



Hausa Proverbs as a Dynamic Mode of Discourse between Tradition and Modernity

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Abstract: Proverbs are very common and employed in African societies, especially in Hausa. They arise in the midst of conversation. They are used for many purposes, in numerous circumstances and ways that, in many African societies, effective speech and social success depend on a good command of proverbs [Usman et al. \(2013\)](#). As such they held a very important place in traditional societies; dynamic mode of discourse, proverbs is also used as a major vehicle of transmission from generation to generation as people could not read and write. But, learning colonial languages (French, English, Portuguese) imposes to new generation the acquisition of new communicative competence. Consequently, new generation has no good command of their native language let alone proverbs whereas modern society is characterized by quick communication which gives no more room to proverbs. There have been many studies on topics related to the use, role, form, characteristic and functions of Hausa proverbs. To the best knowledge of the researcher no study was conducted regarding Hausa proverbs in traditional vis-à-vis modern society. That is what the paper tries to investigate in an attempt of filling up the gap. Participants were chosen through random sampling method while unstructured interview and surreptitious observation were used to collect data. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyse data. Analysis reveals that Hausa new generation is no more competent in their language in that they code switch, code mix or even borrow when communicating let alone use of proverbs. Still in use in traditional societies, proverbs are drastically threatened to falling in disuse in modern societies.

Keywords: Language Use, Proverbs, Discourse, Communication, Tradition/Modernity.

1. Introduction

Language is an instrument through which people in society express their ideas. It is a tool men use for thinking. As such, 'Language is not only a vehicle of individual thought but of collective thought', [Alexandra and Richard \(2014\)](#). Hence, [Fairclough \(1989\)](#) sees the use of language as the most common form of social behaviour and we depend on language in our public and private interactions(...). Language is "a great force of socialisation, probably the greatest that exists." [Nana \(2020\)](#). Language is a means of communication, a function it performs well through the use of, amongst others, proverbs. Hence, proverb is a communicative medium commonly used as communication strategy in our daily life and touches almost all aspects of our life. They (proverbs) tend to add colour to the linguistic process of speakers (..) [Asabe \(2014\)](#). In fact, proverbs are quoted constantly when folks engage in a discourse [Ashipu \(2007\)](#).

They are very common and employed in African societies where they are used for so many purposes in both traditional and modern societies. As such they held a very important place in traditional societies particularly in Hausa. In the same vein, [Ibrahim \(2011\)](#), stated: "proverbs as major sources of information storage are a dominant means of communication in the unlettered culture. Talking about traditional societies, proverbs encapsulated the people's history and philosophy of life as the people could not read and write. Their history and beliefs were stored and coded in some special mental capabilities, and then transmitted orally through, especially, proverbs [Sergio \(2012\)](#). Proverbs are common features of conversational eloquence in many African cultures; "wise sayings" as to Usman et als they are usually acquired and learnt from listening to the elders' talk. Whence, in many African societies effective speech and social success depend on a good command of proverbs. These treasured sayings convey the demonstrated wisdom of the ages and therefore serve as a reliable authority in arguments or discussion [Usman et al. \(2013\)](#). This informs why a traditional African would constantly punctuate his speech with appropriate proverbs and aphorisms to drive his points home [Lawal and Mummad \(1997\)](#). We,

henceforth, maintain Ibrahim (2011) stand that 'Proverbs are some of the best media of transmitting the socio-cultural values of any speech community from generation to generation'. Unfortunately and that is where the shoe pinches modern –literate- generation seems to be in break with tradition. Thousands ignore the meaning of a proverb let alone use it. They undergo western education which means learning and mastering the language of the colonial masters; being exposed to using native language for communication at home and the colonial ones like French, English, Portuguese, for official and academic purposes, using new technology information communication devices, in sum acquiring some new communicative competence.

On the one hand, in traditional society proverbs are intimately and squarely linked to the people almost all aspects or way of life: culture, politics, socialization, entertainment, religion, peace, conflict resolution, community, to mention but a few. All these make proverbs become an icon and have great influence on the life style of the whole members of the society. On the other hand, new generation have their attention turned to making calls, text messaging, e-commercing, chatting through communication devices such as mobile phones, smart phones, tablets, social media and the sorts. To argue in the same line as Sergio (2012), Modern society, everywhere, is based on quick communication and has no room anymore for proverbs that represent the fathers' culture and even a good use of the language. The main thing is that Hausa new generation is not noticed as an exception in spite of the very rich and long tradition of proverbs usage in Hausa society. The study claims that due to a number of factors, proverbs are drastically losing ground even threatened to fall in disuse in modern society.

The literature on proverb discourse is quite rich. Types, form, role, functions and characteristics of proverbs have been extensively discussed though to the best knowledge of the researcher no study has been carried with regards this aspect. To achieve our aim, participants were selected randomly. Unstructured interview and surreptitious observation were used as research instruments. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse data.

2. Conceptual Framework

Etymologically, the word "proverb" from Latin "pro-verbium" ("pro" meaning "in front of" and "verbium" meaning "word"), suggests that a proverb takes the place of ordinary words. They are very common and employed in African societies, particularly in Hausa, a language very rich in this field. Sergio (2012).

However, the concept has been approached from differing angles so that we have to make clear what we do mean by proverb as a discourse.

As to Hosni (2019) the term "Discourse", used as a mass noun, means roughly the same as "language use" or "language-in-use". As a count noun (a discourse), it means a relatively discrete subset of a whole language, used for specific social or institutional purposes. More specifically, "discourse" as a mass noun and its strict linguistic sense, refers to connected speech or writing occurring at suprasentential levels. In this work we refer to discourse in its sense of language use or language in use.

Hosni (ibid) goes on to distinguish about three approaches to Discourse and its Analysis in contemporary scholarship, namely: (1) the formal linguistic approach (discourse as text); (2) the empirical sociological approach (discourse as conversation) and (3) the critical approach (discourse as power/knowledge). The present study is concerned with the empirical sociological approach that is discourse as conversation; an approach that largely consists of sociological forms of analysis which have taken "discourse" to mean human conversation.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Instruments and Procedures

Two main instruments were used in conducting the research, the unstructured interview and surreptitious observation. The two were carried out side by side. This study utilised both quantitative and qualitative methods. According to Creswell (1998) the qualitative approach allows the researcher to share in the perceptions and understanding of others and to know how people learn about and make sense of themselves. Whence as the researcher attempted to interpret the results by way of assessing non-quantitative factors observed in the study, qualitative method was necessary. As to the quantitative method, it was necessary for accounting the frequency of new generation's knowledge and or use of language and proverbs in particular through the recorded spontaneous speech and interview. Samples for this study were chosen through random sampling technique. The sample of this study comprised 60 participants both males and females. The people interviewed were selected regardless of sex and occupation, based on age. All the participants are middle aged from twenty two (22) to thirty seven (37).

All participants are Hausa native speakers from Kano (Northern Nigeria) and Damagaram (Eastern Niger).

The data were collected over a period of one (1) month. However, for this study only some excerpts have been chosen for analysis. As mentioned earlier, an unstructured interview was carried out at different points (in the urban and rural areas). The exercise took the whole day at each point because of the importance of the movement of people specially at rush hours. That time allowed interviewing as much as possible which brought about adequate insight about how people perceive proverbs, their context and usage (and also their knowledge regarding the whole language) whether proverbs are still in use or threatened.

Finally, a special recorder which has an SD card and the ability to transfer data into the computer file was used to ensure the quality of recording as well as the smooth transfer of data.

4. Ethical Consideration

Jalaludeen (2019) revealed that a high standard of ethics and professionalism go hand in hand. Ethical obligation that researchers have toward participants research include that participants should not be harmed or deceived but be willing, informed and be held in confidence. In the same vein, Economics and Social Research Council (ESRC) stated that the confidentiality of the information supplied by the research subjects and the anonymity of respondents must be respected (2006). Consequently, the participants in this research were not subject to harm; they were willing to participate.

5. Data Analysis

Analysis was made on the information gathered from the unstructured interview and surreptitious observation. The analysis focused on:

1. The use of Hausa language in general and Proverbs in particular in both traditional and modern Hausa society.
2. Current position of the proverbs: still in use or otherwise (losing ground even threatened to fall into disuse, disappearing, etc.)? by old and or new generation from the large amount of data (recorded answers) collected, only some excerpts have been chosen for analysis.
3. Link between foreign colonial languages acquisition and utilization, the nature of communication (quick) and proverbs thread to disappearing.

A quantitative analysis was first carried out to account for the frequency of the use of the Hausa language in its whole and Hausa Proverbs in Hausa modern society in particular. From the data obtained, proverbs are falling into disuse, disappearing as to new generation.

Below is the response obtained from the interview made with Hausa native from Niger and Nigeria. It shows the number of respondents in respect to the frequency of the use of proverbs by today's generation of Hausa.

Table 1. Number of Respondents regarding the Frequency of the Use of Proverbs in Hausa Modern Society

Number of respondents	Answers		Frequency			
			True	Sometimes	Rarely	Not at all
60	Language use	Influence of Modernisation	60			41
		No good command of CS/CM/Borrowing	60			
			60			
	Proverbs	Frequency of use		02	17	
		Assessment of language competence in Traditional society	60			
	Proverbs still In use in Threatened in	Traditional society	45	6	9	
Modern society		55		5		
	Proverbs falling in disuse; disappearing due to:	Western education	60			
		Use of communication devices	60			
		Nature of communication (quick)	60			

Source: Collected data

Evaluated in percentage; the result is tabulated as:

Table 2. Percentage of respondents in respect to their use of proverbs and frequency of probable fall in disuse of proverbs

Number of respondents	Answers		Frequency				
			Time	Sometimes	Rarely	Not at all	Percentage
60	Language use	Influence of Modernisation	60				100%
		No good command of CS/CM/Borrowing	60				100%
			60				100%
	Proverbs Use	Frequency of use		02⇒ 3,33%	17⇒ 28,33%	41⇒ 68,33%	100%
		As an assessment of language competence in Traditional society	60				100%
	Proverbs still in use in Threatened in	Traditional society	45 75%	06⇒ 10%	9⇒ 15%		100%
		Modern society	55 91.66%		5 8.33%		100%
	Proverbs falling in disuse; disappearing due to:	Western education	60				100%
		Use of communication devices	60				100%
		Nature of communication(quick)	60				100%

Source: Collected data

As mentioned earlier, only some excerpts have been chosen for analysis. The paper analyses and interprets the excerpts in respect with the various context situation and position of proverbs regarding its use and usage. As can be observed from Table2, there are a total of 60 respondents.

Excerpt 1 reveals that hundred per cent of our respondents attest the influence of modern life style on their use of language. Consequently, they are no more competent in their language. French and English take over that they cannot make a conversation of about 3minutes without CS/ CM or borrowing. They do run out of ordinary language (vocabulary) let alone proverbs-of which they don't know the meaning a fortiori the usage. As stated by our participants "because" of our undergoing western education, we can't help but switch or mix even borrow from French and English when speaking " Hausar tamu ba hausa ba ce". It true speakers (bi/multilingual) frequently switch from one language to another within the existence of two or more languages. Scholars like (Kachru, 1978; Myers-Scotton, 1993a; Panbit, 1972; Sridhal, 1978) are reported to assert that 'Code-switching and code-mixing serve the same functions. Some of the more prominent ones are identity marking. A speaker may use a particular code to signal a specific type of identity, for example, English or French for modernity, sophistication, authority and so on, in many parts of the world" in Sridhar. We found out our informants code-switch and code-mix for modernity and sophistication as they state through the use of words as 'tasirin zamani' that means influence of modernity; kowa ya yi boko ya/zama bature that everyone experienced literacy and, as a result, becomes literate, sophisticated.

Excerpt 2: As to the frequency proverbs are used by todays middle-aged on various degree; the study reveals that 02 that is 3,33% use proverbs sometimes; 17 that is 28,33% rarely whereas 41 that is 68,33% never make use of proverbs amidst conversation. They can be said as not having the ability to sum up ideas and experiences in captivating and succinct expressions that has always been considered a sign of native intelligence, linguistic competence and cultural erudition Gabriel and Etienne (2016).

Excerpt 3 shows that 45 that is (75%) assert proverbs are still in use in traditional society especially by older, westernly uneducated people using only and only their language; they are aged 40/50 to above, not exposed to new lexical items from other languages in their day-day activitie. This can be proven by some authors with different view point as to why proverbs are still in use following the example of (Ashipu (2007)) who asserted 'Major sources of information storage, proverbs are a dominant means of communication in the unlettered culture and are quoted constantly when folks engage in a discourse'. Muhammad (2015) stated:" the proverbs, though mostly old, can still be used in order to solve the problems of misunderstanding which leads to different crises (...). By using the proverbs people will be

able to appreciate the values and philosophies contained in the lore and consequently maintain the wisdom.” In the same line, [Musa and Isah \(2019\)](#) observes proverbs are traditional answers to recurrent problems. They provide an argument for a course of action which conforms to community values, they arise in a mindst of conversation and are used by speakers to give a “name to ethical problem confronting and to suggest ways in which it has been solved in the past.” Furthermore, [Musa and Isah \(2019\)](#) having examined the roles of Hausa proverbs in peace keeping and conflict resolution stated the following: ‘Be that as it may, proverb served as the precaution and often times, panacea to conflict especially in the Hausa land. (...) Hausa proverbs drastically surged forward certain resolutions.

Excerpt 4: 55 that is (91.66%) of our informant ascertain that proverbs are threatened to fall into disuse. And this is due to a certain number of realities: modernity, literacy, use of communication devices, nature of communication etc; this can be ascertained through various view point and statements from various scholars. For instance, Sridhar (P2) stated: ‘Because of colonialism in Africa, colonial languages such as, Spanish, French and English became entrenched and continue to play crucial roles long after the cessation of colonial rules. Other reasons include the commercial, scientific, and technological dependence of the speakers of certain languages over others.

Though most of the younger generation of Africans cannot spend a day without communicating via the internet and notably via social media, which has become an addiction, they often do it in official foreign languages in which they have been schooling exclusively. The dying out of the oral practice of African mother tongues among the youth is one of the consequences of such language in education policies in formal education. In fact, Africans have long been weaned off their mother tongues through exclusive language policies, which do not take into account local languages in public. Gabriel (2016: 48)

Nowadays, communication is what makes everything running. As [Sergio \(2012\)](#) put it “ in traditional societies proverbs have a relevant position in culture(...) In modern society, everywhere is based on quick communication and has no room anymore for proverbs that represent father’s culture and even a good use of language. Hausa is not noticed as an exception, even if it has a very rich and long tradition of proverbs usage. For all these reasons and others, Proverbs are drastically threatened to fall into disuse in modern societies or, to quote our informants verbatim pro verbo in their majority ‘Proverbs are disappearing.

6. Discussion

Proverbs are frequently used in everyday and different kinds of situation that their use cannot be overemphised in Hausa Society: they are revealed as a dynamic mode of discourse used as means of communication and information storage, a medium through which we can learn about a people. As [Murray \(1911\)](#) observes : ‘They have much to teach us. They are the safest index to the inner life of a people. With them we can construct a mental image of the conditions of existence, the manners, characteristics, moral and weltanschauung of the community which used them. They present us with the surest data upon which to base our knowledge of volspscholgia.’

From the foregoing analysis, one can see that inspite of this importance of theirs and contrary to Asabe (2) assertion, proverbs, in regards to young people in modern society who learn to write and read, use communication devices in all aspects of their life, communicate in exported, official languages as French, English etc; no more serve as an avenue for transmitting knowledge, attitudes and values which are often expressed metaphorically. This is, because, the effect of proverbs on the people depends on the aptness with which they are employed in a given situation and on the subject matter, style, and forms of words with which they are dressed [Adeyemi and Ahmad \(2017\)](#). Accordingly, we find out that young generation tend to ignore the existence/ importance(only an infinitesimal number of our population tried to define proverbs where some failed to do so) of this valuable means of expressing the simple and physical truth based on common sense and social experience of people. In fact, the study reveals the whole language in dramatic situation as young generation no more have good command of their native language which is translated by an ostentatious lack of vocabulary and expressions knowledge leading them to code-switching, code-mixing and borrowing when conversing/communicating. This state of affairs gives no room to proverbs or ‘interactive effort involving sharp-witted analysis and judgment, which can make a proverb in the mouth of a skilled proverbist a verbal act of great fitness.” ([Ibekwe, 1998](#)).

Therefore, young generation are in break with tradition that runs counter to Ibrahim (2011) and Adeyemi and Ahmad (2017) assertion, entirely of each other's opinion that 'Proverbs are some of the best media of transmitting the socio-cultural values of any speech community from generation to generation'; 'it offers a useful means of transmitting culture, social morality, manners, ideas of a people from one generation to another' respectively. Today, when you address people through proverbs they are at sea; ask for the meaning or, what is worse, they even make fun of (cf. excerpts).

Following the analysis and interpretation of the present study, it is clear that nowadays, proverbs are threatened to fall in disuse especially because out of many other factors this paper found out the fundamental one is that, Modern society, everywhere, is based on quick communication, that communication is what runs everything.

We share Musa et als (128) assertion that 'the Folklore of any society is very important in understanding the society. To ignore its folklore, so is to ignore the essential ingredient of that society. Hausa proverb must always be taken into account. Certainly, the use of proverb is intimately and squarely connected with Hausa's way of life. 128 Musa ET AL Proverbs expresses the folk ideas, which inspire the thought and action of a given group of people.

7. Conclusion

The study addressed the issue of Hausa proverbs between tradition and modernity; whether they are still in good position or falling in disuse especially in this era of Technology Information Communication that characterize communication as quick.

Base on the analysis of data obtained from unstructured and surreptitious observation the finding of the study reveals that the Hausa new generation are no more competent in language (no command of particularly the vocabulary). They consequently make use of code switching, code mixing and borrowing. As analyses focus on especially the Hausa proverbs it was sorted out that Hausa proverb are absolutely falling in disuse if nothing is done to inverse the situation; this is, in spite of their importance in African traditional societies, mainly in Hausa. By then, proverbs have a relevant position in culture where they are proven to be a measure of speakers' competence in language. Today, in modern society, they are no more given room due to, among other things the nature of communication: quick, rapid.

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