

Investigating Selected Denigrating Yorùbá Proverbs Inimical to Social Cohesion

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ABSTRACT

National cohesion is a global trending issue in this century, consequent upon terrorist activities all over the world. This paper x-rays selected Yorùbá proverbs in relation to social cohesion. It examines the denigrating nature of the selected proverbs in a multilingual society. It also aims at determining existence of the proverbs till date and the extent of their usage for communication purposes. Ten purposively selected Yorùbá proverbs were scripted for completion by one hundred (100) undergraduate respondents between ages 15 and 35, to discover their level of awareness of and familiarity with the proverbs, using descriptive statistics analysis. The study drew insight from Communication Accommodation Theory, (CAT) (Giles et al., 1987 & Giles & Ogay, 2007). Results show that the proverbs are still in use and the youth are aware of these proverbs but in varying degrees.

Keywords: National Cohesion, Denigrating, Proverbs, Communication Accommodation and Inimical.

INTRODUCTION

Social cohesion is a salient issue that has caught the interest of researchers worldwide today. The need arose from incessant disputes experienced in various parts of the world, ranging from national to international. Cohesion is perceived as how individuals relate to the groups in which they find themselves, (Friedklin, 2004). It has to do with individual's attitude towards one another in the group as well as their contributive efforts to serve and maintain the group.

Social cohesion and national unity co-exist in ensuring a peaceful society that can enhance national development, oneness of members of a group or a country, the act of perceiving one another as one; regardless of culture, tradition, ethnic group, race, religion, social status, educational status etc. For instance, in the multifaceted Nigeria, first seeing ourselves as Nigerians before thinking of our background, ethnicity, language or religion is social cohesion.

It connotes one identity, one people and sharing the same law as Nigerians to facilitate rapid growth and development.

Language has been identified as an instrument of social cohesion. Communication is an essential tool for growth and development in any society, from the smallest to the largest. Daily interactions among human beings and ability to string arbitrary distinctive sounds (Phonemes) together in infinite ways to create meaning and enhance communication and relationships is what distinguishes us from non-human. Creativity nature of human language enables us invent new words and expressions. Displacement quality of human language makes it possible for us to describe remote, abstract and imaginary things that are not existing in our immediate environment and present them as if they are. Interchangeability is another characteristic of language peculiar to human, which affords any gender to use the language of communication approved and understood by a community. Language is culture (Sapir, 1921; Yule, 1990) and culture is transmitted by language from one generation to the other. So, human language is learnt by immersion right from birth and it continues to develop as the child grows and gets fully involved in communication activities, while animal language is innate. Culture manifests itself in people's religion, language, philosophy, music, dance, drama, architecture, political organization and morality (Anyawu, 2006). Ambiguity nature of human language distinguishes it from animal communication, in the sense that, a word can be used in diverse ways This is contrary to animal communication where one sign has only one meaning.

The above examined characteristics of human language enable it to be used both nationally and internationally for education, politics, religion, economic and other social activities. However, language which is an instrument of social cohesion can be used for confrontation, leading to disintegration. This brought about the issue of denigrating proverbs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Cohesion

Willingness of members of a society to cooperate with one another to thrive in every area of life, is social cohesion (Stanley, 2003). Here, members form group with a reasonable chance of realizing the set goals and objectives. It aims at social relations, connectedness and orientation towards a common goal (Schiefer, et al., 2017). However, decline in social cohesion has become issue of discussion by researchers (Chan et al, 2006; Jenson, 2010; Harell & Stolle, 2014) based on observations within and outside their communities. Among the factors responsible for this are globalization process coupled with the economic changes associated with it, global migration movement and ever growing ethno-cultural diversity, the development of new information and computer-based communication technologies, and addition of new member states (e.g., the European Union).

Many African countries, such as Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau have been crippled for years by conflicts resulting in violence and incessant killings (Annan, 2014). Afghanistan has been under the siege of violence for the past four decades. Burkina Faso and the Sahel have been a warring zone for the past one decade. The Central African Republic has been experiencing civil war for the past 10 years. Chad and the Lake Chad Basin have been under both external and communal conflict for the past 14 years. Democratic of Congo has experienced civil war and still battling with local conflicts. Somalia has been facing civil war for about two decades. South Sudan has been experiencing serious conflict for the past ten years.

Sudan also is a victim of conflict resulting from political instability and intercommunal crisis. Syria is another conflicting area since 2011 (Concern Worldwide, 2022). Insurgency is currently prevalent in countries such as Mali, Niger, Mauritania as well as other countries like Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal, which used to be less violent. This is rooted in historical factors, socio-economic crisis, legacies of authoritarianism and the politics of exclusion, international forces and local struggles (Obi, 2012). Aside the above are other factors such as poverty, human right violations, bad governance and corruption, ethnic marginalization and small arms proliferation.

Recently, the eight-year crisis in Eastern Ukraine degenerated to a major conflict on February 21, 2022 and still on presently. With the Russian invasion, which has immensely destroyed her economy, Ukraine is experiencing a tough time leading to death of over 8,000 and displacement of nothing less than 16million (over 8million have fled the country while another 8million are displaced within as at the time this paper was being compiled.

Mbunda-Nekang, (2018) examines the use of folklore to promote peace, unity, national consciousness and identity. She observes that peace and harmony of Cameroonians have been ruined 'by the colonial masters, corrupt governance, and now Boko haram and the civil society' (2018:22). The situation she describes is a true picture of Nigeria of today. While we are yet to recover from the evil effects of colonization, neo-colonization resulting from bad governance led to extreme poverty culminating in insurgency, terrorism, incessant kidnappings and killings of innocent souls. Beginning from the Civil War or Biafran war between 1967-1970, the religious war (Maitatsine) witnessed in Kano in the 1980s, the Boko-Haram insurgency (2009 till date) (Jerome, 2015) and very much recent, the Fulani Herdsmen attacks, the Bandits attacks which have led to kidnaps and killings of numerous people as well as the End SARS riots which led to the death of many youths. Things are already falling apart and the center is getting difficult to hold day-by-day in terms of unity, trust, peace and harmony. Nationality, in Nigeria is gradually going down the drain. A situation which requires every thinkable measure to be espoused, before it results in total anarchy. While Mbunda-Nekang (2018) is advocating the use of folklore to reverse the vehicle of Cameroonian peace heading for a crash, we are postulating the removal of part of our folklores, precisely some proverbs, which are inimical to Nationalism and can further ignite insecurity, insurgence, disharmony and chaos.

Folklores are rich, precious, creative and enrich the socio-cultural being, but there are some that need be used cautiously, if not totally eradicated, to foster peace, growth and development. In 1876, Mary Slessor was opportune to abolish the tradition of killing of infant twins in Okoyong, Rivers State. Before then, multiple neo-nate was a taboo among the people, and wherever it occurred the babies would be taken to the "Ojoo Ofia ("bad bus") outside Igbo town in calabash to suffocate to death (Bastian, 2001:13). This barbaric callousness would have continued if Mary Slessor did not take the bold step. She saved many of the twins by adoption, and today, twins are born and bred in the same land; many of whom have contributed to the growth of the society. Some traditions need to give way if we really want to experience growths and developments.

Proverbs

Creativity nature of language engenders the use of proverbs as seasonings to make communication delicacies sumptuous and delicious. It communicates intellectual, emotional

and moral attitudes, such as acceptance, disappointment/condemnation, intention, sympathy, approval/disapproval, appreciation, apology or regret. Proverbs are held in high esteem. They are traditional and originate from the observations of natural phenomenon and human relations (Adegboyega, 2017); handed down from generation to generations, expressing regard for good conduct, respect for elders and authority, value for the young, warning and advice, cordiality and cooperation essential for peaceful coexistence (Idowu, 2010:16).

Yusuf, (1997) examines the sexist correlation of women with the non-human in English and Yorùbá proverbs. The study explores forty-six (46) English and Yorùbá proverbs which compare women to animals, food, plants, property and trouble. It shows how these proverbs de-personify and dehumanize women. Examples are:

1. 'Women are necessary evils' (Whitting, 1977:494). Here women are seen as indispensable sub-category of human race but at the same time despicable.
2. 'Kaka ko san lara iya aje, ofi gbogbo omo bi obinrin, eye wa n yi lu eye'. This is a Yorùbá proverb meaning, 'To worsen the situation of a witch, all her children were females, meaning they will all inherit witchcraft from her.'

Some of the 46 proverbs observed portray women as worse than stupid and mischievous animals, stinging plants and hellish trouble. These are denigrating proverbs which promote patriarchy in our societies where women are seen as unworthy, contemptible and given second place in the affairs of life. The above proverbs overlook women virtues but portray only the negative sides of women. This negative perception of women is manifested in the low percentage of seats (35%) given to women in governance in Nigeria in Nigeria's Gender Policy (Okafor and Ileyemi, 2023) and even presidential seat is regarded as too important for a woman to hold.

Proverbs are Yorùbá mythology used for corrective measures, to promote cultural values, enhance co-operations among people and express diversity. The current study departs from the above studies because our focus is not on a particular sex even though it is based on denigrate proverbs. The above study establishes the fact that certain proverbs denigrate, an insight this current study draws from.

Another insightful study is Akanbi, (2015) on vulgarity in Yorùbá proverbs; focusing on proverbs relating to human sex organs and human sex activities. Yorùbá tradition respects private parts of the body and that is why they use euphemisms any time they need to mention such parts of the body. He concludes that sexually explicit proverbs should be used with discretion in order not to offend the psychology of the listener. This buttresses Salawu, (2011) who also views open discussion of sex and its sensation by women as an anathema. It can be deduced from Akanbi's work those proverbs are essential to communication and interpersonal relationships but care must be taken the way they are used so as not to defeat its genuine purposes. Akanbi's submission dwells on not offending the psychology of the listener by using these abominable direct sexual words in proverbs. But, apart from sexually related proverbs, there are other proverbs that can offend the listeners' psychology and this is what this current study stands to observe.

Similar to the above study is Coker, (2016) which examines selected proverbs which harp on the act of sex and direct reference to coition seeing them as didactic aesthetics, moral education

and sexually consciousness among the Yorùbá a in a unique way. Unlike Akanbi who posits avoidance of vulgar proverbs, Coker views the use of sex organs raw in proverbs as portraying the Yorùbá culture as well as educative. The current study however departs from the above studies.

Ademowo and Balogun, (2014) explore proverbs, values and the development question in contemporary Africa, focusing on Yorùbá proverbs. They too admit that language portrays culture and it is an instrument of development which makes it inevitable in development discourse. Their emphasis is on proverbs related to themes such as care for others and cooperation, leadership qualities, advice, reproach and punishment, conflict resolution and warning. Theirs is not on denigrate proverbs and far from the current study.

Denigrate Proverbs: The Current Study

We were in a meeting one day and a Christian male colleague started his contribution with the proverb, “Ofin to de egungun lo de eleha”. He has just said the first three words, ‘Ofin to de...’ when a female colleague who happens to be a Muslim flared up and asked him to use another proverb. Initially, I did not understand the rationale behind her disposition to the proverb. But, on getting to my office, I put down the proverb in black and white and started analyzing it. ‘Eleha’ is a woman in purdah and ‘Egungun’ means Masquerade. Any law made that binds a masquerade binds a woman in purdah. Why? Because, a woman in purdah is masked and a masquerade too is masked. No one knows the person under a purdah or mask. The man saw the need to use language creatively but on the contrary the lady viewed it from a religious point of view. Thank God, the setting is a small community, though of different religions and denominations, but united like brothers and sisters in the same organization. The incident we jocularly dismissed might end up in a serious conflict if it occurred in another setting or in some other parts of the country where a trivial issue could degenerate to ethnic or religious conflict. The English equivalent interpretation of the proverb is, *‘What is good for the goose is good for the gander’*.

The above incident calls for examination of some other Yorùbá proverbs which need be used carefully or even avoided completely in certain settings. To confirm whether these proverbs are fading or are still actively used these days, we gave ten purposively selected proverbs to 100 undergraduates to complete and translate into English or use their equivalents in English as the case may be. A questionnaire was administered to elicit information about their background that may influence the use of Yorùbá proverbs.

Theoretical Framework

Communication is a vital tool to personal and interpersonal relationships through which bonds can be established. This study draws insight from Howard Giles Communication Accommodation theory (CAT) (Gile, 1987; Giles & Ogay, 2007), which focuses on the way people attune to others and how other people attune to them in communication through behavioural changes. The theory perceives speakers in a communication role as rational actors whose social roles are defined with other members in the society by either converging with or diverging from them. The speaker makes language or code choices to either identify with interlocutors or emphasize social distance between them. The choices may be between languages or language features.

CAT is a theory that concerns itself with relationships among people. Convergence enables a speaker make choices that makes him gain approval of the receiver, increase efficiency between him and the receiver and enable the duo make positive social identity that leads to established and continuous social network. Divergence on the other hand seeks to create distance by dwelling on the distinctive identity, social status or qualities that distinguishes the speaker from the receiver, this in turn results in social distance and withdrawal, which eventually breaks relationships.

For social cohesion to be maintained in any society, therefore, language or code choices is paramount and that is why this study has examined the use of Yorùbá Proverbs in Nigeria as a multilingual and multicultural society and how it can affect negatively, the unity of the country.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Data

	Yorùbá Proverbs	Literal Translation	English Equivalents
1.	Òfin tó de Eléhàá ló de Egúngún	The same law that binds a woman in pudah, binds a masquerade.	<i>What is good for the goose is good for the gander.</i>
2.	Àpónlé ni Málà, Haúsá l'Ahúsá n jé.	Mala is just honorific, Hausa is Hausa.	Nil
3.	Gàmbàrí pa Fúlàní, kò léjò n nù.	There is no crime in Gàmbàrí Killing Fulani.	<i>Blood is thicker than water</i>
4.	Ààyè gba Tápa, ó n kólé igunnu	If you give a Tapa man too much freedom, he will build house for his masquerade (igunnu).	<i>Familiarity breeds contempt</i>
5.	Eni tó fún lgbirà ló tí mu, ló ní kó fèèbò; Ó ní, 'Give me ànódá tobira'.	He who gives an Epira man alcohol caused him to speak English, saying, 'Give me another tumbler, pronounced as tobira [<i>Moderation in everything</i>]	<i>Moderation in everything</i>
6.	Èyàn tan ra è bí iyá Jimoh, tó dé másáláásí tó loun dé 'lé omo òun.	There is no one deceiving herself more than Jimoh's mother who got to the mosque and said she has got to her son's house. [<i>To deceive oneself is very easy/ Deceit always return to its master (French Proverb)</i>].	<i>To deceive oneself is very easy/ Deceit always return to its master (French Proverb)</i>].
7.	Oun tó n tán leégún odún, oun tó n fà lodò Òtìn, èèbó tí ó lo lèèbó Ilorin.	The annual masquerade celebration is just for a short period of the year, Odo Otin will surely reduce during dry season, the white man in Ilorin will surely return to his country.	<i>Christmas comes but once in a year.</i>
8.	Oro asiwere, nii yato	It is only the opinion of a mad person that differs.	<i>Great minds think alike.</i>
9.	Báa bá fún wèrè lókó, òdò ara rè ni o roko sí.	If you give a hoe to a mad person, he will draw it towards himself when hoeing.	Human beings are naturally selfish/Self-defense is the first law of nature.
10	Àpón tó lójá ò kún, e ní kó fisò iyàwó è han ni.	A bachelor who complains that the market is too scanty, tell him to show you his wife's shop or tent in the market.	Nil

Analysis and Discussion

Proverb 1: It makes reference to ‘Eléhàá’ (Woman in pudah) and ‘Egúngún’ (masquerade) to express the fact that what is good for A is also good for B. It is usually used when cheating or favoritism is perceived. Comparing ‘Eléhàá’ to ‘Egúngún’ is denigrating and if you want to annoy a woman in pudah, call her ‘Egúngún’, then you’re looking for trouble. The English version use the male and female gender of animal (goose and geese). These are lower animals who are not advantaged to hear, decode or interpret language the same way human beings do. Even if they hear, they don’t have the cognitive capacity to process the information and react negatively based on that. The English version is less offensive if used in the context of the illustration given above.

Proverb 2: ‘Málà’ and ‘Hausa’ are nouns in Hausa language. ‘Málà’ is the Yorùbá variant of the word ‘Mallam’ which is used generally to refer to Hausa men. The word Mallam is an honorific word used to refer to Islamic Scholars in Nigeria. The proverb is used when someone wants to disrespect another person, he previously accorded some respect, may be because of dispute or misunderstanding between them. It means that Mallam is just used as honorific, but Hausa is Hausa.

Proverb 3: ‘Gàmbàrí’ is used as a synonym for Hausa. It means if a ‘Gàmbàrí’ kills a Fulani man there is no crime committed because they are brothers from the same part of the country. The Northerners, to some people, regardless of the tribe, are seen as one. The proverb depicts segregation, discrimination and tribalism. It is used to mean ‘I am less concerned’ or ‘It is none of my business’. The proverb may be used concerning friends, siblings, colleagues, members of the same religion ethics, political parties or social organization. For instance, if Mr. A spends the money belonging to Mr. B, Mr. C may use the proverb to diverge, showing the distance between him and Mr. A & B who are cordially related biologically or intimate friends. I have heard the proverb used by mothers when there were issues between siblings to mean the siblings are one and not strangers to one another.

Proverb 4: ‘Tápà’ is a tribe from the Middle Belt of Nigeria, dominant in Niger State with an important minority in Kwara State. One of their occupations is farming and which makes them mingle with Yorùbás. The original name is Nupe, traditionally called the ‘Nupawa’ by Hausas and ‘Tápà’ by the neighbouring Yorùbá, while they refer to Yorùbás as Eyagi. They travel to other parts of the country, such as the South-West to earn a living in the 19th and 20th century. (Wikipedia). The proverb means, when a ‘Tápà’ man is accommodated too much, he goes beyond the boundary. If you give him some space to build a hut to live in, he will go as far as building a house for ‘Ìgunnu masquerade’ which is his deity. Ìgunnukó (Ndako Gboya) is a popular masquerade worshipped in Lagos but which was brought to Lagos in 1814 by Yaisa Ayani from his home town Patigi, Niger State and appealed to the Lagos war chief to give him space to build ibasoshi (igbó ìgunnu) known today as Igbo Ìgunnu Epetedo.

The proverb shows that there is a limit set for strangers and if the limit is exceeded there is bound to be problem. One of the challenges Nigeria is having today is this limit setting. If there is any dispute, those people seen as strangers are in danger because they easily fall victim of tribal and territorial disputes. This is evident in tribalistic voting of candidates in the just concluded February 25th 2023 Presidential elections in Nigeria. The proverb portrays tribalism which is a way of thinking or behaving in which people are more loyal to their tribe than their

friends, their country, or any other social group who may even be more beneficial to them. It implies possession of a strong cultural or ethnic identity that separates one member of a group from another.

Proverb 5: ‘Eni to fun Ìgbìrà loti mu, lo ni ko feebo; O ni, ‘Give me anoda tobira’. The Ebiras are found in Okene, Adavi, Ajaokuta and Okehi Local Government Area of Kogi State, North-central geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Èbìrà is also known as, Ìgbìrà Okene or Okpoto. They are very hardworking agrarians. Some of them as a sign of dignity and diligence even travel far from their state to other parts of the country to work for people on their farms to earn a living. The master-servant relationship brought about the proverb. The farm owners see them as labourers who are not meant to enjoy what their masters enjoy. It therefore means when you show too much love to your servant, he will misbehave.

Although just 38% could complete the proverb; yet it shows that the proverb is still in use. There is dignity in labour and the fact that these people are working for a living does not warrant their vilification as human beings. The proverb is also a sort of mockery of the Èbìrà’s regional pronunciation of the word ‘tumbler’ /tɒ. mblər/ as [tobira].

Proverb 6: ‘Jimoh’ is the Arabic name for Friday, which is the 6th day of the week. As we have some Christians name their children Sunday for being born on Sunday, or even Friday because they are born on Friday, so also Muslims name theirs Jimoh. According to the Islamic injunction, Muslims gather together to worship God on Fridays in the Mosque and this makes Friday (Jimoh) a special day to them. For a woman whose son is named Jimoh to get to the Mosque and claimed ownership of the mosque for his son simply because he was named after the Muslim worship day, Jimoh, would be a great self-deception.

The proverb is therefore used when someone, regardless of his religion is portraying a wrong picture of himself just to impress people. These days we hear of people, celebrities and various individuals going on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram with borrowed money, clothes, cars etc. to display false wealth so they can be respected and have numerous followers. When such fabricated lifestyles are eventually revealed to people, this proverb is used to show that such a person is deceiving himself. Apart from that, if someone aspires for something which he knew he could never achieve it could also be used.

This proverb, however, may lead to misunderstanding or even degenerate to pandemonium if there is someone bearing the name Jimoh where the proverb is used; most especially if the person who used the proverb is not in good term with the speaker. Instead of using that proverb he can say: *Deceit always return to its master.*

Proverb 7: This is symbolic in nature. *Eégún odún* is the annual Egúngún Festival. Once the celebration is over, it cannot be witnessed again until the next year. *Odò Òtìn* is a river in Odò Òtìn town in Osun State, named after the river. No matter how full the river might be, during the dry season, it will surely reduce. *Èèbó* is the Yorùbá name for the white man. *Ilorin* is the capital of Kwara State. *Èèbó Ilorin* is therefore a White man who is a sojourner in Ilorin and who is bound to go back to his country one day. In essence, what the proverb connotes is that no matter how long a person stays in a position, one day he will leave the post because it is transient. It is used to caution people when they are power drunk. If the proverb is used in Ilorin

and most especially in an office where a white man is a boss, the man may feel a sense of racial discrimination if he is able to decode the proverb.

Proverb 8: It is used when people are deliberating on an issue or into argument in any kind of meeting where people give their opinion. If someone has a different opinion from others' and most especially, if it is not favourable to some members, the proverb may be used. Here the person giving a contrary opinion is compared to a mad man, forgetting that everyone has a right to his/her opinion. This kind of comparison is too weighty, comparing someone who gave a contrary opinion to a mad man. The English version is less offensive than its Yorùbá equivalence. In these days of terrorism, political unhealthy rivalry, racial discrimination, territorial dispute etc., mild proverb in English can be used, that is, *Great minds think alike*.

Proverb 9: This is similar to proverb 8 in the sense that it makes a comparison with a mad man, but with a different meaning. It is usually used to portray selfish people. Meaning if you gave a hoe to a mad man, no matter his level of insanity, he would draw it towards himself. The illustration is a picture of a hoe with the blade facing the person using it. If you use it otherwise, there is no how it can perform the function it is meant for. When people are interested in themselves alone without thinking of others, this proverb is used. Someone was voted into power by the people for the benefit of the electorates but got to power and forgot the people, instead, diverted all the benefits to himself and his family alone. This kind of proverb may cause dispute most especially where there are others who are not really deep in the Yorùbá language. The person referred to may feel being insulted and to avoid that, the English version may be used – '*Human beings are naturally selfish*' or '*Self-defense is the first law of nature*'.

Proverb 10: This symbolizes a bachelor who is complaining that the market is not well populated. If everybody were single like him, where would they get enough women to fill the market? If this kind of proverb is used where there is a bachelor already overripe for marriage, he may feel the speaker deliberately used the proverb to ridicule him. This may affect such a man psychologically and even degenerate to physical combat.

Results

Table 1: Showing Respondents' Level of Familiarity with the Proverbs

Questions	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
RT	75	77	61	71	38	34	48	38	57	39
WG	25	23	39	29	62	46	52	62	43	61
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Q= Question, RT= Right and WG = Wrong

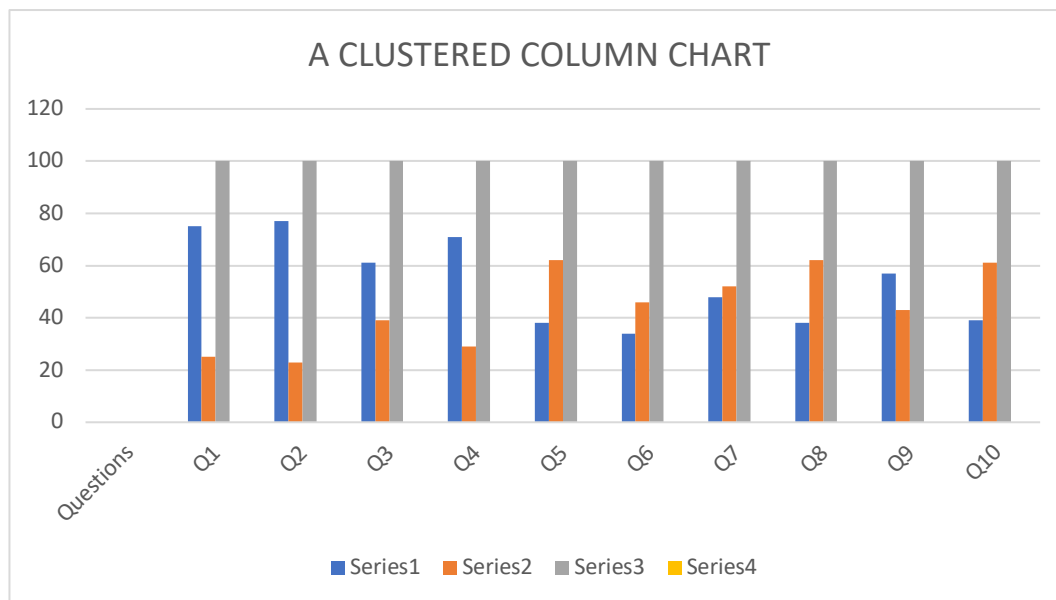


Table 2: Showing Descriptive Statistics of Responses to the Proverbs

Var.	Obs	Mean	Std Dev.	Min.	Max.
RT	10	53.8	16.63196	34	77
WG	10	44.2	15.12026	23	62

The study examined 100 youth between ages 15 and 30. The rationale behind this was to detect whether the proverbs are still in use or not. This is the youth age that can still be considered as belonging to the Net Generation. As displayed in table 2 above, the mean right response is 53.8% while the mean wrong response shows 44.2%. The standard deviation for the questions correctly answered is 16.63196 as contrary to the questions rightly answered which is 15.12026. The minimum performance for right answers is 34% while the minimum for wrong answer is 23%. Also, the maximum performance for right answers is 77% while for wrong answers, we have 62%. The result shows that the youth are still very much familiar with the proverbs, in spite of the technological development. They have one time or the other heard others use them, used them themselves in discussion, and can still use any of them.

The age range today in Nigeria can be considered the crime age, taking cognizance of the rate of crimes committed by the youth these days. If we see ourselves as brothers and sisters, we will not want to harm anyone, remembering it is the same blood that flows in us which flows in others as Nigerians and of course as human beings. Nigeria is a multilingual nation with about 529 local languages which called for a language of unification, a purpose the English language has been serving since the exit of the colonial masters. Language barrier is one of the factors that can lead to disunity and dispute. At this crucial period, peace is very germane to growth economically, politically and socially in Nigeria. If we look at the English equivalents of the proverbs, no names are mentioned but they are generally corrective.

It should be noted at this juncture that such denigrating proverbs are available in other tribes in Nigeria as well.

The following are typical examples in Hausa language:

- i. Wannzami'n Bohnu, ka sha' woni, ba a sha' k aba.
Meaning: O barber of the Bohnu, you circumcise but no one circumcises you.
- ii. Bohnu kasua da gado.
Meaning: The stupid Bohnu bring their beds to market.
Bohnu is a district west of Nigeria.
- iii. Na Ma'azu Kasshi'n shanu
Meaning: The Nupes are like cow's dung- they are so deceitful. (Cow's dung which has been exposed to the air has a hard outside and a soft inside; the manner of a Nupe is sincere while his heart is false. (Ma'azu is a king of Nupe). It is unfair to generalize here. The fact that the Nupe king then was deceptive doesn't really mean that every Nupe King or the indigens are deceptive.

CONCLUSION

Proverb is to language what salt is to stew. It is no doubt the beauty of language, but the study has shown that if used negatively it could lose its flavor. The above proverbs are denigrating and divisive, and should therefore be avoided in communication, most especially in this period of tension when security becomes a phantasm in Nigeria. In the absence of non-equivalents in Yorùbá, there are other proverbs in English that can be employed instead of codeswitching where proverbs are needed. It is high time Nigerians started seeing ourselves first as human beings, as a nation and as brothers and sisters before thinking of the tribe or religion we belong and then individual families we come from. Status, tribe, language, religion or territory should not be a determinant of respect or love for one another as a nation. The world generally is in a period of tension when any little provocation can lead to chaos. This is a period we need to strive for unity in our diversity and avoid every loop hole that may engender pandemonium, crisis, terrorism, killings and every other form of crime in Nigeria.

It should be noted at this juncture, however, that the above proverbs are still active in the Yorùbá culture and language community. These kinds of denigrating proverbs in Yorùbá language and those of other tribes in Nigeria should be avoided in speeches and, if possible, substituted with their milder English versions where necessary instead of being codeswitched in English medium settings. Yorùbá proverbs are heritage that cannot be avoided in Yorùbá context. Proverbs generally are constructed based on socio-functional reasons; resulting from close observations of situations or circumstance. People should, however, be selective and avoid some of them in settings where there are people with diverse languages where they can be misconstrued. It is essential to be convergent in language or code choices, most especially in a multicultural gathering, if social cohesion is to be maintained or enhanced. We should remember that, communication goes beyond communication; without communion it is useless. Also, unity that lacks sincerity is sheer collusion.

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