

THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND CLASSIFICATION OF NIGERIAN PIDGIN PROVERBS

Shalom Oladele

Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, State University of New York at Buffalo, USA

Abstract

This paper explores thematic analysis and classification of Nigerian pidgin proverbs through thematic approach. Classifying a carefully curated corpus of NPE proverbs across recurrent domains on wisdom/knowledge, relationships, economic life, patience and timing, consequences vs. causality, appearance vs. reality, speech and communication, leadership and authority, gender/family, and contemporary urban life, etc., each theme is exemplified using canonical examples of NPE proverbs such as: *Book nor bi load*, *Na condition make crayfish bend*, *Monki dey work*, *baboon dey chop*, *Sofri Sofri e catch monki*. The analysis combines cultural-linguistic approaches and corpus-based data to demonstrate how NPE proverbs offer locally grounded metaphors and pragmatic acts of advising, warning, and justifying, as well as a variety of specific lexical items that collectively contribute to the nativization of Nigerian English discourse. Overall, these results support the conclusion that NPE proverbs are an evolving, self-renewing source that preserves traditional wisdom, embodies the modern realities of Nigerian cities, and serves as an effective conversational genre and cultural repository for Nigerians.

Keywords: Nigerian, Pidgin, English, Communicative Roles, Social-Cultural

Introduction

Proverbs are condensed expressions of collective wisdom that have existed since the dawn of written language and serve not merely as linguistic artifacts but as active carriers of cultural values, social norms, and ancestral knowledge (Mieder, 2018). Oral traditions of people are full of these condensed forms of wisdom, moral codes, and pragmatic measures for making one's way in the thickets of social life, which we call proverbs. These are therefore an essential element of any culture. Proverbs can be regarded as outlines of specific circumstances that apply to a wide range of circumstances (Gibbs, 1994). According to Midder (1985), a proverb is brief, concrete, original, and rhymed. They are familiar to members of society because they maintain their culture, conceptual frameworks, and the experiences they have gathered (Emrich, 1972).

Proverbs are communicative and cross-culturally important, serving as tools for exploring how linguistic communities view and conceptualize the world. Özbal, G., Strapparava, C., & Tekiroğlu, S. S. (2016, May).

The literature has conducted numerous studies examining proverbs related to specific areas. Moreno (2010) concentrates on animal sphere and performs a cognitive and sociolinguistic study of the English and Spanish proverbs in the context of dogs as the main characters (where people are animals metaphor). Faycel (2012) focuses on food metaphors in Tunisian Arabic proverbs, noting that food terms are numerous in these proverbs. Chiarung (2012) Dwells on the food and examines the metaphors in Taiwanese, Chinese and English proverbs to draw a comparison of cultural values.

According to Turner and Lakoff (1989), proverbs are mostly metaphoric and suggest the Great Chain Metaphor Theory to analyze and interpret it. This notion presupposes that people can be understood in terms of lower-order modes of existence, or, conversely, that lower-order modes of existence can be explained in terms of human qualities and behavior. In Nigeria, a country with multiple languages, no better illustration can be made than the development of proverbs in Nigerian Pidgin, a prominent lingua franca. Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), also known as pidgin, has become a second language today. Accordingly, it offers the treasury of proverbial outcry. Why should we study these proverbs of NPE? To begin with, these proverbs represent native ideas about life, using indigenous ecology, foodstuffs, and social activities to create abstract thought and make it seem familiar. Metaphorical mappings are used to express proverbs such as '*Na condition make crayfish bend*' and '*Monki dey work, baboon dey chop,*' which describe the themes of hardship, exploitation, and resistance in ways relevant to real-life situations in Nigeria. Second, these proverbs serve pragmatic purposes, including advising, warning, consoling, and critiquing. Their adaptability to contemporary realities is evident in their urban-themed products, such as '*Data nor dey lie*' and '*Persin wey get phone get power,*' which underscore their importance in preserving cultural continuity while embracing modernity.

3. Research question

In Nigeria, NPE proverbs are applied in normal life. Despite this ubiquity, little has been done to compile and categorize them. Much has been written by scholars about their structure and their use in conversation, and some have examined what they reveal about metaphor and

how people use language. However, little or no attempt has been made to make a full list of the various kinds of proverbs and their relationships to one another. The paper is attempting to address that gap. The proverbs were categorized by theme: wisdom, family, poverty, love, patience, consequences, appearance, and reality. These proverbs are combined to demonstrate the knowledge they conceal and how it helps make Nigerian English more native-like.

4. Brief Evolution of Nigerian Pidgin

Historically, Nigerian Pidgin has been a second language for most of its speakers, while they retain their ethnic languages (Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, and many others) as their primary languages of identification and in-group communication. According to Ofulue (2012), Nigerian Pidgin is gradually gaining native speakers, particularly in urban settings, indicating creolization. Babarinde (2020)'s investigations of the linguistic organization of Nigerian Pidgin show that native languages continue to shape its formation and that, even at the stage of its spread, substrate influence persists. Nigerian Pidgin has attained impressive vigor and widespread dissemination despite not being officially recognized. Balogun (2013) strongly advocates its recognition as a fully fledged language with rich lexical, semantic, and syntactic competence and opposes ingrained ideologies that label it as broken English. The language has played vital roles in the life of the Nigerian society: it is the language of inter-ethnic dialogue in a country with more than 250 ethnicities, the leading language of popular culture and the media (especially music and comedy), and the language of Nigerian identity in the country and in the diaspora. The linguistic features of Nigerian Pidgin indicate a complex history of linguistic contact. Although most lexical input comes from English, significant vocabulary from Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo is incorporated into the language. More importantly, Nigerian Pidgin exhibits grammatical properties that differ from English, such as aspect-marking systems, serial-verb constructions, and negation patterns, which are influenced by the African substrate. The role of Nigerian Pidgin English in cultural representation and identity formation has become a focus of recent scholarship. The issue of standardization and official recognition is controversial. Other researchers and interest groups also support it as an official language, stating that it already serves as a lingua franca among people from different linguistic backgrounds. (Balogun, 2013). Others fear that the language's current status would threaten indigenous languages or that standardization would inhibit its dynamic, adaptive nature. The controversies resemble larger-scale postcolonial language policy conflicts among the goals of appreciating linguistic diversity, fostering

national cohesion, and retaining links to colonial languages that grant access to global networks.

Methodology

Unseth (2016) Poorly enough, there are times when collections of proverbs have been collected, ready to publish, yet they are none. Further, accessible to the community at stores, whereas it is found only in expert libraries or on obscure websites. The research methodology is qualitative, as the majority of the studies within it use thematic categorization to analyze the use of proverbs in Nigerian Pidgin English and the socio-cultural meanings they imply. The study collected data by compiling a thoroughly revised corpus of frequently spoken Nigerian Pidgin proverbs from oral sources, daily conversations, and available literature.

Proverbs were obtained from native speakers of NPE. These respondents were selected using random sampling, and a total of 35 proverbs were provided for analysis. 19 proverbs were obtained from daily conversations and 26 from literature, for a total of 77. For accuracy, proverbs were thoroughly examined by three annotators, who were tasked with determining and comparing results to differentiate proverbial from non-proverbial expressions. Finally, we were left with 50 proverbs for analysis. The proverbs were intentionally selected for their frequency of use, relevance to the socio-cultural realities of Nigerian society, and capacity to reflect broader human experiences. Upon completion of data collection, the proverbs were divided into 14 thematic categories, such as wisdom and knowledge, relationships, economic life, patience and timing, consequences and causality, appearance versus reality, speech and communication, leadership and authority, gender and family, and contemporary urban life. The basis for categorizations was obtained from previous literature on proverbial classification. Lauhakangas (2014), Mensah, E. O. (2013), part of the classification was based on the international type system of proverbs proposed by Matti Kuusi (1914–1998), and finally, there was also a random categorization based on everyday usage. Each theme was interpreted by identifying recurring metaphors, cultural imagery, and pragmatic intentions embedded in the expressions.

4.0 Data Analysis

We are now going to analyze the proverbs according to their thematic significance.

4.1 Theme Of Wisdom, Knowledge, And Learning.

These NPE proverbs address wisdom, knowledge, and learning, emphasizing education, experience, and good judgment.

1. *Book nor bi load*

Book NEG be load

‘Education or books are not a burden’

Meaning: Knowledge is good and worth having; education does not burden a person.

Setting: in a setting that encourages students to study. It emphasizes that knowledge is a valuable investment.

The proverb *book nor bi load* brings out the perception that education is not a burden but an asset. The proverb promotes intellectual growth and contributes to the social status of learning as something positive rather than oppressive by conceptualizing knowledge as a useful tool.

2. *Persin wey nor know buk go know strit*

Person REL NEG know book FUT know street

‘Someone who has no knowledge of the book will know the street’

Meaning: If you don’t learn through school, you will learn through suffering and survival.

Setting: Warning lazy students. This proverb is often used by parents or elders to caution young people.

Persin wey nor know buk go know strit sets an opposition between formal and experiential learning. The implication of the proverb is that those who fail to learn in school will always learn in the struggle of life. This is a cultural worldview where learning cannot be avoided, even when it comes at a painful experience

3. *Sence nor bi property*

Sence NEG be possession

‘Common sense isn’t property or possessions.’

Meaning: Material wealth is less important than wisdom and intelligence.

Setting: This expression may be used to condemn the stupid behavior of wealthy individuals or to console people who lack material comforts.

The proverb *Sense nor bi property* also highlights the fact that wisdom is best than material wealth. The proverb also criticizes the societies, which value material wealth and ignore wisdom because the distinction between intellectual capacity and material wealth is made.

4. *Wise man nor dey talk all im mind*

Wise man NEG PROG talk all 3SG mind

‘A wise person does not say everything that they are thinking’

Meaning: Knowledge and tactical silence are the signs of wisdom, meaning that a wise person knows when to speak and when to keep quiet.

Setting: Often advises against speaking carelessly and keeping certain thoughts to oneself. This proverb is used when someone talks excessively or discloses sensitive information.

The wisdom is linked to control and a hold-back in speech as used in the proverb *Wise man nor dey talk all im mind*. The phrase implies that real intelligence is knowing when to keep quiet as it has been culturally taught that wisdom must be wise in communication.

5. *Experience na the best teacher*

Experience COP DEF. best teacher

‘Experience is the best teacher’

Meaning: Direct experience is more effective than abstract education.

Setting: It is a common phrase used when someone learns about something in the most difficult way possible.

Experience na the best teacher sheds light on the epistemological significance of experience. The saying reflects the native ideology that understanding gained through personal encounters with the realities of life is often more didactic than theoretical learning.

Theme Of Love And Hatred

6. *Monki nor fine, but im mama like am.*

monkey NEG fine but 3SG.POSS mother like 3SG.OBJ

‘The monkey is not fine (not beautiful), but its mother likes it’

Meaning: Family members learn to tolerate one another, even when they are not good, because the mother's love is unconditional.

Setting: Family love is shown by giving or protecting a person against an attack. It reminds society that everyone has someone who values them.

The idea of unconditional love of a family is depicted in the proverb *Monki nor fine but im mama like am*. The proverb, by the metaphor of a monkey's mother that loves her ugly children, implies that love is a powerful force in families that overlooks physical disabilities.

7. *Persin wey chop alone go kpayi alone*

person REL eat alone FUT die alone

'Someone who eats by themselves will die by themselves.'

Meaning: Egoism, on the one hand, separates; giving, on the other, unites.

Setting: Rejecting selfishness and encouraging community and mutual values.

Persin wey chop alone go kyayi alone denounces egocentrism and encourages unity. The saying reflects the communal spirit of most African cultures, according to which it is a moral duty to share resources with others and assist them.

8. *Na persin wey you help go first betray you*

FOC person REL 2SG help FUT first betray 2SG

'The one that you help will be the first to betray you'

Meaning: It is a common phenomenon that ingratitude takes its toll; the beneficiaries become its victims.

Setting: To show a statement of cynicism with human nature, mostly after being betrayed.

The proverb *Na persin wey you help go first betray you* brings out the irony of human relationships by accepting that someone might turn into a betrayer of one who has been so kind to them.

Despite its cynicism, the proverb serves as a warning to human beings about how unpredictable they are.

Theme Of Achievement, Unity And Success

9. *If you wan go fast, go alone; if you wan go far, go together*

if 2SG want go fast go alone if 2SG want go far go together

‘If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together’

Meaning: To achieve long-term success, teamwork is required, though it can be slower.

Setting: In a setting where one wants to nurture teamwork and group spirit.

The famous saying *If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together* promotes group work as the best way to achieve success in the long run.

However, the action of an individual can lead to short-term effects, but to achieve long-term success, teamwork is needed.

10. Rat wey dey follow lizard play for sun go come back wit dry skin

rat REL PROG follow lizard play for sun FUT come back with dry skin

“A rat that plays in the sun with a lizard will come back with dry skin”

Meaning: Do not emulate others who are not doing what you are; be aware of your weaknesses.

Setting: Caution should be taken not to make wrong associations or attempt to act like others whose circumstances are not the same.

The saying, “*Rat wey dey follow lizard play with sun go come back wit dry skin,*” teaches not to try to be like others in a different situation. The ecological analogy of animals adjusting to sunlight in different ways illustrates the threat of an unsuitable comparison.

11. Who nor know go know

who NEG know FUT know

‘Those who are not know will know’

Meaning: Delusional or doubtful individuals will ultimately come to know the truth with experience.

Setting: Used as a strong warning. It suggests that if someone refuses to learn through wisdom or advice, life itself will teach them through hardship.

The proverb, *Who nor know go know* is the view that the ignorance can never be permanent. Those who do not listen to instructions will later learn through experience.

Theme Of Wealth, Poverty, And Economic Life

Most NPE proverbs revolve around economic issues, material problems and wishes that are paramount in the Nigerian society.

12. *Na condition make crayfish bend*

FOC condition make crayfish bend

‘It is circumstances that cause the crayfish to bend’

Meaning: Challenging situations compel individuals to adapt, compromise, or learn to live with unfavourable situations.

Setting: This is among the most popular NPE proverbs for describing or excusing compromises made under economic pressure.

‘The saying *Na condition make crayfish bend*’ means that a man conforms to external conditions. The proverb states that the environment shapes the behavior of economic pressures, likening people to a crayfish curved by its surroundings.

13. *Monki dey work, baboon dey chop*

Monkey PROG work baboon PROG eat

‘The monkey works, the baboon eats’

Meaning: Hard workers hardly ever get to enjoy the fruits of their labour; they are being exploited.

Setting: Economic inequalities and mistreatment of the labor force are under criticism.

‘*Monki dey work, baboon dey chop*’ criticize economic exploitation. The metaphor creates an opportunity that implies a scenario whereby people who do the work do not enjoy the fruits, implying social disparities.

14. *Persin wey get moni nor dey fine trouble*

Person REL have money NEG PROG seek trouble

‘Someone with money does not go seeking trouble’

Meaning: Rich individuals do not want to fight, as they have a lot to lose.

Setting: This proverb illustrates that people with something valuable to lose (money, property, reputation) often behave cautiously.

The adage "*Persin wey get moni nor dey fine trouble*" reflects the idea that people who have power are likely to be careful in their actions to guard their assets.

15. *Moni good, but e nor bi evritin*

money good but 3SG NEG COP everything

‘Money is good, but it is not everything’

Meaning: We would like to be rich, but other values are important as well.

Setting: when consoling someone who is poor but contended. This proverb is often used to caution people against placing money above all else.

Moni good but e nor bi evritin makes the listeners remember that material wealth cannot be considered the final scale of value.

16. *Evri man get voice but na moni bi di koko*

every man have voice but FOC money COP DEF most important

‘Everyone has a voice, but money determines how loud it is’

Meaning: Money provides safety, self-esteem and a voice. It reflects the idea that money controls authority, respect, and attention in society

Setting: Used when poor people are being ignored or when people notice that in real life, opinions are not valued equally.

The social inequality can be well illustrated by the proverb *Evri man get voice but na moni be di koko* which is a very powerful metaphoric statement and it attempts to give us the idea that it is the wealth that dictates the opinions that are listened to in society.

17. *Persin wey dey fine yam nor dey count leaf*

person REL PROG search yam NEG PROG count leaf

‘Someone searching for yams does not count leaves’

Meaning: Set priorities; do not focus on insignificant details.

Setting: It recommends focusing on the task and avoiding distractions from unnecessary things. Used when a person is being unserious or distracted while pursuing something important.

This proverb uses agricultural imagery to underscore the necessity of focusing on key objectives rather than being preoccupied with minor problems.

Theme of Patience, Persistence, and Timing

NPE proverbs also emphasize the value of patience, appropriate timing, and sustained effort.

18. *Sofri, sofri e catch monki*

suffer suffer 3SG catch monkey

‘Gradually and gently is how to catch a monkey’

Meaning: Be patient, take prudent steps, and be not hasty in life. Good things do not come easily, and persistence is necessary to succeed.

Setting: In a setting that involves encouraging someone not to give up especially when someone is tired of waiting or suffering and wants to quit.

Sofri sofri e catch monki is a message that everything leads to results in the end. The examples of catching a monkey gradually support the significance of hard work.

19. *Persin wey dey rush nor dey reach*

person REL PROG rush NEG PROG arrive

‘Someone who rushes does not get there’

Meaning: Excessive haste results in errors and failure.

Setting: When giving admonition, not to be reckless but to be very careful in life.

The saying *Persin wey dey rush nor dey reach* warns against too much haste implying that being in a hurry can be disastrous.

20. *Make you dey your dey*

IMP 2SG be 2SG.POSS be

‘Mind your business and Stay in your lane’

Meaning: Take it easy, keep off of others, know thy place.

Setting: When counseling on forbearance and non-interference.

Culturally, the proverb reflects the **African communitarian worldview, in which coexistence depends on mutual respect and role awareness.** By encouraging individuals to remain within their proper sphere, the saying reinforces the broader ethical value that **social stability emerges when people understand their limits and act with restraint.**

21. *Na small small dey kill obia man*

FOC small small PROG kill medicine man

‘It is little by little that kills the medicine man’

Meaning: Repeated minor actions can lead to significant consequences; minor processes can be fatal.

Setting: Caution over the possibility of not taking small issues seriously or their overall impact.

The situation depicted in *Na small small dey kill obia man* is meant to show how seemingly insignificant actions can lead to serious consequences. Reduplication is a common strategy in NPE. The phrase **small small** indicates **graduality or repetition**, a common strategy in Nigerian Pidgin.

22. *When time reach, yam go don*

when time reach yam FUT done

‘When the time comes, the yams will be cooked’

Meaning: All things take their own time; wait till nature runs its course.

Setting: Instruction to be patient and trust in time. Used when someone is impatient or worried about delay.

A further support of the significance of patience is presented in the agricultural saying *When time reach yam go don*, which implies that the natural events have their own speed.

Theme Of Consequences And Causality

NPE Proverbs often speak of cause and effect, particularly as a caution against certain consequences of action. Some of them are illustrated below.

23. *Persin wey nor hear word go feel am for body.*

person REL NEG hear word FUT feel 3SG.OBJ for body

‘A person who does not listen to advice will feel it in the body’

Meaning: A person who does not listen to others will, sooner or later, experience a physical consequence of their actions, which is a common-sense statement that ignoring advice will have physical repercussions.

Setting: It is a proverb that cautions a stubborn person who does not listen to others.

Persin wey nor hear word go feel am for body which teaches that ignoring advice ultimately leads to suffering that befalls individuals.

24. *As you make your bed, na so you go lie down*

As 2SG make 2SG.POSS bed FOC so 2SG FUT lie down

‘As you make your bed so you will lie on it’

Meaning: You must take the results of what you do.

Setting: This saying illustrates that everyone can take responsibility for their own decisions. The proverb is culturally inclined towards a broader African moralistic worldview, where actions and outcomes are deeply linked within social and moral arrangements. It reinforces the notion that people are responsible not only to themselves but also to the community as a whole for the decisions they make. The proverb advocates the virtues of prudence, responsibility, and moral consciousness, which are crucial to ensuring harmony and balance in society, because it emphasizes the fact that individuals need to live with the consequences of their actions.

25. *Wetin you sow, na im you go reap*

What 2SG sow FOC 3SG 2SG FUT reap

'What you have sown is what you will reap'

Meaning: what you do shall be the result of you. According to this saying, there must be some form of moral causality that motivates people to do good things.

Settings: The proverb is used to discourage people from engaging in harmful behavior.

Wetin you sow na im you go reap is a life principle that tells you to be careful with our actions because it might someday come back to us exactly the way we made it happen.

26. *Persin wey dey fine wahala go sure see am.*

person REL PROG seek trouble FUT surely see 3SG.OBJ

'A person who is looking for trouble will surely find it'

Meaning: The person who is searching for trouble will definitely find it someday.

Setting: This is in case you wish to include a few problems; you will find some. This proverb warns against engaging in provocative or reckless acts.

The saying *Persin wey dey fine wahala go sure see am* reinforces the vision that people who want to have trouble shall get it.

27. *If you play with shit, e go smell your hand*

If 2SG play with shit 3SG FUT smell 2SG.POSS hand

'If you play with faeces (shit), your hand will smell'

Meaning: what he means is that your hand will smell if you play with feces. It is a common saying that dirty dealings will eventually tarnish you someday.

Setting: This proverb warns against engaging in dubious activities, especially when someone is mixing with troublemakers or engaging in questionable behavior.

In most African cultures, social respect and reputation are treasured, and actions that compromise a person's integrity may have permanent social repercussions. Consequently, the saying highlights the value of discipline, wise association, and individual integrity, which proves the point that people should not engage in behaviors that may corrupt their character or reputation within society.

Theme Of Appearance And Reality

There are also proverbs that advise us to look twice because appearances are very deceptive. Some examples include:

28. *Nor bi evritin wey shine bi gold*

NEG COP everything REL shine COP gold

‘Not everything that shines is gold’

Meaning: All that glitters is not gold hence beauty is a falsehood.

Setting: Caution on our being wise in the judgment of what we observe alone.

This Nigerian Pidgin proverb shows that appearances can be misleading and outward beauty is not always indicative of inner quality or authenticity.

Structurally, the proverb is a negated copular construction where the particle *nor bi* is a negation of the supposition that all objects that shine are gold. The relative clause *wey shine* is used to modify *evritin* to refer to objects considered attractive or impressive. This grammatical form shows a difference between the appearance and the reality.

29. *Fine face no bi character.*

fine face NEG COP character

‘A beautiful face is not good character’

Meaning: It is not true that physical attractiveness is an indication of much morality.

Setting: Challenges us to look beyond physical appearance when judging others.

Although the words originate in English, their **semantic interpretation is shaped by local cultural norms**, in which *character* refers more to **moral behaviour or virtue** than to personality traits.

Clothes no dey make man

Clothes NEG PROG make man

‘Clothes do not define a person’

Meaning: Do not judge a person by the way he dresses, or even by external appearances.

Setting: When giving advice as regards deception. Advice not to judge by appearance. It reminds society that true value lies in a person's inner qualities, not their outward presentation.

This fact is further expanded in the proverb *clothes no dey make man* by hinting that the way an individual is dressed does not define his or her value.

Theme Of Pride And Humility

30. *Na who wear shoe know where e dey pain am.*

FOC who wear shoe know where 3SG PROG pain 3SG.OBJ

'Only an individual putting on the shoe knows where it hurts'

Meaning: There is no better meaning than direct experience.

Setting: Advice to be Empathic with the life of another person. To teach empathy and reminds people not to be quick to judge others, because they may not know the full story.

The common saying *Na who wear shoe know where e dey pain am* emphasizes the need to learn about other people's suffering before judging them

The pronoun 'e' can be used for both masculine and feminine genders. Pronouns often serve **multiple grammatical roles**. Nigerian Pidgin mirrors this feature.

31. *Empty barrel dey make noise.*

empty barrel PROG make noise

'An empty barrel is making noise'

Meaning: Proud people mean little; they are noisy about nothing.

Setting: The condemnation of most individuals who would prefer talking rather than closing their mouths.

In comparison with the literal English translation, which uses an indefinite article at the beginning of the sentence, many African languages **do not use definite or indefinite articles**, and this feature is reflected in Nigerian Pidgin syntax. The omission of articles, therefore, illustrates **structural transfer from indigenous Nigerian languages**.

Theme Of Speech And Communication

Utterances are tools of strength and injury. Words can mar or make us.

32. *Word wey dey commot for mouth nor dey turn round.*

word REL PROG come out from mouth NEG PROG turn around

‘A word that is out of the mouth does not come back.’

Meaning: This implies that things that are spoken can never be retracted, and therefore, one needs to take care of what they say. It cautions on the irreversibility and implications of speech.

Setting: When warning against gossip or insult, or advising someone to control their speech. Even if you apologize later, the damage may already be done.

This proverb represents the African oral tradition of expressing moral wisdom in vivid imagery that humans can relate to their daily experiences. The picture of a word emerging through the mouth and never being able to be returned in any manner introduces the idea of speech as something real and never to be reversed, an idea which is typical of numerous African proverbial systems. Within the African cultural context, it is believed that spoken words possess power and permanence, which is why one should be cautious when speaking.

33. *Mouth wey talk anyhow go collect anyhow.*

mouth REL talk anyhow FUT receive anyhow

‘A mouth that talks carelessly will suffer anyhow’

Meaning: This can be translated to mean that reckless speech will bring trouble. Therefore, it teaches us to speak very sensibly and politely. That is, irresponsible talk will have repercussions; talk responsibly and respectfully.

Setting: This proverb is used when someone talks too much, gossips, insults others, or speaks arrogantly. It implies that reckless speech attracts retaliation.

Mouth wey talk anyhow go collect anyhow, is a warning of careless speech. It implies that lackadaisical or rude communication is bound to raise a negative response. The proverb is also applied in social correction in discourse when a person indulges in gossip, insulting, and arrogance. Instead of telling the person off directly, the speaker uses a proverb to do so indirectly, thus preserving social peace as the speaker expresses their dislike.

34. *Make you nor put mouth for wetin nor concern you.*

IMP 2SG NEG put mouth for thing NEG concern 2SG

‘Don’t interfere in what doesn’t concern you’

Meaning: Do not interfere in matters that are not your business. Avoid unnecessary involvement in other people’s private issues.

Setting: Used when emphasizing respect for privacy and personal boundaries. Also, to caution or correct someone who is over-involved in other people's affairs.

'Make you no put mouth for wetin nor concern you' underscores the value of not going beyond the limits of conversation

The proverb shows the cultural awareness of language as a potent and dangerous social instrument.

Theme on Leadership and Authority

Nigerian proverbs reflect the country's political realities of power, leadership, and social hierarchy. The political realities of Nigeria are also reflected in Nigerian proverbs, which address issues of power, leadership, and social hierarchy.

35. *When persin guide you start thief, you go thief pass am*

when person guide 2SG start steal 2SG FUT steal surpass 3SG.OBJ

'When someone teaches you to steal, you may steal more than them'

Meaning: Corrupt leadership further corrupts the subjects.

Setting: Used to attack the failure of leadership and its perverting effect.

In reference to unethical leadership, *when persin guide you start thief you go thief pass am* criticizes corrupt leadership when he proposes the argument that leaders who are unethical would only promote more immoral acts among their followers.

36. *When two elephants fight, na grass go suffer*

when two elephant fight FOC grass FUT suffer

'When two elephants fight, it is the grass that will suffer'

Meaning: When the strong are at loggerheads, the weak suffer the weight of the conflict.

Setting: In a setting where conflicts at the elite level are scolded about to the detriment of ordinary citizens.

When two elephants fight na grass go suffers, bringing to attention the fact that the battles between strong people usually damage common people. The proverb reinforces the ethical value that **those in positions of power should manage conflicts carefully to prevent harm to those who depend on them.**

37. *Nor bi persin wey get power, get sense*

NEG COP person REL have power have sense

‘Having power does not mean you have sense’

Meaning: Holding authority does not imply being wise or making sound judgments.

Setting: Political discussions. This is used to critique wrong leadership. Often, when someone in authority behaves foolishly, irresponsibly, or unjustly.

This proverb highlights the difference between authority and wisdom, stating that power does not necessarily mean a person is intelligent, wise, or well-endowed with the capacity to make sound judgments and be moral. Structurally, the proverb uses a negated copular construction with the use of the particle ‘*nor bi*’ which negates the supposition that having power does not mean having sense. The relational clause *person wey get power* refers to people in positions of power, whereas the second one compares the state to a lack of sense, which is simply a broad term for wisdom, reason, or prudence.

Theme On Family

These NPE proverbs can be considered reflections on the interaction between men and women within the family and society as a whole. The following are the proverbs and their meaning.

38. *Woman na nation builder*

woman COP nation builder

‘A woman is a nation builder’

Meaning: Women play significant roles in societal development.

Setting: Confirms the significance of women and their efforts.

The proverb “*Woman na nation builder*” is known for honoring the key role of women in societal and national development. This proverb underlines the primary role of women in the development, stability, and rise of society. The proverb is structurally represented by a copular construction, with the use of a particle, *na*, which is a focus marker or the power equivalent of the verb to be. The sentence directly compares a woman to a nation builder, thereby prefiguring the significance of women's roles in social and national development.

39. *Pikin wey say im mama nor go sleep, im sef nor go sleep*

child REL say 3SG.POSS mother NEG FUT sleep 3SG self NEG FUT sleep

‘A child who does not allow his/her mother to sleep will not get to sleep either’

Meaning: People who make other people miserable will be punished themselves.

Setting: Advises against the mutuality of injury. It is used when someone is intentionally causing stress or discomfort for others.

The concept of sleep is figuratively applied to indicate peace or calmness, meaning that those people who disrupt others will end up losing their own peace. Pragmatically, the proverb serves as a warning in an indirect way, allowing the speaker to condemn disruptive behavior without face-to-face confrontation. In the sociocultural context, the proverb embodies the principle of reciprocity, a moral tenet that governs interpersonal relationships in Nigerian society.

Theme on Urbanization and Modernization

A number of proverbs in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) have recently emerged and this reflect the realities of Nigerian urban life, technology, and other contemporary social problems.

40. *Data nor dey lie*

data NEG PROG lie

‘Data doesn’t lie’

Meaning: Facts are evidence that cannot be denied.

Setting: When insisting on the empirical truth of the digital age. Used when someone is trying to deny reality or argue emotionally without evidence.

Sociolinguistically, the proverb depicts the way in which Nigerian Pidgin keeps developing its vocabulary using words that are used in contemporary technological contexts. This shows the dynamic and changing nature of the NPE proverbs in reaction to the modern urban life.

41. *Wetin concern agbero wit overload?*

what concern bus-conductor with overload

‘What concerns a bus conductor with overload’

Meaning: Why does somebody have to intrude into the affairs that do not involve them?

Setting: in a setting where someone gets involved inappropriately in the involvement of questions or affairs that do not call for one's attention.

This proverb of Nigerian Pidgin denounces futile meddling in things that are not essential to one. Formally, the proverb is a rhetorical question that begins with ‘*wetin concern,*’ a common Western Pidgin phrase meaning "what concerns?" The rhetorical character of the

proverb suggests that an individual should not interfere in any way with other people's business. As they do not have a legitimate reason to do so.

42. *Persin wey get phone get power*

person REL have phone have power

'Who has a phone has power'

Meaning: Communication technology accords social and economic benefits.

Setting: Basically used to demonstrate the significance of mobile technology in modern Nigeria.

Persin wey get phone get power, in its turn, demonstrates the social and economic significance of communication technologies.

All these proverbs show that even the traditional forms of expression are constantly changing with the changing experiences in modern times.

Themes on Animals and Insects

The imagery of animals is also a major stylistic aspect in proverbs of the Nigerian language.

43. *Fly wey no dey hear word go follow dead body enter grave.*

fly REL NEG PROG hear word FUT follow dead body enter grave

'A fly that does not listen to advice will follow a dead body into the grave'

Meaning: A stubborn person who refuses to heed warnings or correction will eventually face serious trouble or destruction. If you don't listen early, you will suffer the consequences later. **Setting:** when advising stubborn youths or children. It can be applied to teaching discipline in schools or family.

The phrases Fly wey no dey hear word go follow dead body enter grave remind us of obedience and discipline by use of animal behaviour as a metaphor.

44. *Who dash monkey banana?*

Who give monkey banana

'Who gave a banana to the monkey'

Meaning: Who gave power and opportunity to someone who will misuse it?

Setting: often used where someone not qualified is given authority. The monkey symbolizes carelessness or greed. Banana symbolizes privilege, money, power, or opportunity. The proverb is used to question why the wrong person was empowered.

45. *Wetin concern dog wit family planning?*

What concern dog with family planning

‘What concern does a dog have with family planning?’

Meaning: This matter does not concern you. Mind your business.

Setting: Typically used when someone interferes in private matters, in family issues, or in confidential discussions.

The expression is formulated as a **rhetorical question**, beginning with the phrase “**wetin concern**” which is commonly used in Nigerian Pidgin to challenge the relevance or legitimacy of someone's involvement in a particular issue. The interrogative structure does not seek an answer; rather, it implicitly asserts that the subject **has no valid connection to the matter being discussed**.

46. *Dog wey nor hear im oga whistle go lost for the forest.*

dog REL NEG hear 3SG.POSS master whistle FUT lost for DEF forest

‘A dog that does not listen to its master’s whistle will get lost in the forest’

Meaning: Anyone who refuses advice or guidance will eventually face trouble or destruction. **Setting:** used in the setting of a warning against wrongdoing that will eventually have a severe effect in the long run.

It is commonly used when someone refuses correction. The “forest” symbolizes danger, confusion, and hardship. The master represents elders, parents, or authority.

Theme of Parts of the Body

Certain proverbs in NPE use body images to pass moral messages.

47. *Teeth and tongue nor dey quarrel.*

teeth and tongue NEG PROG quarrel

‘Teeth and tongue do not quarrel’

Meaning: People who are close (family, friends, couples) may misunderstand or hurt each other sometimes, but they should not become enemies because of it.

Setting: this can be used during conflicts, quarrels or settling disputes. The proverb shows that just like the tongue and teeth sometimes clash in the mouth, close people may offend each other. But they must learn to forgive and continue living peacefully.

The saying *Teeth and tongue nor dey quarrel* is used to show that there is always a conflict between individuals who have close bonds with each other.

48. Eye wey dey cry still dey see road.

eye REL PROG cry still PROG see road

‘Even a crying eye can still see the road.’

Meaning: Even when someone is suffering, crying, or facing hardship, they are still aware of what is happening. Pain does not remove intelligence or awareness. A person may be quiet or emotional, but they still understand things.

Eye wey dey cry still dey see road focuses on the toughness and survival despite misery.

Setting: when someone is being underestimated in a workplace or school situation. This proverb serves to remind people that hardship does not render someone foolish. Even if a person is crying, they can still notice betrayal, manipulation, or unfair treatment. It can also be used to show that someone may be patient now, but they still know what is going on and may respond later.

50. Persin wey get ear, make e hear

person REL have ear IMP 3SG hear

‘Let those who have ears hear’

Meaning: Anyone who is wise should listen and understand advice or warning. It is a call for people to pay attention and learn from what is being said.

Setting: To caution someone to listen and pay attention to what is important; listen and understand, and the wise will understand.

This proverb is usually used after giving an important message.

Persin wey get ear make e hear is a rhetoric appeal to the wisdom to listen to the valuable advice

Conclusion

This paper revealed that the Nigerian Pidgin English proverbs are an ample source of socio-cultural knowledge that is neatly structured around common areas of experience like wisdom and knowledge, interpersonal relationships, economic life, patience and timing, consequences and causalities, appearance versus reality, speech and communication, leadership and power, gender and family relations, and modern life in the city. By categorizing a carefully edited selection of NPE proverbs according to these themes and analysing their metaphorical composition and pragmatic use, the analysis shows how speakers rely on proverbs as a culturally situated source of advice, warnings, evaluations, and justifications of social behaviour in day-to-day interaction. The results also demonstrate that NPE proverbs are neither fixed remains of a precolonial past nor a fixed, self-renewing genre that merely transports accumulated wisdom into the present realities of contemporary Nigerian cities, including economic shifts, shifting gender roles, and emerging types of political authority.

The lexical repetitions, metaphorical mappings, and discourse functions identified in this study reflect the key role of NPE proverbs in the further nativization of Nigerian English discourse, as they provide locally intelligible scripts for understanding experience and negotiating social relations. From a thematic and cultural-linguistic perspective, it is worth noting that Nigerian Pidgin, though regarded as an excellent means of contact code or low-prestige language, is also a complete language for capturing and conveying indigenous epistemologies and moral codes. Further studies may build upon this study by juxtaposing NPE proverbial themes with other West African languages and West African pidgins, the diachronic innovation of proverbial forms, and the transformation of the proverbial repertoire by younger speakers and digital media processes, thus keeping it relevant as a conversational genre and cultural deposit in everyday speech.

References

- Babarinde, O. Linguistic structure of Nigerian Pidgin (Naija): The influence of indigenous languages. *EDITORIAL COMMITTEE*, 119.
- Balogun, T. A. (2013). In defense of Nigerian pidgin. *Journal of languages and culture*, 4(5), 90-98.
- Chiarung, L. (2012). Eating is not an easy task: Understanding cultural values via proverbs. *Japanese Studies Journal*, 29(1).
- Emrich, D. (1972). *Folklore on the American land*. Little Brown and Company.
- Gibbs, R. W. (1994). *The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge University Press.
- Faycel, D. (2012). Food Metaphors in Tunisian Arabic Proverbs. *Rice Working Papers in Linguistics* 3/1.
- Lauhakangas, O. (2014). Categorization of proverbs. *Introduction to Paremiology: A Comprehensive Guide to Proverb Studies*. Warsaw: De Gruyter Open, 49-67.
- Lauhakangas, Outi. 2001. *The Matti Kuusi International Type System of Proverbs*. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia.
- Mensah, E. O. (2013). Proverbs in Nigerian pidgin. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 69(1), 87-115.
- Mieder, W. (1985). Popular views of the proverb. *Proverbium*, 2(1985), 109-43.
- Mieder, W. (2018). The humanistic value of proverbs in sociopolitical discourse. *Humanities*, 7(1), 28.
- Moreno, A. I. (2005). An analysis of the cognitive dimension of proverbs in English and Spanish: The conceptual power of language reflecting popular beliefs. *SKASE Journal of theoretical linguistics*, 2(1), 42-54.
- Moreno, A. I. (2010). An analysis of the cognitive dimension of proverbs in English and Spanish: The conceptual power of language reflecting popular beliefs. *SKASE Journal of theoretical linguistics*, 2(1):42-54.
- Ofulue, C. I. (2012). Nigerian Pidgin and West African pidgins: A sociolinguistic perspective. *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, 1, 1-42.
- Özbal, G., Strapparava, C., & Tekiroğlu, S. S. (2016, May). Prometheus: A corpus of proverbs annotated with metaphors. In *Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC'16)* (pp. 3787- 3793).
- Turner, M. and Lakoff, G. (1989). *More than cool reason: A field guide to poetic metaphor*.
- Unseth, P. (2016). Comparing methods of collecting proverbs: Learning to value working with a community. *Comparing methods of collecting proverbs*, 4, 59.
- Wilson, F. C. (2009). *A model for translating metaphors in proverbs (French to English): A cognitive descriptive approach* (Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia).