

A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURES OF SELECTED HAUSA AND ENGLISH PROVERBS

BUTARI NAHUM UPAH

Department of English and Drama
Kaduna State University

&

ABUBAKAR SADIQ MUSA

Department of Languages
Kaduna Polytechnic

Abstract

This study is a Contrastive Analysis of English and Hausa proverbs in selected texts. The study considers three (3) research questions which are based on the similarities and differences between the English and Hausa proverbs. The sample population covers collections of several proverbs. The data collected were subjected to comparison at different levels using Quirk and Wilson's models while Banathy's contrastive model is then used to describe the selected proverbs according to their form, patterns, distribution and variations. Overall findings on the similarities and differences of English and Hausa proverbs were stated based on the forms, patterns; distributions and varieties. The findings of the study reveal that Proverbs that are culture-bound are those that posed difficulties for learning and translation from Hausa language to English. On this basis, the study recommended that the English and Hausa proverbs should be given adequate consideration so as to improve students' performance on the use of English proverbs.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is a comparative analysis of Hausa and English proverbs. Over the years, many studies have been conducted on proverbs using different linguistic approaches. One of such prominent linguists is Robert Lado (1957) who posits that the differences that may seem to exist between languages could be the cause of difficulties that speakers of first language (L1) may experience while speaking the second language (L2). This goes to show that knowing the linguistic and cultural elements of the first and second languages would help learners focus more attention on the areas that need to be stressed. Errors made by Hausa learners while translating a proverb into English has become a source of concern to all Hausa-English coordinate bilinguals. It is from such premise that the research developed its motivation. For example, the problems encountered while in the classroom and social interactions defined the

interest on this frontier of linguistic research. In line with the above discovery, the comparative analysis of English and Hausa proverbs is important as it would enable the teacher of English as a second language to understand the causes of certain errors committed by learners. These errors will be looked at from the structural and semantic (meaning) aspects of the languages. It is also expected that once the areas of potential difficulties are mapped out through comparative analysis, it will become possible to design language courses.

Objectives of the Study

This study is a comparative study of proverbs in selected English and Hausa written literary texts. The study intends to achieve the following:

1. Find out the similarities between Hausa and English proverbs.
2. Determine the differences that may exist between Hausa and English proverbs
3. Examine the areas of difficulties between English and Hausa proverbs.

Research Questions

This study raises the following research questions and attempts to address them:

Q1. To what extent is English proverb similar to Hausa proverbs?

Q2. In what way is the English proverb different from Hausa proverb?

Q3. What difficulties do Hausa L1 speakers likely to encounter in an attempt to translate either English proverbs to Hausa or Hausa proverbs to English?

Literature Review

A proverb (from the Latin *proverbium*) is a simple and concrete saying popularly known and repeated, which expresses a truth, based on common sense or the practical experience of humanity (Latin, 2011:34).

The study of proverbs offers a useful means of transmitting culture, social morality, manners and ideas of a people from one generation to another as they express the folk ideas, which underlie the thought and action of a given group of people. Abrahams (1973:177) defines proverb 'as a short and witty traditional expression that arise as part of everyday discourse as well as in the more highly structured situations of education and judicial proceedings. Each proverb is a full statement of an approach to a recurrent problem. It presents a point of view and a strategy that is self-sufficient, needing nothing more than an event of communication to bring it into play. "A proverb is such a saying popularly known to express simple and concrete truth based on common sense and the experience of people". According to Bascom (1964:438), 'proverbs which are the

most important type of aphorism in Africa have a deeper meaning than is stated literally; a meaning which can be understood only through the analysis of the social situations to which they are appropriate’.

Every language has its own stock of proverbs, and proverbs in one language today reflect every age and time. It contains keen observation of everyday life, constitutes popular philosophy of life, and provides an insight into human behavior and character. All the different definitions of proverbs examined above identified both the structural and functional elements of proverbs. Proverbs are tools for social regulation besides the fact that they are useful devices in literary productions. The main purpose of proverbs is to reach out to individual and societal needs at any point in time. Proverbs have been variously called: sayings, idioms, metaphors, maxims and so on. Sayings are wise statements which often have meanings beyond ordinary meanings of the words used to express them (Folly, 1991:36).

According to Usman (2008:33) the most notable characteristic of proverb is the way it is used orally. Until recently, proverbs were strictly spoken and passed on from one generation to another. Writing is said to be a recent development in language, hence, it will not be out of place to speculate that proverbs are as old as language itself since humans have always had experiences before the evolving literary traditions.

Norrick (1985:19) identifies two basic characteristics that differentiate proverbs generally from free formed utterances. First, proverbs are performed inventorised linguistic units; and second, they have traditional item of folklore. These characteristics have important consequences for the interactional meaning proverbs realize in context. By choosing a ready-made utterance with a standard ideational meaning and perhaps a standard textual and interactional meaning as well, the speaker avoids the necessity of formulating an original utterance of his own. Another consequence of proverbs being inventorised is their value in signaling group membership. Here proverbs are like clichés, jokes, especially inside jokes, allusions, quotes and the way of speaking generally, all of which can lead to bonding between people (Cohen, 1978:32).

Proverbs are known as “Karin Magana” in Hausa. The Hausa proverb is said to be the oldest and the most important genre of folklore which is used by the people in many contexts. Hausa proverbs give answers to recurrent problems;

these proverbs are also used to revive history, to develop language, to entertain and to educate (Ibrahim, 1970:32). Hausa proverbs touch on almost every aspect of the people's life. Akporobaro (2005:89) rightly observes that 'proverbs in Hausa language manifest the same wide range in topical interest and close attentiveness to the facts of human life, as do the proverbs from other major social ethnic groups. He added that," Hausa proverbs reflect the religious temper and heritage of the Hausa people".

The origin of Hausa proverb according to Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2012:32) is derived from the interaction of traders of old that made the Hausa people of that time get proverbs from their types of business. Apart from the fact that there have been various explanations about the origin of Hausa proverbs, no one tells/says the exact origin, as it is as old as the language itself.

Sadiq (2009:14) identified seven types of proverbs in Hausa according to their functions. He explained that some of these proverbs deal with various topics of national character in the Hausa society and examples include societal expectations, curbing of excess behavior, morality, courage, sense of responsibility to depiction of cultural settings and so on.

Models of Contrastive Linguistics Analysis

Many descriptive models have been developed to aid the study of CLA. For example, Lyons (1994:23), Selinker (1992:20) James (1996:43) and Mohammed (2000:21) identified some models of contrastive analysis. Lyons (1972:50) points at a semantic model, Selinker (1992:50) mentions Structural model, Functional model, Pragmatic model, grammatical model, Transformational model, Diaglossic model, Eclectic generative model and James (1996:32) points out Structural or Taxonomic model, Case Grammar, Transformational Generative model, Contractive Generative Grammar. Mohammed (2000:34) also identifies some descriptive grammatical models mentioned such as Traditional Grammar, IC analysis, transformational generative, Sector analysis, pedagogical grammar and communicative model. In this study, however, some of the descriptive grammatical models mentioned above are reviewed while others are chosen adopted as the theoretical framework for this research work.

Theoretical Framework

The framework of analysis adopted for this work is Banathys (1968:60) Model of Contrastive Analysis. This model was selected in order to aid a thorough understanding of Hausa culture as transmitted through proverbs in English.

Sources of Data/Sampling Technique

The proverbs presented as data for the study are extracted from books on proverbs especially the works of Bello Muhammad, i.e. Karin Maganar Hausawa, Thematic Analysis of selected Hausa proverbs by Zainab Abdulkarim, Hausa Custom by Ibrahim Madauci et al. and “1000 English proverbs” by wordpress.com and A Dictionary of Common English Proverbs by Mohammed Attia. Purposive sampling developed by Fraenkel and Wallen (2008:35) is chosen to serve as a sampling technique for this study. This model which is also known as judgment, selective or subjective sampling, is a sampling technique in which a researcher relies on his own judgment when choosing members of population or data to use or participate in the study. Thus, some proverbs from the two languages under study are selected from texts or works of Bello Muhammad and Frank Williams, in both English and Hausa respectively for the purpose of this study.

Method of Data Analysis

Distributions of several proverbs are used to show the levels of similarities and differences of proverbs in the two languages being studied. As a result, descriptive analysis is used for comparison and their equivalent meanings or translation presented side by side as well as their structural sentence patterns using (SVOCA) structural analysis.

Data presentation

English Proverbs

The data presented below show that English proverbs can be described in terms of form, pattern, distribution and variety. It is believed that this analytical description will help to look into the proverbial forms such as the structure of the proverbs, its wider range of distribution and also examine if English proverbs conform to the regular arrangement of English sentence order or not. Examples are as follows:

1. A picture is worth a thousand words.

Form: SVC (subject verb, complement)

Pattern: regular

Distribution; love

Variety: Subject + predicate

2. A little learning is a dangerous thing.

Form: SVC (subject, verb, complement)

Pattern: regular

Distribution: knowledge

Variety: Subject + predicate

3. A penny saved is a penny earned

Form: SVC (subject,verb,complement)

Pattern: regular

Distribution: advice

Variety: Subject + predicate

4. A chain is only as strong as weak link

Form: SVC (subject, verb, complement)

Pattern: regular

Distribution: warning

Variety: Subject + predicate

5. The early bird catches the worm

Form: SVO (subject, verb, object)

Pattern: regular

Distribution: determination

Variety: Subject + predicate

Hausa Proverbs

The data presented below show Hausa proverbs and their description in terms of form, pattern, distribution and variety. Some of the Hausa proverbs showed similarity with their English equivalent while others have shown partial differentiation according to form, pattern, distribution and variety which the research gives a bilingual explanation of each of the proverbs analyzed. For example:

1. Guntun gatarin ka ya fi sari ka bani. (Your own modest possession is better than a borrowed one)

Form: Adj Phr +VP + Adv Phr (adjective phrase, verb phrase, adverb phrase)

Pattern: regular

Distribution: self-reliance

Variety: Subject + predicate

2. Rashin sani ya fi dare duhu (ignorance is darker than night).

Form: NP +VP +Adj Phr (noun phrase verb phrase + adjective phrase)

Pattern: regular

Distribution: knowledge

Variety: Subject + predicate

3. Labarin zuciya a tambayi fuska. (The story in the mind can be seen on the face)

Form: Adj Phr + VP + NP

Pattern: regular

Distribution: frustration

Variety: Subject + predicate

4. Nagari shi yake sai da kansa. (Those with worthy character need no advertisement)

Form: NP +VP + NP

Pattern: regular

Distribution: goodness

Variety: Subject + predicate

5. Ilimi gishirin zaman duniya. (education is the key to success)

Form: NP +Adj Phr (noun phrase + adjective phrase)

Pattern: regular

Distribution: knowledge

Variety: Subject + Adj (predicate)

Analysis of data

The contrastive analysis undertaken in this study begins with form. The formations of the English proverbs collected in the data are in terms of SVOCA (subject, verb, object, complement, adjunct) while that of Hausa, proverbial formation are in some cases in form of VP+VP, VP+ Adj. Phr. The notions of form in English proverbs are words that signal conventional pattern (i.e. regular word arrangement to form meaning). For example:

- Fortune favors the bold.
- Beggars can't be choosers
- A watched pot never boils.

In Hausa, it is also words that signal conventional pattern but in some cases different patterns that are distinct from English do occur, such as:

- Gani ya kori ji (seeing is believing)
- Fede biri har wutsiya. (Skin the monkey to its tail i.e. reveal everything)
- Mahakurci mawadaci. (Patience is a virtue)

The distributional characteristics of English proverbs are mostly warning, advice and admonishing. Such as: A great talker is a great liar, all that glitters are not

gold, and once bitten twice shy etc. While in Hausa proverbs, it differs because of the descriptive nature of the language. Hausa proverbs however, discourage laziness; encourage hard work, contentment, goodness and precaution etc. For example:

Guntun gatarinka ya fi sari ka ba ni (contentment: your modest possession is better than a borrowed item), Nagari shi yake sai da kanshi (goodness: the good ones need no advertisement) karamin sani kukumi ne (caution: a little learning is a dangerous thing).

In some cases however, both English and Hausa proverbs share similar distributional characteristics, for example:

English proverb: Prevention is better than cure (precaution).

Hausa proverb: Riga kafi yafi magani (precaution)

English proverb: A patient dog eats the fattest bone (patience)

Discussion of Findings

The findings showed that the use of form in English and Hausa proverb are similar. The distributional characteristics of English and Hausa proverbs have the similar elements of distribution. It is however worthy to note that Hausa proverbs have wider range of distributions when compared to that of English proverbs. Much of these distributions of English proverbs are mostly of warning, advice and admonishing etc. while proverbs in Hausa language are important cultural element that cannot be ignored.

The proverbs that appear to be culturally bound are the ones that could pose difficulty to Hausa learners of English when translating them into English language. In other words, proverbs that have cultural allusion and/or have no equivalence in the target language are difficult for the Hausa learners of English to translate into the target language.

For Example, Gaba ta kai ni gobarar titi (a Jos)

A literal or word- for- word translation of this proverb may read; “forward it took me, the fire incident of Titi in Jos”. This proverb may not make any sense to a non-Hausa speaker, because decoding the individual meaning of the lexical items in the proverb cannot provide the accurate meaning of the Hausa version. But for a more accurate and comprehensive meaning to be established, the entire utterance must be translated probably independent of the individual items. In

addition to the socio-cultural value that the proverb represents, its historical background must be considered in translating it into English.

Another example of proverb with culture bound interpretation is “Girman kai rawanin tsiya.” This Hausa proverb is used to show that arrogance leads to a downfall. Humility is the key to any success in life. The reference to culture in the proverb is in the word “rawani”, which means “turban” or a headdress that consists of a long piece of fabric wrapped around the head or around a small cap completely covering the hair that is worn especially by spiritual leaders and/or elders in the Hausa community; a culture that is borrowed from the Arabs during the advent of Islam in Hausa land.

Thus, the proverb could be translated literally as: “A Big head is the turban of misery.” This translation will hardly make sense even to a native audience, talk less to a non-native audience. In this kind of proverb, one of the options the translator has is to adapt an already existing proverb (or its equivalent) that has the same communicative function.

Conclusion

This research is based on the assumption that proverbs are vital elements of communication in a language community. In the context of this research, there is more to the meaning of a proverb than the mere linguistic examination of its form i.e. it includes the psychological, sociological, and as well as other pragmatic features (speaker, hearer intention and presupposition). These proverbs generally educate members of the society to live in peace with one another. They are the vehicle of transmitting norms, values behavioral patterns and therefore encourage unity, and hard work. They focus on the world view in order to advice, warn, instruct, and condemn laziness, impatience and other social vices.

Based on the findings in this research, it can be rightly concluded that English and Hausa proverbs share similarities in terms of world view. Also, despite the syntactic and lexical variation of the proverbs formulation noticed in the two languages, the themes of the proverbs all tend to remain the same.

Also, it was observed that proverbs that are culture bound usually pose a problem when translating Hausa proverbs into English. In this case, the Hausa student may resolve to do a word-for-word, semantic or communicative method in translating the source language to the target language.

References

- Alli, W.O (2008). A Contrastive Analysis of Modification in English and Yoruba. A Seminar Presentation, Department of English and Literature: Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
- Akporaboro, F.B. (1994). Nigerian Proverbs: Meaning and Relevance Today. Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information and Culture.
- Banathy, B.H. (1969). The Potentials and Limitation of Contrastive Linguistic Analysis, Oregon Defense Institute: Oregon.
- Bascom, W.R (1954). Four Function of Folklore, Journal of American Folklore. Vol.LXIII.
- Cohen, D. (1978) Proverb Usage: Kind of Relationship. Proverbium. Page85-99
- Ellis, J. (1996). Toward General Comparative Linguistics, Mouton: The Hague.
- Fraenkel and Wallen (2008). How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education. McGraw-Hill Higher Education, San Francisco.
- Folly, D. W. (1991). Getting the Butter from Duck: Proverbs and Proverbial Expression in an Afro- American Family Folklore: Tales and Traditions.
- Ibrahim, A.A. (2006). An assessment of the Problems and Prospects of Translating Hausa Proverbs into English. Master's Thesis submitted to Department of English Language, Ahmadu James, C. (1980). A Contrastive Analysis .England, London Bello University, Zaria.
- Kim, B. (2002). Contrastive Linguistic Analysis (material source from the internet).
- Lado, R. (1957). Linguistic Across Culture. University of Michigan Press, Michigan.
- Latin Proverbs. (2011). Retrieved February 12, 2017, from <http://encyclopedia.freedictionary.com/Latin>.
- Lyons, J. (1968). Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Mohammad, Z. B. (2000). Error Analysis: An Essay of Applied Science and Diploma Students of Kaduna State Polytechnic. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
- Norricks, N.R. (1985) How Proverbs Mean: Semantic Studies in English Proverbs.
- Okonkwo (1998). A Complete Course in Igbo Grammar. Lagos, Academy Press Ltd.
- Onisabi, A. (2012). The Effect of Arabic Plural on Performance of Student in FCE, Zaria and KSCOE, Kafanchan.

- Osoba, G.A (2005). Words of Elders, Word of Wisdom: A Thematic and Stylistic Study of Some Yoruba Proverbs. *Proverbium*, Vol22.
- Saeed G.N and Fatihi, A, R. (2011). A Contrastive Analysis of Inflectional Affixes in English and Arabic. *Journal in Language, India*. Vol.11: 5/5/2001.
- Sadiq, M. (2009). Functional Classification of Hausa Proverbs: A window to the Study of Meaning. A paper Presented at the Department of Art and Social Science Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- Selinker, L. (1992). *Discovering Interlanguage*. London: Longman, London.
- Usman, V. O. (2008). *The Use of Proverbs in Content: A Case Study of Nigerian Film* A project Submitted to Dept. of English and Literary Study, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- Wilson, F. (2010). *A model of translating metaphor in proverbs: A Cognitive Descriptive Approach*. Okanagan College, British Columbia