to fall into it.

Komai yayi farko zai yi karshe.

Everything that has a beginning has an end.

This proverb is self explanatory, meaning whatever the situation might be one will not dwell forever. It definitely has an end.

KNOWLEDGE

This is quite an important theme in Hausa proverbs. Examples include

Iya ruwa, fidda kai.

The knowledge or ability to swim is preservation of life,

The greater our knowledge, the greater our chances to succeed in what we want to achieved.

Ko ba'a gwaada ba, gatari ya san dutse.

Without a trial a hoe knows a stone

This proverb is saying that an educated person can recognize certain things by merely seeing those things.

PATIENCE

Patience is a major theme in Hausa proverb. Examples of proverbs associated with this theme include

Hakuri maganin zaman duniya.

Patience is a universal remedy.

This proverb is saying that we must be patience and not despair. This proverb could be used to silence a person who is complaining about the harsh condition of life.

Kowa yayi hakuri zai samu riba.

Anyone who is patient will profit.

Patience is the key to success in life. If a person is patient enough he will succeed. Patience is profitable.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Hausa proverbs are used in settling disputes among villages, towns, clans and even among brothers. The ability of the speaker to utilize the appropriate proverbs that refer to the subject matter in question, gives peace a chance easily. For instance in settling disputes between people, the speaker can utter this proverb:

Hannu daya baya daukan jinka

One hand cannot lift a hut

This proverb is used to show the importance of team work because no man is an island. You need someone to assist you in decision making or other activities of your life. You need someone to assist you one way or the other.

Zama lafiya yafi zama dan sarki

It is better to live in peace than to be a prince.

What you earn or what you can get cannot pay the price of peace because of its importance.

Kaso danuwanka kamar kanka.

Love your neighbour like yourself

It is without doubt that for you to do justice and to live in peace with your neighbours you must think of them the way you think of yourself.

CONCLUSION

Proverbs has been and remains a most powerful and effective instrument for the transmission of culture, social morality, manners and ideas of a people from one generation to another. The reason behind the efficacy of the proverb is that it is an aphorism, a wise saying based upon people's experience, and is a reflection of the social values and sensibility of the people.

Proverbs cannot be out-weight because of the fact they have been in existence and are still very vital in our day-to- day activities. Some of these proverbs have been there before our great grannies were born and are still transmitted from generation to generation. *Kunne ya girmi kaka.*

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