

PROVERBS IN FRENCH AND YORUBA LANGUAGES: POINTS OF CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE

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Abstract

Proverbs are simple and insightful traditional sayings that express perceived truths based on common sense or experience. Proverbs are special, fixed, and unchanged phrases that have special, fixed, and unchanged meanings. They are the collective wisdom of a society and thus contain much that must be known and constantly remembered. One major way to facilitate the learning and internalization of events is through the creation of images in spoken words, as found in proverbs. They are often metaphorical and use formulaic language. Proverbs are very important aspects of any given language, be it foreign or indigenous. They are colourful expressions that add beauty to any given conversation. The importance and functions of proverbs cannot be overemphasized. This, on the one hand, will be our focus in this paper, and, on the other hand, we shall consider the areas of difference between the two languages (French and Yorùbá). Since proverbs are metaphorically motivated, the paper hinges on conceptual metaphor theory in Cognitive Linguistics. Analysis of 25 proverbs from each language reveals that while French and Yorùbá proverbs share six functional categories—advice, warning, unity, patience, truth-telling, and self-reliance—they diverge significantly in three areas: (1) source domain preferences (Yorùbá favors domestic animals and farm imagery; French favors classical and European historical references), (2) syntactic compression patterns, and (3) usage protocols (Yorùbá requires permission from elders before proverb use in formal settings, a practice absent in French culture). These divergences are systematically accounted for by the Conceptual Metaphor Theory's cross-domain mapping principles. The theory postulates that human thought processes are largely

metaphorical, and the human conceptual system is structured and defined in a metaphorical way. Findings revealed that proverbs in the two languages (French and Yorùbá) may be used to express similar realities but with a different word pattern.

Keywords: Language, proverbs, French, Yoruba, and Metaphor.

Introduction

Language is a basic need of human beings to interact with one another. As a tool of communication, people use it to express their needs, ideas, thoughts and feelings. It therefore, plays a pivotal role in human society. It is the only phenomenon that differentiates human society from the lower animals because language can be used to express a wide range of concepts unlike the humming of animals. Man is unique in his ability to transmit ideas through language and this quality distinguishes him from other animals. He is a social animal using language to communicate in such a way that it is indispensable to the maintenance of his culture. Therefore, without language, there could not have been meaningful communication, and if there is no meaningful communication, there cannot be any social relationship. Afolayan (1979) opines that:

Without language, man cannot function as the social, co-operative, and creative animal, and it is only with language accomplishments that man rises above the lower animal and is both educable and indeed educated, governed and governing, ordered and regulating, civilized and civilizing.

Based on the above quotation, we can vividly see that all human activities revolve round language. Both formal and informal

education, government and politics and others are impossible without language. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word language as “the whole body of words and of methods of combination of words, used by a nation, people or race; a 'tongue'. Equally, the Free online dictionary defines it as “communication of thoughts and feelings through a system of arbitrary signals, such as voice sounds, gestures or written symbols. From these definitions, we can establish the fact that language exists in all human societies, both in spoken and in written form. Kelman (1971) quoted by Oyetade (2001:14) describes language as, a powerful instrument in unifying a diverse population and in involving individuals and subgroups in the national system". Another definition of language that is relevant to our subject matter is equally given by Oyetade (2001) citing Block and Trager (1942), describing language 'as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by which a social group operates.' These two definitions emphasized the co-operative function of language i.e holding people together for a common goal. Language is therefore important if there is going to be any meaningful co-existence between the nations of the world. A major advantage of human language being a learned symbolic communication system is that, it is infinitely flexible. Meaning can be changed and new symbols created. Languages evolve in response to changing in historical and social conditions. Like society, language is constantly evolving and is subject to growth and change in much the same way as a living organism.

Language cannot be separated from the culture of the society to which it belongs because; it is an important part of culture. The use of language is pretty much influenced by the culture and it will change along the changes faced by the people.

Both foreign and local languages contain phraseology such as proverbs which are used to embellish one's conversation. In African society, proverbs are not taken with levity. Both young and old,

literate and illiterate, men and women, boys and girls use proverbs in their interpersonal communication. “ it is believed that speech without proverbs is like a soup without salt. Words of elders are full of proverbs. This can also be said of French people. This paper therefore aims to consider the areas of differences and similarities between French and Yoruba languages.s

Proverbs

One of the most important aspects of language (English, French, and Yorùbá) is proverbs. They are frequently used in a variety of situations, from friendly conversations and business meetings to more formal and written contexts. Proverbs belong to a group of word called 'fixed collocation'. According to Jimoh (2009:168), a fixed collocation refers to “a group of words which is often used together to form a natural sounding combination”. In other words, such arrangement is fixed because it is not possible for anyone to alter the arrangement, to delete any lexical item from it, or include 'external' lexical item into it. It is therefore, a phrase or an expression that means something different from the meaning of the lexical items that make up the phrase or the expression. According to Brookes et al (2003:216), a proverb is “a short familiar saying expressing a supposed truth or moral lesson: a saying that requires explanation”. Wehmier et al (2006: 1169) define it as “a well-known phrase or sentence that gives advice or says something that is generally true, for example, 'waste not, and want not” It is a collective wisdom of a society and thus contains much that must be known and constantly remembered. By implication, proverbs are charged with ideologies and the common sense of the socio-cultures that own them. Proverbs differ from idiomatic expressions in that they display shared cultural wisdom. Proverbs are easily understandable; sometimes, the first part of the proverb might be enough to express the whole meaning. For instance, “do not count your chickens” is used instead of „do not

count your chickens before they have hatched₂. One major way to facilitate learning and internalization of events is through creation of imageries in spoken words. Stevick (1986) argues that memory and availability depend on mental imagery. He then offers a great deal of exercises in language learning situation to students, intensifying the iconicity, thereby creating images in their mind₂s eye. Even if proverbs may be considered as culture-specific because they are very bound to culture, many proverbs have equivalents in different languages. Proverbs are not always transparent, and their meanings are sometimes ambiguous. Yet learners are fascinated by them since they are always intrigued by expressive, colourful language. Proverbs are also a part of figurative language that produces cultural information, and their use shows that the person is a part of that social group that uses them (Hartch and Brown 1995: 202- 203). For instance, Yorùbá people always use Yorùbá proverbs in their communication to drive home their points.

French and Yorùbá proverbs

Proverbs in the French and Yorùbá languages are expressions of wisdom because they are not just communicating ideas but with a view to advising or to give a kind of enlightenment. They are also described as marks of native intelligence (Adedimeji 2003).

French Proverbs

Ventre affamé n a point d'oreille

Yorùbá Proverbs

Eni ebi ñ pa esu ñ se é.

Literary: A hungry man is an angry man (someone who doesn't get what he wants can be frustrated and even become violent)

A bon entendeur, salut,
bon entendeur, demi mot

Ààbò ọrọ ni à ñ sọ fún
omọlúàbí, tí ó bá dé inú
rè á di odidi.

Literary: A word is enough to the wise (a very brief explanation is enough for an intelligent person).

Rome ne s'est pas faite en un
jour ou petit à petit
L'oiseau fait son nid.

Díḡdíg ni adiyẹ ñ diyẹ

Literary: Rome wasn't built in a day (an injunction or plea for someone to be patient)

Qui se ressemble s'assemble

Ègbẹ ẹyẹ ni ẹyẹ ñ wọ ọ

Literary: Birds of the same feather flock together. (those of similar interest or value congregate in group)

Dis- moi qui tu hantes,
je te dirai qui tu es

Fi ore re han mi, ki n
so iru eniyan ti o je /
Àgùntàn tó bá

bá ajá rìn yóò.jẹ igbé
Literary: Show me your friends and I will tell you who you are (people of like minds stick together. If I know who your friends are I will know what your character is).

Cognitive Linguistics and Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

According to Njoroge (2015: 58), Cognitive linguistics claims that metaphor is an ubiquitous feature of French idioms and powerful educational tool for both second language teachers and learners. It is an approach to the study of language that looks at the nature of language, the mind and their relationship with socio – physical (embodied) experience. Njoroge (2015: 58) opines further that Cognitive linguistics is one of the most reliable areas of research within the interdisciplinary project of cognitive science. Its reliability stems from the fact that cognitive linguistics aims at an integrated model of language and thought that reflects the human construal of external reality, taking into account the way in which human beings experience reality, both from cultural and psychological perspectives.

In Cognitive linguistics, metaphor is regarded as one of the several kinds of idealized cognitive model (ICM). According to Lakoff (1987: 68), Idealized Cognitive Model is the way in which human beings organize knowledge and therefore, it may be postulated as cognitive structures whose purpose is to represent reality from a certain perspective. (Grant and Oswick, 1996) in Njoroge (2015). As a process, metaphor involves combining language and thought to develop new non-literal meaning that enhances our reality. Cognitive linguists claim that metaphor is not merely a figure of speech, but it is a specific mental and neutral mapping that influences a good deal of how people think, reason and imagine in everyday life. In cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor, or cognitive metaphor, refers to the understanding of one idea, or conceptual domain, in terms of another. Cognitive linguistics postulates that the meaning of proverb is motivated by conceptual mechanism like metaphors, which implies that people should always bear in mind the relations between the conceptual system and the linguistic system (Csabi, 2002).

Metaphor is common to all languages and cultures. Metaphorical language is an indispensable part of human life, involving language,

thought, and action. Writers and speakers use metaphors to express abstract, difficult-to-talk-about concepts in terms of concrete entities that are easier to understand (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphorical expressions (MEs, hereafter) are the cream of a language. They reflect the relationship between language and culture. Metaphoricity is the main feature of all human languages. In fact, a language or any form of language, without metaphorical traits, is non-existent (Goalty, 1997 in Abass & Ghafel 2011). It is not confined to language. It runs through all veins of man's everyday life, including language, thought, and action.

As proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Conceptual Metaphor Theory suggests that human thought processes are largely metaphorical, and human conceptual system is structured and defined in a metaphorical way. In other words, the Conceptual Metaphor Theory takes the basic assumptions of the Lakoffian School on “experiential realism”, which hypothesizes that metaphor is not just an aspect of language, but constitutes a primary part of human cognition (Gibbs, 1994; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Sweetser, 1990) in Njoroge (2015). There is an intermediate level “Cognition” between language and the world (Lakoff, 1987) in (ibid). Conceptual metaphors are seen in language in our everyday lives. Conceptual metaphors shape not just our communication, but also shape the way we think and act. The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of things in terms of another.

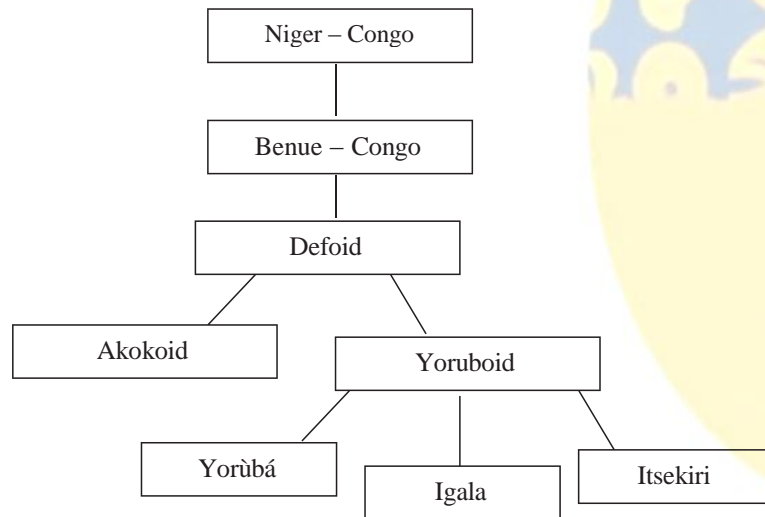
Conceptual Metaphor Theory indicates that human thought processes are largely metaphorical, and human conceptual system is structured and defined in a metaphorical way. Therefore, metaphor is defined as cross-domain mapping between source and target domain. The target domain is an abstract domain while the source domain is a concrete concept of which one can have direct sensory experience.

Investigating conceptual metaphoric systems across cultures is enlightening in more than one aspect. It tells us whether the metaphoric concepts that shapen our lives are similar to, or different from the other nations. Abass et al (2011) state that if the same conceptual metaphors are used to structure our lives, despite our belonging to different cultures (in our study French, English and Yoruba), we are conceptualizing the concept in the same way; and in the case of different conceptual metaphors that structure our lives. The study of our respective metaphoric systems will highlight how we model our reality and how the understanding of these systems may contribute to further intercultural understanding.

Yorùbá Language

Yorùbá belongs to the Defoid group of languages, a subgroup of Benue-Congo languages. (Capo, 1989)

Figure 1: Linguistic family of Yorùbá



It is spoken principally in the South-Western part of Nigeria, especially in Òyó, Ògùn, Òndó and Òsun states. Yorùbá is also spoken in some parts of Kwara, Kogí and Edo states. It is equally spoken by a large number of speakers in the south - western part of the Benin Republic (Sábe, Isa, Idasa, Sàkété, Pòbe´ and Ifè`), while in Togo; it is also natively spoken by certain sections of the population (Oyetade 1998).

Yorùbá language like other languages such as English and French is rich in figurative expressions such as proverbs and lends itself easily in the hands of one who knows the language, to limitless improvisation of proverbs. In friendly, family, and societal conversations, idiomatic expressions occupy a unique place. Their importance cannot be overemphasized because they add beauty to the speech that employs them, give them more knowledge and wisdom, make words better and clearer, etc.

French Language

According to the Real French. net website accessed 20th August, 2016; French owes its existence to several ancient languages. These include:

- **Gaulish**, the language of the celtic people (of which the fictional Asterix the Gaul was one) who inhabited primarily the territory of what is now modern- day France prior to the Roman invasions.
- **Latin**, the language of the invading Romans.
- **Frankish**, the language of the Germanic people who occupied this territory after the fall of the Roman Empire, and who gave France its name.
- **Old Norse**, the language of Vikings, who occupied many of the coastal and in-land navigable areas of Northern France before being granted the area now known as Normandy (meaning “Land of the Norsemen”).

The French language was introduced to the educational system of Nigeria as far back as the nineteenth century. The precise date when the 1st lesson in French took place in Nigeria has not been discovered by the researchers. Since then, French has been one of the subjects that feature prominently in the curriculum of Nigeria Secondary Schools. French came as a foreign language and has remained one since it came.

The French language is an Indo-European language with a sprinkling of similarities in its lexicon. Proverbs do not follow the same wording pattern in both languages. Proverbs reflect socio-cultural and socio-linguistic realities of languages. The most important thing is the fact that they express similar realities, aims, and objectives (Adedimeji 2003).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative design. A total of 50 proverbs—25 from French and 25 from Yorùbá—were purposively selected from published proverb collections (Adedimeji 2003 for Yorùbá; Maloux 1998 and Rey & Chantreau 2007 for French). Selection criteria included: (a) frequency of use in contemporary speech, (b) representation of diverse functional categories (advice, warning, unity, patience, self-reliance, truth), and (c) availability of contextual usage examples. Data were analyzed using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, focusing on cross-domain mapping between source and target domains. Each proverb was examined for (i) literal meaning, (ii) metaphorical meaning, (iii) function, and (iv) cultural embeddedness. Convergence was coded where identical functions and similar source domains appeared; divergence was coded where functions aligned but source domains or structural features differed.

Points of Convergence of French and Yoruba Proverbs

This aspect talks about the points where proverbs in the two languages meet. Convergence is the act of converging and especially moving toward union or uniformity. Proverbs in both societies (French and Yoruba) can be used to perform different functions as shown in the table below.

The table below presents the areas of convergence of Yoruba and French proverbs.

French proverbs	Equivalence in Yoruba	Functions/ Concepts	Explanation
Autres pays autres mœurs	Oúnjẹ ibikan, ewọ ibòmíràn	Different ideologies	What is pleasant to one person may be unpleasant to another.
Aide-toi, Dieu t'aidera	ṣmọ t.ípá ni iyá n gbé/ ẹni ti o bá ran ara rẹ l. w. ni ọrìsà òkè n rin lẹwọ.	Inspiration	It emphasizes the importance of self initiative and agency. It also conveys that divine intervention is most likely to come to those who take action on their own behalf and not to those who sit back and wait for heavenly help to come.

La charité bien ordonnée commence par soi-même	Ilé ni a ti ní ko ẹso 2 lọ sí ọde.	Advice	A person's first responsibility is for the needs of their own family and friends. People should deal with the needs of people close to them before they think about helping others.
A bon entendeur, demi mot	Ààbò òrò ni à ñ sọ fún omolúàbí, tí ó bá dé inú rẹ, á di odidi	Warning	A very brief warning or explanation is enough for an intelligent person. Someone who is wise heeds a piece of advice, even if it is very brief.
Au besoin on connaît l'ami	Ìgbà ipónjù ni a ñ mọ orẹ ọd.do.	Reality of life	A person who helps at a difficult time is a person you can rely on. A friend who helps out when we are in trouble is a true friend, unlike others who disappear when trouble arises.

Battre le fer quand il est chaud.	Ìgbà ara ni à ñ bì ara.	Encouragement/advice	One should make use of a good situation or of good conditions. Making the most of your opportunities. Taking the advantage of a situation that is favourable.
L'union fait la force	Agbájọ ọwó ni a fi ñ sọ àyà.	Unity and collaboration.	People who join together as a group are much harder to defeat. A proverb designed to stir people up to greater unity. If we work together we can be successful, if we fight each other we will fail.
Appeler un chat un chat	sọ ojú abẹ nìkó	Truth	Someone is expected to speak plainly without avoiding unpleasant or embarrassing issues

From the few examples of proverbs given in the two languages, it is observed that both languages make use of proverbs to embellish their conversation. They are metaphorical expressions and in both languages they perform similar functions during the process of communication as shown in the table above. Morals, ethics,

instructions, advice, warning, encouragement, ideologies etc have been crystallized in proverbs. According to Dan MacDougal (2004), proverbs can be a key element in the language acquisition and language learning process. Proverbs can provide a snapshot of other cultures that allow for a more thorough understanding of both language and culture. Proverbs in French are as rich in meaning as their Yorùbá counterparts. The examples given also establish the fact that, the same proverb may be found in many variants. And also, certain stylistics similarities have been found in proverbs of the two cultures. Proverbs in the two cultures make frequent use of colourful pictorial forms of expression (appeler un chat un chat/ sọ ojú abẹ ni ikẹ). Proverbs in both languages use rhyme (petit à petit, l'oiseau fait son nid / diẹ diẹ ni adiyẹ ń diyẹ) alliteration (petit à petit, l'oiseau fait son nid / diẹ diẹ ni adiyẹ ń diyẹ) and wordplay (qui se ressemble s'assemble/ẹgbẹ ẹyẹ ni ẹyẹ ń wọ to) . Proverbs in both languages are commonly illustrated with homely imagery- household objects, farm animals and pets and events of daily life (battre le fer quand il est chaud/igbà ara ni à ń bú ara). Proverbs from both languages have sources where they originated from. Proverbs come from many sources but some are anonymous and also difficult to trace. For instance, the proverb appeler un chat un chat originated from the classical Greek of Plutarch's Apophthegmata Laconica and was used in 1660 by a Poet called Nicolas Boileau.

Points of divergence

Despite the fact that proverbs in both languages concerned in this write - up have similar features and can be used to perform the same functions, there are some differences in their structures and these shall be discussed here.

Proverbs have been described by Greene (1986) as an integral part of the people that are perpetually on the lips of elders... This claim could be true in an African setting, especially among the

Yorubas. In any gathering where the elders are, if any young man or woman wants to talk and make use of proverbs, he or she must first of all, take permission from the elders. But in European culture, this may not be necessary.

Again, each language has its own version of each proverb used for the same situation and circumstance. This can be seen from the table above. Proverbs do not follow the same wording patterns in both languages. This can be seen in the table below:

French Proverbs	Yoruba Proverbs	Functions	Explanation
Le chat parti, les souris dansent	Àísí nílẹ ológbò, ilé dílé èkúté.	Rebuke	In the absence of authority (parents, teacher, boss etc) to which one is subject to, one shows reckless euphoria. This can also lead to breaking the rules.
Telle mère, telle fille.	Òwú tńyá gbòn, l'ọmọ ó ran.	Relationship	A boy has the same attitude as his father or behaves in the same way. Children often appear and act just like their parents
Petit à petit, l'oiseau fait son nid.	A kń kánjú tu olú ọrán.	Patience and perseverance	With continuous efforts one can achieve any goal in life
La charité bien ordonnée commence par soi-même	Ilé la tí késódó ròde	Ethics (moral inspiration)	Everything good begins at home e.g. good character, alms giving etc.
L'habit ne fait pas le moine	Asọ ńlń kó lẹyàn ńlń	Warning	One should not judge the worth or value of something by its outward appearance alone

Il faut battre le fer quand il est chaud	Ìgbà ara làá búra, ẹnìkàn kì í bú Sàngó ní èèrùn.	Advice	Make the most of a favourable situation while it lasts . Take advantage of the chance to do something while the conditions are good.
L'union fait la force	Àgbájọ ọwọ la fí n s ọ àyà.	Unity	A proverb designed to stir people up to greater unity. If we work together we can be successful, if we fight each other we will fail.

If we carefully look at the proverbs presented in the table above, it is discovered that, these proverbs expressed similar realities, aims and objectives but they did not follow the same wording patterns in both languages. They were structured following their socio-cultural and socio- linguistic realities.

Recommendation

In order to enhance better cultural values and understanding of proverbs, there should be a robust curriculum that will take care of this. There should be a course on French and Yoruba proverbs that will expose students the more to French and Yoruba cultures, and proverbial expressions that will improve their vocabularies.

The Government should encourage indigenous authors to publish books on proverbs for all levels of education in Nigeria. Such publications should be subsidized by the Government to reduce cost of production and eventually selling price to students.

Conclusion

This paper has examined Proverbs in two languages, French and Yoruba languages respectively. It is discovered that there is no part of the globe in which proverbs are

not important, especially in the continent of Africa. They are not just platitude but sayings that carry authority. Efforts have been made in this write-up to discuss in detail proverbs and their divers roles in human society. The paper also provides information on conceptual metaphor theory on which the paper hinged. Equally, the areas of convergence and divergence of proverbs in French and Yoruba languages was discussed. Since proverbs are channels for learning, or used to advise, rebuke, praise, educate, encourage one etc. Avenue to learn them (proverbs) should be created for students

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