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The Body as a Toolbox in the Hausa Language: A Sociolinguistic Study of Hausa Proverbs

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Abstract

This paper discusses Hausa proverbs related to body parts and bodily functions. The Hausa people sometimes conceptualize body-related proverbs as tools used to perform certain functions virtually or in reality. Thus, this study attempts to explore some of these proverbs and analyze them within the framework of Linguistic Relativity, nowadays associated with Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf. Through the use of a purposive sampling procedure, the data (the proverbs) for the study is generated from a written textbook on Hausa proverbs and from non-participant observation of spontaneous communication among Hausa native speakers in Kano state, Nigeria. From the analysis of the selected proverbs, the study found out that Hausa people have a penchant of conceptualizing body parts as tools. And this further reinforces the belief that although in the Western world, some of the works associated with human body are, to a large extent, done by machines these days, in Africa, human body parts are still used as tools to perform a number of functions, hence their linguistic conceptualization as such.

Tsokaci

Wannan makala ta tattauna batu ne na karin magana masu dangantaka da sassan jikin Dan Adam da kuma aiyukan sassan jiki a harshen Hausa. A wasu lokutan, Hausawa kan yi amfani da karin magana masu dangantaka da sassan jikin Dan Adam a wani irin salo da kai kace wadannan Karin maganganun wasu kayan aiki ne da ake aikata aiki da su a gaske ko kuma a tinani. Don haka wannan makala ta yi kokarin zakulo wadannan karin maganganun sannan kuma ta fayyace su ta hanyar mahangar ‘Linguistic Relativity’ wanda Benjamin Lee Whorf ya samar. Ta hanyar amfani da ‘purposive sampling’, wannan makala ta zakulo wadannan karin maganganu a cikin wasu litattafai na karin magana da kuma sauraron hirarraki a tsakanin al’umar Hausawa dake garin Kano a Nijeriya. Bayan kallo na tsanaki tare da fayyace wadannan karin maganganu, wannan makala ta gano cewa Hausawa su na yawan amfani da karin maganganu masu dangantaka da sassan jikin Dan Adam ta hanyar da mutum zai yi tsammanin cewa wadannan karin maganganu wasu kayan aiki ne da ake sarrafa su a yi aiyuka. Wannan watakila yana faruwa kasancewar yadda yanzu haka a kasashen Turai yawanci injina ne suke yin aiyukan da a da mutune ne ke yi da jikinsu kamar irin su dako da daka da tafiye-tafiye da sauransu. Mu kuwa a nan kasashen Afirka har yanzu mutune da kan su ke yin yawancin irin wadannan aiyuka. Hakan shi ya sa watakila har yanzu wadannan karin maganganu su ke da matukar amfani a rayuwar al’umar Hausawa.

1. Introduction

- <1> The use of body parts as tools to perform certain specific tasks is an old practice since the beginning of the existence of humankind. Before the advent of technology—which brings about the creation of machines that assist human beings in carrying out certain tasks— human beings relied solely on body parts to do tasks such as farming, building, washing clothes and carrying objects. With the coming of industrial revolution which began in the 18th to 19th century onwards, machineries were created which relatively reduce the inherent hardship common to manual jobs. This is especially true in the western world that is more technologically advanced than the other parts of the world. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, perhaps because of the economic standards of the people, a lot of jobs are still done manually. And as such, different body parts are literally or metaphorically associated with different functions. Among the Hausa communities of northern Nigeria, for example, the head and the shoulder are associated with carrying loads, eyes for measuring things and legs for travelling.
- <2> The use of bodyparts as tools used for certain jobs is reflected in metaphors, including grammaticalized ones, in imageries, in idioms and in proverbs. Thus, this paper investigates the conceptualization of body parts as tools as enshrined in Hausa proverbial expressions. It has been observed that Hausa proverbs have been studied by many scholars, but none of them explores body-related proverbs based on their tool functions. For example, Bichi (2014) investigates the influences of Islamic religion on Hausa proverb. On his part, Almajir (2012) studies Hausa proverbs and their use as conflict resolution mechanisms. He identifies and discusses a number of proverbs, such as those that outline the inevitability of conflict, those that outline the causes of conflict, those that are used by third parties in conflict mediation, those that outline the peaceful relationship among human beings and those that outline the necessity of managing conflict. In the same vein, Lawali and Allagbe (2021) also conduct a study of Hausa proverbs and their roles in the promotion and maintenance of peace among the people.
- <3> Again, Abubakar explores Hausa proverbs in terms of their didactic influences in shaping the conduct of, and instilling moral and religious teaching in, *Hausawa*. He concludes that despite the impact of foreign culture that has been changing the ways of life of the Hausa people, "...proverbs, especially those that uphold dedication and obedience, are used alongside Islamic ethos to inculcate moral lessons in the typical northern Nigerian setting" (Abubakar 2017:138). Although Baldi (2012) and Almajir (2012) both undertake studies on body parts in Hausa proverbs, the two studies do not explore the conceptualization of the proverbs as tools. This means that the only study that focuses on body-related idiomatic proverbs is Almajir (2012) and Baldi (2012) and even those studies do not discuss the proverbs in relation to their conceptualization of body parts as tools.

Basically, there are not enough academic literatures on how *Hausawa* portray parts of the body as tools for doing specific jobs. Based on this fact, this paper attempts to fill in the gap by exploring how speakers of the Hausa language conceptualize body parts as tools used to carry out certain tasks virtually or in reality through the use of proverbs.

2. The Hausa Language and People

- <4> Hausa is one of the three main languages spoken in Nigeria (the others being Yoruba and Igbo). In fact, Hausa is a native language not only in northern Nigeria, but also in some parts of Niger, Chad and Ghana among others. The language belongs to the Western Chadic branch of the Afro-asiatic family of languages. It is spoken both as a native and as a second language, by a large number of people across many parts of central West Africa. With a population estimated to be around 50 million speakers, three quarters of whom live in Nigeria (Caron 2015: 4), Hausa is ranked as the second most spoken language across Africa after Swahili (Gordon 2008).

<5> Hausa people are predominantly Muslims. Their tradition of long-distance commerce and pilgrimages to the Holy cities of Islam has carried their language to almost all major cities in West, North, Central and Northeast Africa (Koki 2017). Like many other languages in Africa, Hausa is a tonal language, whose usual word order is subject-verb-object (SVO). Even though the language has a number of dialects, the dialect of Kano is believed to be the standard one. To this end, Hausa language is written in both Arabic (*ajami*) and Roman (*boko*) scripts. The world-wide prominence of Hausa language is such that it is used for news broadcast in many international radio stations, including the British Broadcasting Corporation (<https://www.bbc.com/hausa>), Deutsche Welle (www.m.dw.com/ha), Radio France Internationale (www.m.ha.rfi.fr), the Voice of America (<https://www.voahausa.com/>) and China Radio International (www.hausa.cri.cn). The language has, over the years, expanded its lexical items largely through coinage and borrowing.

3. The Concept of Proverbs

<6> Proverbs (translated as *Karin Magana* in Hausa) are wise sayings that offer practical wisdom about life. They give practical wisdom because they are often used to convey the virtues and norms common to a particular linguistic group. Proverbs also contain morals and other traditional views in a metaphorical sense. (Abubakar 2017:130). According to Furniss (1996:70), a proverb is a short statement that conveys a rich information, often in a hidden manner. Knappert (1989:2) corroborates this assertion claiming that proverbs are “short expressions of wit containing the wisdom of past generations in a condensed form, sometimes in rhythmic language, easy to remember and pleasing to hear”. That is to say, although a proverb may appear short, its meaning may be so condensed and so encompassing that it can be open to many interpretations and, at the same time, implicitly talks about information that can be useful in the life of the people. Along this line, Gulbi (2018) explains that proverbs are folk wisdoms, which form an essential part of the experience and the way of life of the people who produce them. As said earlier, it is important to note that proverbs are often meant to be understood metaphorically.

<7> Proverbs can also be explained from two contrasting theories of metaphor comprehension: the Extended Conceptual Base Theory (ECBT) and the Conceptual Metaphor Hypothesis (CMH). As developed by Honeck & Hoffman (1980), ECBT identifies four stages of interpretation of proverbs: the problem recognition stage, the literal transformation stage, the figurative stage and the instantiation stage. When proverbs are used during interaction, the listener has to first recognize the proverbs in question before attempting to attach any figurative meanings to them. From there, the listener tries to identify the two conceptual bases that inform the analogy between two contrasting sets of ideas that are explained through the chosen proverbs. Alternatively, the selected proverbs can also be interpreted on the basis of CMH proposed by Lakoff & Turner (1989). CMH argues that interpretation of proverbs is dependent upon listeners’ ability to draw a detailed, metaphorical mapping between two dissimilar domains. This means that for someone to comprehend proverbial expressions, he/she needs to identify the source domain which triggers the use of the proverbs in the first place. It is this identification that allows for the metaphorical mapping with the target domain. In the case of the proverbs used in this study, the source domains are the different body parts conceptualized as tools, while the target domains are the different ideas expressed via the proverbs.

4. Proverbs in the Hausa Language

<8> Like any other language, the Hausa language is also rich in proverbs. It is interesting to note that Hausa proverbs have been the focus of scholarly attention since as far back as early 20th century. Malumfashi & Ibrahim (2014:5) note that the study of Hausa proverbs began with the works of Edgar (1911) and Rattray (1913). Ever since, a lot has been written on Hausa proverbs. For example, Gulbi (2018) adopts the definition of Hausa proverbs, *Karin Magana*, from the Hausa people or *Hausawa*

themselves. They use proverbs to discuss important aspects of their life. Additionally, proverbs are also used to project and reinforce the different societal views about philosophy of life to the younger generation of *Hausawa*.

- <9> According to Malumfashi & Ibrahim (2014:31), proverbs are as old as the existence of humankind. Specifically, Hausa proverbs came into being as a result of an attempt by *Hausawa* to talk about themselves and their ways of life in a shortest possible form. This leads to the creation of a large number of proverbs that are used to talk about many the socio-cultural life of *Hausawa*. Thus, most of the proverbs in Hausa are used to talk about topics such as marriage, trades, entertainment, religion and rulership.

4.1. Theoretical Framework

- <10> This study is conducted within the theoretical framework of Linguistic Relativity. Also called the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Linguistic Relativity is built within the premise that our languages determine how we see and perceive the world. This theory was first conceived by German scholar Wilhelm von Humboldt, but in recent scholarly literatures, the theory is associated with American linguist, Edward Sapir and his disciple, Benjamin Lee Whorf. It is important to note that despite the large number of theoretical perspectives on linguistic relativity (see Lucy 1996; Hill & Mannheim 1992; Hunt & Agnoli 1991; Gumperz & Levinson 1996), the basic claim of the theory revolves around the idea that our linguistic and cultural background influence how we think about the world. In other words, there is a strong relationship between the language and culture of the people and the way in which they perceive the world. Supporting this assumption, Carroll (1956:214) adds that the theory “introduced [us] to a new principle of relativity, which holds that all observers are not lead by some physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated”.
- <11> In relation to the aforesaid view, Wardhaugh (2010:232) notes that “different speakers will therefore experience the world differently insofar as the language they speak differ structurally”. Thus, the grammatical categories available in a language not only influence its speakers’ worldviews, but also control and limit such worldviews. For this reason, “if speakers of one language have certain words to describe things and speakers of another language lack similar words, then speakers of the first language will find it easier to talk about those things” (Fishman 1972). Sapir (1949:162) adds that “We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation”. It is these choices that allow speakers of one language to interpret the same things in different ways from speakers of another language.

4.2. Methodology

- <12> The data for the study constitutes Hausa body-related proverbs that portray parts of human body as tools used to perform real or virtual tasks. Through the use of purposive sampling technique, 20 proverbs are selected from two sources: a non-participant observation of spontaneous communication among native speakers of Hausa and a textbook titled *Kamusun Karin Maganar Hausa* (loosely translated as “A Dictionary of Hausa Proverbs”) written by Malumfashi & Ibrahim (2014). The book talks about Hausa proverbs in general, including the history of Hausaland and its folklores, the origin of proverbs as well as examples of some scholarly works conducted on Hausa proverbs. At the end, the authors identify thousands of proverbs that are used by the Hausa people. Thus, the book is not strictly a dictionary, yet the authors name it *kamusu* which literally means dictionary. The chosen proverbs are, then, translated from Hausa to English using translation theory proposed by Ahmad (2016:333-334). According to this theory, translation can be classified into four types based on its nature, purpose and form:

- i. Word-for-word translation: This is otherwise called glossing. It is a kind of translation in which the message is translated word-for-word from the source to the target language irrespective of its conformity with the actual message. This kind of translation is often undesirable as it does not make sense.
- ii. Literal or direct translation: In this kind of translation, the meaning of the source language is transferred directly into the target language regardless of the actual meaning.
- iii. Free or literary translation: This is a kind of translation that gives the translator “the liberty to transfer a message from one language to another without paying attention to the literal meaning of the individual words in the message”.
- iv. Instant translation: In this kind of translation, the message is translated into the target language simultaneously as it is produced in the source language.

<13> Because of the linguistic and cultural differences between English and Hausa languages, it would be very difficult to give an English translation of any Hausa expression that fully captures all the essential messages contained in the original Hausa version. Translation is even more difficult with proverbs which are meant to be understood figuratively even in the source language.

The present study presents a selection of twenty proverbs, with a word-for-word translation which may look difficult to understand or even meaningless and then a free translation is given, which conveys most of the essential information contained in the proverbs. Finally, each proverb is analyzed using a qualitative method of analysis and in line with the theory of Linguistic Relativity as the framework as well as the personal intuition of the researcher.

4.3. Data Analysis

<14> In this section, the proverbs selected for the study are analyzed. Each of the given proverbs is discussed separately. This is done because most of the proverbs talk about different parts of human body and how they are conceptualized as tools for performing certain tasks virtually or in reality.

(1) *Hannu daya ba ya daukar jinka*

One hand cannot **carry** thatched roofing.

A single tree cannot make a forest.

The first proverb is used in reference to a difficult task that cannot be accomplished by one person alone. The task is so huge that it needs a many people to cooperate and perform it. In other words, for the task to be successfully done, several people have to give their ‘hands’. In proverb (1), *hannu* ‘hand’ as a body part is used metonymically to capture the way in which people may be encouraged to help in the actualization of a difficult task. It is important to note that the proverb might have its origin from rural areas where one can still find thatched houses. In these areas, the main structure of the building is erected separately from the thatched roof. After the structure of, say, a room is erected, the roof has to be carried by many people and placed on top of the building. Regardless of someone’s strength or skills, he/she alone cannot carry the roof, much less place it on top of the erected building.

(2) *Ido ba mudu ba, ya san kima*

Eye is not a measuring bowl, but it can estimate.

One can predict how worthwhile things are, even without measuring them.

Proverb (2) is used to suggest that even if an eye is not a tool for measuring things, it can still estimate their quantity or value. That is, when you are presented with two or more things, and you are asked to judge their size or worth, by merely looking at them, you can determine which among them is larger, better and more valuable. Ironically, the proverbs clearly states that *ido* 'eye' is not a technical measuring tool, yet it portrays it as a tool for measurement, since it (an eye) can estimate. This logic is used by most Hausa people when they are tasked with sharing things among many people.

(3) *Baki shi ke yanka wuya*

It is mouth that cuts the neck.

It is what you say that puts you in trouble.

People are cautioned against being unnecessarily garrulous by proverb (3). More often than not, people are judged by what they say. But talkative people are despised and scorned because they talk too much and they often talk bad about other people. As such, the proverb advises the people to be careful with their utterances, else the utterances could land them in trouble. Here, *baki* 'mouth', which is an instrument for uttering words, is conceptualized as a sword or a knife that can cut someone's neck. In other words, when someone utters sharp words, they function like a knife that can wound him/her or others. Essentially, it is what your mouth utters that can potentially put you and others in trouble.

(4) *Wuya madaukar kaya.*

Neck is the carrier of the load.

There is something that everybody/everything depends on.

The origin of proverb (4) could be because of the fact that in Hausa society, it is common to see people carrying WHICH goods on their heads. This sight is common in markets where people earn their livelihood by carrying goods from one place to another. However, the common belief among the Hausa people is that it is rather only *wuya* 'the neck' and not the head that carries the load. This is because even if the load is on the head, it is the neck that carries both the head and the load. Hence, the conceptualization of the neck (*wuya*) as the carrier of the load. In this sense therefore, the neck is portrayed as (the real tool ??) a tool used to carry goods.

(5) *Kafa me na ci ban ba ki ba?*

Leg, what have I eaten without giving you?

When you find yourself in a danger zone, it is your leg that carries you to safety.

This proverb appears to be praising

Kafa 'the leg' is praised in proverb (5) for being very important to someone's survival. This is because it is the nature of human beings that when they sense a danger in a place, the usual reaction is to run away; and running is possible only if someone has legs. The proverb itself is literally a rhetorical question that seem to ask the leg "what have I eaten without giving you?" In this sense, the leg, which is just a part of human body, is portrayed as a tool that carries people from from a danger zone to safety.

(6) *Ba a hada gudu da susar duwawu*

You cannot run while **scratching** your buttocks.

You cannot do two things at once.

The above proverb advises people about the futility of doing two things at once. Even though the proverb does not specifically mention fingers, it implies their use as tools. This can be deduced considering the fact that the act of scratching one's buttock can only be done with a tool—a finger, in this case. Thus, a finger is conceptualised as a tool that can be used to scratch other parts of the body.

(7) *Ciki da gaskiya, wuka ba ta huda shi.*

Stomach that **holds** the truth can never be punctured even with a knife.

It is hard to see the downfall of a truthful person.

Here, *ciki* 'stomach' is conceptualized as a tool that can hold someone's truth. And once your stomach holds your truth, it will never be pierced through even with a knife. This means that no matter how hard you try, you can never see the downfall of an honest person. Therefore, the proverb is used to encourage the people to stand by the truth at all times.

(8) *Kai da kaya duk mallakar wuya ne.*

Both the head and load are **carried** by the neck.

No matter how many people depend on you, you too depend on someone else.

The proverb here is used to describe a situation where someone, on whom many people depend, for his part, depends on a third person. In this way, the third person can exercise control over the second person who, in turn, controls the first person. Thus, the third person is depicted as *wuya* 'the neck' that carries and controls the second person—who is depicted as *kai* 'the head' as well as whoever is under the control of the second person—depicted as *kaya* 'the load'. Essentially and as it is in reality, both the neck and the head are conceptualized as tools that can be used to carry things.

(9) *Zumunta a kafa take.*

Good relationship depends on the legs (that **carry** people to visit friends and relatives).

You maintain good relationship with people by visiting them regularly.

Formerly, when there were no cars and other automobiles, and very few people could afford local means of transport—camels, horses and donkeys—people used to walk to places to visit their relatives frequently. The act of visiting friends and relatives to see how they do is called *zumunchi/zumunta* in Hausa. And since for one to be able to visit friends and relatives, one must walk, therefore, *zumunci* is believed to be located in *kafa* ‘the leg’. Basically, the proverb depicts the leg as a tool that is used to carry people to distant places to see their loved ones.

(10) *Hannu da hannu, cinikin makaho*

Trading that involves a blind person is always **give** and **take**.

To avoid any potential problem, it is better if things are done once and for all.

When trading involves a blind person, the commodities to be purchased have to be brought to the trading post and exchanged with the money. In other words, the transaction involves a kind of give-and-take scenario, in which the blind gives the commodity and instantly receives their cash and vice versa. This is done to avoid any potential problem or misunderstanding that may result from doing otherwise. In the proverb, *hannu* ‘the hand’ is conceptualized as a tool that is used to give or take the items involved in the trading.

(11) *Kunkuru ya so dambe, amma ba shi da yatsa.*

A tortoise wants to **fight** with the fist, but it has no fingers.

It is important to assess your strengths and weaknesses before doing anything.

Yatsa ‘finger’ is depicted in proverb (11) as a tool that people use for fighting. The proverb literally talks about the fact that for someone to engage in fighting, one needs to have fingers/hands with which to fight. If you have no fingers, then you cannot fight anyone. Metaphorically, the proverb counsels people to gauge the benefits or otherwise of doing anything.

(12) *A tafi hannuna yake.*

He is **on my palm**.

He is under my complete control.

Hausa proverb (12) is used by people to explain a situation in which they have total control over another person and/or objects. Alternatively, the proverb is also used when someone is fully aware of what another person seems to be doing in secret. And by saying someone is on my *tafin hannu* — “palm” —, the proverb appears to conceptualize the hand as a tool that can carry and control not only small objects, but human beings as well. In addition to this literal control, the proverb is also used to refer to a virtual control in a situation where someone is in control of a particular situation.

(13) *Baya goya marayu*

The back is the **carrier** of orphans.

One needs to carry everyone along.

Baya ‘the back’ in proverb (13) is conceptualized as a tool used to carry infants. In the Hausa society, most women carry their babies on their backs when going from one place to another. However, ‘back’ here is used metaphorically to refer to people who are always willing to help others irrespective of ethnic, political religious and other affiliations.

(14) *Taura biyu ba ta tauno a baki.*

Two taura cannot be **bitten** in a mouth.

You cannot do two things at once.

This proverb is used as an advice to focus on one task at a time. This is because of the belief that if one attempts to do two things at once, both tasks may end in failure. The proverb metaphorically uses *baki* ‘the mouth’ as a tool that is used to bite *taura*—an edible fruit gotten from a tree called *Detarium senegalense*. Essentially, the proverb suggests that just as it is practically impossible for the mouth to bite two *taura* fruits at a time, it is equally impossible for anyone to embark upon two tasks at a time. Anybody who attempts to do so may end up failing in both tasks.

(15) *Hannu bawan baki*

The hand is a slave to the mouth/The hand always **gives** to the mouth.

Most struggles in life are done to earn a living.

In this proverbial expression, *hannu* and *baki* ‘the hand and the mouth’ are used to mean the general life struggles which people engage in to earn a good living. This is so because most of activities performed by people involve the use of hands. Likewise, people usually use what they earn from working to buy food as a basic necessity. For this reason, the proverb is used to depict the hand as a tool which gives; and the mouth as a tool which takes. In this way, the two body parts (the hand and the mouth) are depicted as giving and taking tools respectively.

(16) *Ciki ba don abinci kadai a ka yi shi ba*

Belly is not meant to **carry** food only.

No matter how intimate you are to someone, there is a secret you must hide from him/her.

This proverbial expression admonishes that *ciki* 'the stomach' should not be used only for carrying the food someone eats. In addition, it should be used to carry someone's own secrets too. In other words, everyone has a secret that should never be divulged to others regardless of intimacy or close relationship. The human belly is, therefore, conceptualized as a carrying tool which not only carries the food one eats, but also carries the secrets one has.

(17) *Labarin zuciyar a tambayi fuska*

For the story of the heart, ask the face. In other words, it is the face that **carries** the story of the heart.

Facial expression often reveals inner feelings.

The above proverb is built on the premise that the inner mood of people can be detected from their facial expressions. In other words, by observing someone's face, you can know if one is happy, sad, shocked, surprised and so on. Basically, the proverb depicts *fuska* 'the face' as the body part that carries what is in *zuciyar* 'the heart'—the mood. Essentially, the face is portrayed as a body part that tells the story of the heart.

(18) *Hakorin dariyar shi yake cizo*

The tooth that laughs is the one that **bites**.

Someone that seems friendly can at the same time be dangerous.

This proverb advises *Hausawa* to be wary in dealing with people, because someone that appears to be friendly may turn out to be dangerous. Here, *hakori* 'the tooth' is depicted as a tool whose function is for both 'biting' *cizo* and 'laughing' *dariya*. That is to say, in dealing with people, one should get oneself ready with the good and the bad sides of them.

(19) *Wanda ya fada ruwa ko kaifin takobi aka ba shi kamawa zai yi*

He who is about to get drowned in water will **seize** even the edge of the sword.

Anyone in a difficult situation will do anything to save himself (to clutch at straws).

This is used in reference to a situation in which someone looks to survive from a difficult situation. Although the proverb does not specify the name of any body part, the verb *kamawa* 'seizing' in the proverb implies the use of hands as tools. That is to say, the hand is virtually conceptualised as a tool that can seize even *takobi* 'the sword' during a difficult and desperate situation. This means that when

people find themselves in a difficult situation, they often try all the available means to get out of it.

(20) *Idan kunne ya ji, jiki ya tsira*

If the ear heard, the body becomes safe.

If you follow rules and regulations, you live peacefully.

Here, the proverb is used to advise people to be law-abiding, so as to live a peaceful life. The proverb conceptualizes ‘the ear’ *kunne* as a tool that carries message or warning to the rest of the body. In this sense, if the ear carries warning to the rest of the body and the person heeds the warning, he/she will live without getting into troubles.

5. Discussion

<15> From the foregoing proverbial expressions, it can be understood that to decipher the meaning of proverbs, there must be certain cognitive processes that come into play. Similarly, for someone to make meaning out of proverbs, one needs to know not only the context in which the proverbs are used, but also the sociocultural belief of the people that use them. In other words, since Hausa proverbs are meant to be understood figuratively, it is hard to decode the message they convey, as long as one is not aware of the social and cultural context of the Hausa people. As Almajir (2012) puts it, “The wisdom of proverbs is not restricted only to their literal and cultural values, but also their philosophical and pragmatic usefulness in interpretation in the context of their usage”. Thus, for someone to fully understand the analyzed proverbs, it is imperative to understand the sociolinguistic context of the Hausa people. This postulation is especially true with some of the preceding proverbs (such as those involving mouth, tooth, nose) which cannot be easily ascribed tool functions.

<16> Because of the difficulty explained above, it can be argued that proverbial expressions are important aspects of a people’s social reality. Sapir (1949:68-69) as cited by Kramsch (2004:32) holds that:

Language is a guide to social reality [...] it powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes... The ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The world in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.

<17> From the above submission, one can deduce that since proverbs are linguistic items, they reflect the social realities as well as the ways of life of people that use them. Indeed, given the fact that no two languages are exactly alike as well as the fact that most proverbs are culture specific, it is often difficult to understand proverbial expressions outside the culture in which they are composed and used. Along this line of argument, Oha (2010:176) remarks that language is more than just a means of communication, it also “acts like a polarising lens on a camera in filtering reality – we see the real world only in the categories of our language”. Therefore, the analysed proverbs solely reflect socio-cultural realities of Hausa people. Perhaps, that is why a non-Hausa person may struggle to attach appropriate meaning to proverb like ‘*Kafa me na ci ban ba ki ba*’. This is because the proverb only reflects the thought process of *Hausawa*. Indeed, Wardhaugh (2010) talks about this when he says that different people perceives the world in different ways so long as their languages differ.

Furthermore, Gibbs (1997) proposes that for a possible understanding of metaphorical basis of proverbial expressions, one can employ a mental imagery task. Although, Gibbs uses the technique to explore the possibility of uncovering the meaning of English proverbs by associating the proverbs with possible mental images, the technique can also be applied to uncover the meanings of the

proverbs selected in this study. Corroborating this assertion, Moreno (n. d.) argues that although proverbs reflect different cultural beliefs, they share a common underlying schema of cognition. Thus, for the proverbs involving head, hand, neck and leg, it is possible to imagine people carrying loads or using hands to do certain things in reality. This can be possible because "Proverbs belong to our common stock of ready-made formulas that will come to mind as part of our thinking process" (Mieder 1989:90).

6. Conclusion

<18> It has been discussed in this article that one of the ways through which *Hausawa* convey useful information from generation to generation often in a tacit or hidden manner is via the use of proverbs. In the Hausa language, therefore, proverbs cut across a number of communicative domains. This paper focuses only on those Hausa proverbial expressions which appear to conceptualize human body parts as tools used for performing certain tasks in reality or virtually. Thus, the paper discovers that through the employment of proverbs *Hausawa* have a penchant for portraying body parts as tools that can be used for some specific jobs. However, the findings of this research reveal that some body parts are more commonly depicted as tools than others. For example, body parts such as head, neck and hands are conceptualized as tools more frequently than body parts such as stomach, heart and teeth. Perhaps, this is because the former are used as tools even in reality, while the latter are used as tools only virtually.

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