

UNDERSTANDING CHUMBURUNG PROVERBS

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Various characteristics of proverbs as given in definitions will be examined as to whether or not they apply to the Chumburung language of Ghana. *Proverbial competence*, namely knowing about proverbs in general, will be distinguished from *cultural knowledge*, which is understanding some aspect of the culture. The two words for proverb in Chumburung will be distinguished, and shown to be literal and metaphoric. Differing contexts for using proverbs mean that a person will also need what I call *situational competence*. Examples from living and recently deceased people will be given to challenge the assumption that proverbs of minority groups are, like their culture, dying out.

Nous examinons ici divers traits mentionnés dans les définitions des proverbes, pour voir à quel point ils s'appliquent à ceux de la langue chumburung du Ghana. Nous distinguons la *compétence proverbiale*, la connaissance des proverbes en général, de la *connaissance culturelle*, la compréhension de tel ou tel aspect de la culture. Nous verrons que des deux termes chumburung désignant les proverbes, l'un indique ceux qui ont un sens littéral, l'autre métaphorique. La variété des contextes où s'utilisent les proverbes laisse comprendre qu'un locuteur doit avoir ce que j'appelle une *compétence situationnelle*. Des exemples provenant de personnes soit vivantes, soit récemment décédées, présentent un défi à la supposition que les proverbes des ethnies minoritaires, comme leur culture, sont en voie d'extinction.

0. INTRODUCTION

The rainy season was due. I looked up at the gathering clouds, and commented that it looked as if it would rain soon. Our next-door neighbour said in the Chumburung language, “If a woman has a stomach (i.e., is pregnant) surely she will give birth”. I pricked up my ears and remembered that I had also been given this proverb when I wondered how soon electricity would come to the town. Then it had been pointed out to me that the poles were already going up in some parts. In one metaphor the pregnant woman is represented by rain clouds, in the other by electricity poles! When I asked the meaning, I was given, “Once something has happened in a process, you know the rest will follow”. But two occurrences had already taught me just that!

In order to understand proverbs in the Chumburung language¹ of Ghana, I will make a general study of their forms and meanings as an outsider. Investigation will also be made to see what factors might contribute to either an insider or an outsider understanding a particular example.

¹ Chumburung is spoken in Northern and Volta Regions of Ghana by about 25,000 people. It is a Guang language. There is vowel harmony in Chumburung, with the following vowel phonemes in the +ATR set: i, e, o, u; and the following in the -ATR set: e, ɛ, ɔ, ɒ. The vowel /a/ is in both sets. The letter ɲ is used for phonetic [ɲ] and /ny/ for the palatal nasal. The digraphs /ky/ and /gy/ are pronounced like English /ch/ and /j/ respectively. Thanks are due to several SIL colleagues and JWAL reviewers who have read this paper and made useful comments.

1. THE PROBLEM OF DEFINING A PROVERB

“The first hurdle that the ambitious compiler of proverbs encounters is the difficulty of defining his research,” says Bangnikon (1999) concerning another language of Ghana. This is true to such an extent that Archer Taylor (according to Mieder 1999) was unable to define a proverb clearly, but nevertheless said that ‘an incommunicable quality tells us that this sentence is proverbial and that one is not’. If we first look at several definitions of proverbs, we will establish some of the ideas which are current about what it is that constitutes a proverb.

1.1 DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Writers have defined the proverb in various ways (emphases mine):

Crystal (1992): “*A short, pithy, rhythmical saying which expresses a general belief or truth.*” He also says they often have *parallel parts*.

Simpson (1982): “A proverb is a *traditional saying which offers advice or presents a moral in a short and pithy manner.*”

Okpewho (1992): “Put simply, a proverb may be defined as a piece of *folk wisdom expressed with terseness and charm.*”

Arewa and Dundes (1964) describe proverbs as examples of “*fixed-phrase genres of verbal art*”.

Lyons (1969): “The stock of proverbs passed from *one generation to another* provides many instances of [the] ‘ready-made utterances’ [referred to by Saussure, a well known linguist].”

In contrast to the definitions above, Mieder (1999) collected fifty-five definitions of the proverb “by merely asking various people to write their definition of a proverb on a piece of paper without any previous discussion of proverbs whatever”. Despite many apparent differences between them, upon analysis he reduces them to a common form:

A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a *metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form* and which is handed down from generation to generation.

Wordy though it is, I don’t think a better definition could be found than this amalgamated version, with one exception, and one addition. The exception is that, although most proverbs are metaphoric, many of them are not. Indeed none of the previous definitions said anything about this aspect. The addition arises from the fact that proverbs are composed of wisdom, namely they all *generalise*.

Common characteristics can be drawn out of all these definitions:

- ◆ short sentences
- ◆ generally known to ordinary people
- ◆ contain wisdom, truth, morals, views
- ◆ traditional
- ◆ often metaphoric
- ◆ fixed and memorizable form
- ◆ handed down from generation to generation
- ◆ generalisation.

1.2 THE AIMS OF THIS PAPER

Much has been written over a long period of time about proverbs, and African proverbs in particular. I will look at questions concerning the meaning of proverbs, and how they are often couched in a poetic form, namely the metaphor, in order to save face for either the speaker or the intended hearer.

In the light of this, a collection of Chumburung proverbs will be investigated in which the two words used for proverb will be shown to refer to the literal and metaphorical types. The ability to recognise and understand a proverb spoken by someone else will be termed *proverbial competence*. This will then be distinguished from *cultural knowledge*, which is what you need to know about that culture before you can understand a particular proverb. Some factors that influence both types of understanding will be posited. Then looking at some of the grammatical features of Chumburung proverbs, some of the characteristics above will also be addressed.

The contexts in which proverbs have often been cited as conducive to their use will be highlighted by specific occurrences heard in similar contexts. The phrase *situational competence* will be used for the ability to employ a proverb in an appropriate way.

Lastly the topic of creativity will be addressed, and examples of the creation of new proverbs by named people will be given. That this is still happening, and the fact that someone wants to preserve their proverbs and meanings indicates that the genre is certainly not dying out.

1.3 THE FORM OF A PROVERB: POETICS AND THE USE OF METAPHOR

Some people have written that proverbs are closer to poetry than prose (e.g. Awedoba 2000), so I will look at some ideas that surround poetics or poeticalness. The structural linguist Jakobson (according to Hawkes 1977:79) defined “the *poetic* function of language as one which draws on both the selective and combinative modes as a means for the promotion of *equivalence*”. When Jakobson says “My car beetles along,” he *selects* ‘beetles’ from a common store of possibilities which includes, say, ‘goes’, ‘hurries’, etc., and *combines* it with ‘car’ on the principle that this will make the car’s movement and the insect’s movement *equivalent*. This idea of *poeticalness* appears as an aspect of all uses of language, even prose (Hawkes 1977:81). The meaning of a message, according to Jakobson, depends on its orientation towards one of six “functional dimensions” (emotive, referential, poetic, phatic, metalingual and conative), and if the communication is oriented towards the *message* for its own sake, then the *poetic* function can be said to dominate (Hawkes 1977:85). Thus the form of the message is an integral part of the meaning.

The poetic form used in many proverbs is the *metaphor*, just as ‘to beetle’ is equivalent to ‘to go’. It is this very poeticalness that makes some proverbs hard to understand.

Thus in my opening story above, the certainty of the woman one day giving birth is *equivalent* to the certainty of the *context* that rain was coming, or the *context* of electricity arriving in the town. The focus is on the *message* and hence the proverb is poetical.

Siran (1993) quotes a Vute man, Ndi Pierre. He says that the statement ‘Your family departed, you are no better than a slave’ is in fact not a proverb, precisely because it is

clear. There is no metaphor to be recognised. Crystal (1987) gives both literal and metaphoric examples of Chinese proverbs, although they are not distinguished. The literal one or truism that he cites is, "Calamities do not occur singly". The metaphoric one is, "Tigers do not breed dogs", where he says the nearest English equivalent is, 'Like father, like son'. The apparent referents are a tiger and a dog, but they are not the true referents, and the apparent referents father and son may need to be taken literally, or may not.

Finnegan (1970), however, says that a proverb may be literal or a metaphor or even a simile. An example that she gives for a simile is, "He has the kindness of a witch". To me this may be a simile, but it is not a proverb.

Christensen (1958) wrote that West African proverbs "may be grouped into two general categories: the truism..., which has limited application because of its literal or definite assertion; and the 'metaphorical proverb', which...has wide applicability". I agree with Christensen about there being two categories, but I would suggest that the range of applicability of the "literal" ones may still depend on knowledge of the culture; for example, things that a Westerner might classify as calamities might differ from those that a Chinese person might so classify.

1.4 THE PROVERB AS A FACE THREATENING ACT

Siran (1993) says that a proverb is useful to the speaker as a way of backing off "from whatever may be aggressive in his words". It also enables the person being talked about to "dodge, what, if it were said plainly, would be offensive". However, it is possible that the proverb might not actually be understood by the hearer as what the speaker had in mind.

This aspect of detachment ties in with the advice session given to Obeng (1996) by his parents when he and his wife and children were leaving Ghana for the USA. The author shows in each case how the proverbs are being used "to mitigate upcoming potentially difficult, tense, or risky utterances". The use of proverbs also "helps to maintain the speaker's face, since his or her face is also potentially threatened by the Face Threatening Act inherent in his or her own utterance". For Face Threatening Acts see also Brown and Levinson (1978).

1.5 THE MEANING OF A PROVERB: INTENDED VERSUS UNDERSTOOD

Awedoba (2000) says the meaning of a proverb is "the totality of its references and uses or its potential meaning". However one proverb may have plenty of potential uses because it generalises.

Assuming that one speaks the language, is it possible to guess the meaning, that is, the generalisation, of a proverb from the form quoted? Not always. An Ibo youth from Nigeria studying in the USA is quoted by Arewa and Dundes as knowing some of the Ibo proverbs, but not knowing how to apply them. According to Siran, what is needed is *cultural competence*. "The speaker is thinking A but says B, whereas the listener hears B and understands A." Thus, "Sentence A is the *value* that circulates at the latent level in the communication process. It is not uttered". The text of the proverb he calls its *signification*.

I do not find Siran's terms, *value* and *signification*, very useful. Instead I will use *meaning* and *message*. The normal use of the word *values* in connection with proverbs is the cultural values of the people group.

According to Siran, a set of interpretations of a proverb

can be figured as a cloud in a multidimensional space. To be understood, each use has to be located inside this cloud, which therefore constitutes something like a space of acceptability... A speech act whose value clusters with others around the centre of the 'cloud' will be understood right away, but will be of little interest... As soon as an utterance moves away...at a distance from the cloud's centre, it draws attention by requiring from listeners some work of interpretation. Beyond a certain distance, ...the speaker runs the risk of not being understood at all. (Siran 1993:333.)

He devoted some time to asking specific informants to create situations in which a certain proverb might be used. This compares with creating "texts within contexts", as suggested by Arewa and Dundes. Finnegan (1992) however says that one should be "aiming at 'naturalistic' occasions, hoping appropriate and accessible ones will occur during your stay". Obeng's tape-recording of his parents giving him advice falls into the category of aiming at naturalistic occasions, although one wonders how much the staging influenced the discourse, and whether his own mother and father felt they needed to save face.

Siran's conclusions from his work with informants were twofold. First, that for those who had continued to live in their home area, the range or 'cloud' of situations for any one proverb was quite small. Second, that for those who were living away from their home area there were even further reductions in the range of situations. Thus although proverbs generalise, one does need to know to what kind of situations a proverb is applicable.

2. CHUMBURUNG PROVERBS

The difference between a literal and a metaphoric proverb was brought home to me when it was decided to make a book of Chumburung proverbs for use in a literacy project (Demuyakor 2000).

2.1 BACKGROUND TO CHUMBURUNG

My husband and I arrived in Ghana in 1976 and went to live amongst the Chumburung people, and to learn their language, under the auspices of the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation.

The first literacy classes in which adults learned to read in their own language were started in 1978. At that time we were living in the town of Ekumdipe. The person who was most involved in early book production was Isaac Demuyakor (in Chumburung spelling, De-mo-ya-ko). In the reading primers, according to the number of letters so far taught, proverbs were introduced as well as story material. The first of these is given in example (1).

(1) **Ɔkɔ sɛ nɛ ɔkɔ bɔ-rɔ.**

Because of someone, someone is.

This means that we are all dependent on other people. It is in fact also the proverbial name of one of my women friends, frequently shortened to **Ɔkɔ-sɛ**, meaning 'Because of someone'.

The first proverb we learnt to say ourselves was:

(2) **Kafwɛɛ kafwɛɛ nɛ deekreeke de ɔ deɛ kɛbɛɛ.**

Slowly slowly the chameleon climbs the hill.

This was very useful when we were learning the language and always got a laugh when we produced it. Soon after that Isaac Demuyakor came home one day and passed on to us a proverb that another man had told him to tell us. It was:

(3) **Kibɛntiŋ ya kyee nkyu-ro, kanɔ ŋkɛmaa kɛ maa buruwi daŋkyam.**

No matter how long a log remains in the river, it will not become a crocodile.

It was intended to show us that even if we learnt Chumburung well, we could never become Chumburung ourselves. Its occurrence is a case satisfying the requirements that the rules for applying proverbs can only be studied if actual instances of individuals applying proverbs to real life situations are recorded.

One of the results of the literacy campaign was that Chumburung people started chalking proverbs over the top of the doors of their rooms. A popular one was:

(4) **Kanɔ ɛ gyɛ maŋ.**

Mouth is town.

This refers to the fact that it is good to be united. It is a shortened version of **Kanɔ koŋko ɛ gyɛ maŋ**, where **kanɔ koŋko** means 'one mouth.'

Several books have now been produced in Chumburung as further reading material, and the New Testament was translated and dedicated in 1989. One man who wrote both stories and poetry was the late Emmanuel Amoako-Adjah. He also contributed some proverbs and their meanings to our collection. Isaac Demuyakor, who was one of the NT translators, continued collecting proverbs in an exercise book.

2.2 CHUMBURUNG PROVERBS BOOK

In 1999, we were living in a different town, Banda Bungwesi in Volta Region, and I worked with Isaac Demuyakor again to try to bring together a book of proverbs from his collection and ours to add to the literacy programme. We ended up with 230 proverbs. Isaac Demuyakor's motivation was that proverbs need passing on to the next generation with their meanings. It was his choice, not mine, that the meanings should be in English. But it must be emphasised that this book was intended solely for speakers of Chumburung, not for English mother-tongue speakers.

We produced three lines for each proverb. Line 1 was the Chumburung text, and in several instances a proverb could have small variations in the telling. Line 2 was the translation into English, the gloss. Line 3 was intended to show the meaning. The generalisations into English were all written by Emmanuel Amoako-Adjah or by Isaac Demuyakor, and all were checked by the latter, the 'folk' in this case. Minor corrections to the English were made by me, the native English speaker. Often Isaac Demuyakor

was able to give me appropriate situations in which they could be used, but these were not incorporated into the book, nor unfortunately did I record them; instead the generalisation was used. We abandoned the attempt to produce a fourth line, the meaning in Chumburung.

It was at this point that I realised there is a real difference between proverbs which are *metaphors* and those which are *literal*. Since pictures are a welcome addition to reading books, we asked some people to draw some of the proverbs. However it became instantly clear that what needs to be drawn is the metaphoric or apparent referent, not the true one. This is for two reasons. One is that it is much easier to draw an object or animal than a person doing whatever the proverb is really about. The other is that it would give the game away by explaining the proverb before readers had had a chance to use their brains to figure it out. Thus it is not easy to make a picture for the following proverb, nor does it need a third line:

- (5) **Kuṅu e gye kəkəregyi.**
Seeing is believing.

On the other hand there is:

- (6) **Kiyii kəṅko maa kəre afwii.**
One tree does not collect the wind.

This means ‘It is better to get help from others, not always from one person’, which becomes its third line. It can be illustrated with a picture of a tree bending in the wind.

2.3 TWO WORDS FOR PROVERB IN CHUMBURUNG

The original title of the book was to be *Kyōṅborōy Ajase*, ‘Chumburung Proverbs’. In its singular form **kəṅase** means a proverb, although the word is perceived by some people as having been borrowed from Gonja **kingasa**, the Gonja area being adjacent to some of the Chumburung area. There is, however, an alternative word which the author appended, so that the title now reads *Kyōṅborōy Ajase beee Akpare* (Demuyakor 2000). The singular form of **akpare** is **kekpare**. The word **beee** means ‘or’, but it needs to be born in mind that this word is used in Chumburung in an inclusive rather than exclusive way. Isaac Demuyakor always denied that there was any difference between the two words. However in translating the New Testament, he used **kekpare** for expressions like Luke 4:23, “Physician heal yourself”. Parables were referred to as **itee na akpare**, meaning ‘stories and proverbs’; possibly because many parables were in fact stories that ended with a moral.

Determined to sort out this confusion, I asked for some elders to meet and talk about proverbs. The group, whom I will call my discussants, comprised one woman and four men, one of whom was considered to be able to explain Chumburung things well. I tried asking what the difference was between **kəṅase** and **kekpare**. They couldn’t tell me. Speaking always in Chumburung, I tried giving contrasting literal and metaphoric types and saying that in the latter, it is not, for example, crocodile that you have in mind, but a person. They couldn’t tell me, except that the expert said something I already knew, but had not understood the significance of: namely, that the word for ‘proverbial name’, **kəṅasenyare**, is derived from **kəṅase**. They said you would hear **ajase** frequently, since you often speak to or refer to someone by their

proverbial name, but you won't hear **akpare** so often. It was not until I looked at the collection of more than 150 proverbial names that I realised they were all literal. (Each name would not necessarily be used by everyone, since they also have a name depending on what day of the week they were born on or order within the family, and maybe an English name. Not everybody has a proverbial name, although most do.) Here are some examples:

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------------|---|
| (7) | Ɔko-se-ne-ɔko-bo-ro | Because of someone, another exists (see (1)). |
| | Abrese-yii | Elders have gone (Isaac Demuyakor's own proverbial name). |
| | De-mo-ya-ko | Which town fought? (Isaac Demuyakor's father's proverbial name, used now as a surname.) |
| | Ɔmaŋ-ko-moŋ-te | One town does not stay. |
| | Ane-maa-muri | We will not die out. |
| | Ndee-a-kyoŋ | Yesterday has passed. |
| | Ŋke-mone | Should I see you (PL)? |
| | Laŋta-ka | Wife of the fetish Dente. |

We can now reasonably deduce that **anjase** are literal proverbs and **akpare** are metaphoric ones.

2.4 LITERAL AND METAPHORIC IN CHUMBURUNG.

In our collection of 230 proverbs in the book, 36 seem to me to be literal (**anjase**) and 190 metaphoric (**akpare**). To make this decision, I needed the meanings that others had provided. If a proverb had three lines, proverb, gloss and an explanatory line, that did not guarantee it being metaphoric; but if there were only two lines, proverb and gloss, then it was definitely literal. If it was metaphoric, it would have three lines. In other words, for a literal proverb, the 'meaning' was the gloss even if it got expanded upon, but for a metaphoric one the 'meaning' was the explanatory line. Two proverbs I still cannot decide about, but they are probably literal. For another two, I could not initially decide. They were possibly in the form of a *simile*. Firstly:

- (8) **Ɔfo du nee feye keegyī.**
 A stranger is like a child.
 A stranger is unaware of the customs and taboos of the place he visits.

Unlike Finnegan's example of the simile, the comparison is *within* the proverb. Apart from that it is a literal proverb, as it does refer to strangers or visitors. It seems to me to be fairly easily comprehended! Is that just because I myself have been in the situation of being a newcomer? Secondly:

- (9) **Akerafate-ana-ɔ dɛɛ e gye aborɔŋborɔŋkyeekpa-ɔ.**
 Iguana-people are the same as geckoes. / Geckoes are of the family of iguanas.
 Similarity clearly indicates a relationship: for example, white men are associated with Europe, black men with Africa.

Here again the simile is *within* the proverb, between the two apparent referents. But the true referents are people, not members of the lizard family. It is unnecessary to know the way in which the animals are alike. Rather one needs to know how alike they are.

Because the true referents are people, we can now say that it is metaphoric. The basic semantic structure of both examples is based on the simile and is X is like Y.

2.5 PROVERBIAL COMPETENCE, CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AND CHUMBURUNG

It is Siran who uses the term CULTURAL COMPETENCE concerning the need to know certain aspects of the culture before understanding a specific proverb. This use of the word *competence* is different from that of Chomsky, where linguistic competence means the knowledge that the speaker has of the language as distinct from their performance (Matthews 1997:63). Siran is using *competence* about one person, namely the hearer. I will use the term PROVERBIAL COMPETENCE to refer to the ability to recognise a metaphor and those general attributes of proverbs that occur across languages. I will use the term CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE for what you need to know about a culture before you can interpret a proverb that is spoken. I will aim to give examples of both proverbial competence and cultural knowledge, and draw out some other factors which might help one understand a proverb. (Later I will use the term SITUATIONAL COMPETENCE for the ability of the speaker to apply a proverb appropriately.)

We shall look at literal proverbs and metaphoric ones, and also ones containing proverbial-type nouns. Within each category, there are some which are harder to understand, and we will try to see what it is that makes them harder. Of necessity this is rather subjective, and is from my perspective as an outsider.

2.5.1 Literal proverbs

We will start by examining literal proverbs. Until I looked at the few that there are, I expected that literal would mean easier to understand.

- (10) **Kanyiasɛŋ bə lɛŋ ka kyə keyaalɛŋ.**
Knowledge is stronger than strength.

This appears to be easily comprehended. The two abstract qualities are common to all cultures, and no specific cultural knowledge is needed. (Unless one posited a subculture like boxing, or a small warlike people group where strength might seem to be valued higher than knowledge, and yet would benefit from knowledge as to how to use one's strength.) Some are more problematic, for example:

- (11) **Kowɛbɛɛ bɔrɔbɔrɔɔ kɛmaa bə naŋpɔ.**
Every useless relative is better than a friend.

Despite being literal, this may not be comprehensible to someone not used to the high value placed on a person's extended family in Africa. But it is a comparison between two types of people. The basic semantic form is X is better than Y. The next example also incorporates two people:

- (12) **Kayaagyi na mɔ se maa sa seŋsa ba kyee.**
A child and his father do not talk together for long.

This means, 'A child will not waste time on courtesies before making a request'. But without knowing how important greetings are in this society, a Westerner would probably not understand it. This is harder than the previous one, because it seems to

apply to a specific situation. Also, a Westerner would value a father spending time with his children and being on a fairly equal level, so might not comprehend it.

Hence we see that even within the category of literal, there is a gradation of difficulty and cultural knowledge is necessary.

2.5.2 Literal proverbs containing proverbial-type nouns

Sometimes what would otherwise be a literal proverb, contains a noun that has been constructed from a clause:

- (13) **Ɔ-naa-nde e deŋ o nu aseŋ.**
He-(who)-travels-to-towns hears news.

Awedoba (2000) uses the term *pseudo-name* for such a noun. It has been rank-shifted by incorporating it within a (headless) relative clause (see also §3.3).

This is fairly easily comprehended despite having a proverbial-type noun in it, because it really does refer to travellers. However whether it is 'good' or 'bad' to travel is not certain, so the proverb is deeper than at first glance. The meaning given was, 'A traveller picks up news and gossip', which does not of itself decide the issue for us. However it was claimed to be good by my expert discussant.

2.5.3 Metaphoric proverbs

Turning away now from literal proverbs and whether they are easy or difficult to understand, let's look at the same thing within metaphoric proverbs. A fairly simple one is:

- (14) **Bera kiyii nsaŋ ne ke gye kagyinyii-o.**
Train a tree whilst it is small.

You could think that this is literal, and somebody is telling you to make a Japanese bonsai type tree. Only the surrounding conversation will let you know that trees are not even the subject of discussion. Proverbial competence is needed to recognise this as a metaphoric proverb referring to bringing up children, not growing trees. The fact that there is only one apparent referent may make it easier to understand than where there are two referents, such as:

- (15) **Fo ma koŋ tee kateŋtaree konne.**
You should not call an ant an elephant.

This requires that you notice that the main difference between the two animals is size, hence it really means 'Don't exaggerate'. The words 'ant' and 'elephant' do not here refer to people, but to situations. The fact that it is equivalent to 'Don't make a mountain out of a molehill' might help you, if you were an outsider. Also:

- (16) **Kyaŋkpaŋkpuni maa buruwi kabreba.**
A [certain plant] cannot become a pineapple.

This requires a degree of knowledge of the local plants, usually acquired during childhood when going to and from the farm with a parent or peers. But if you do know what a **kyan̄kpaŋkpuni** is, then you will know how similar it is to a pineapple. This is culture-specific knowledge, unlike the one above where both apparent referents are known. You can interpret it as, 'What nature has ordained can never be changed'. It is similar to

the one about the log and the crocodile in that two apparently similar items are actually quite distinct. But in both cases the basic semantic structure is X not equal to Y.

The next proverb could also be hard for an outsider:

(17) **Bo ma kyon̄ kesareegyikpangyi si da kikpuni.**

One should not bypass the thumb when tying a knot / making a decision.
Important persons such as the elder(s) cannot be left out of the decision-making if it is to be successful.

This is a very interesting example, because the phrase **da kikpuni** meaning ‘to tie a knot’ is normally a dead metaphor, yet in this case it has been brought to life again. The following is also hard:

(18) **Fo ya kine okpe, fo e nya oyu.**

If you reject a witch, you will get a thief.

This requires knowledge of the culture to understand the significance of ‘witch’. This is no fairy-tale character on a broomstick, but a person with supernatural powers. Whilst a witch behaves badly towards you, at least they might be known to you, and you can take action to prevent harm, but you never know who is a thief and when they will steal. It is arguable which is worse. But Isaac Demuyakor says that it really means ‘Put up with small troubles, or worse will come your way’.

The next proverb was hard for me:

(19) **Ok̄o maa waa kyuroro sa krakya.**

No-one stirs for the gourd.

This really means, ‘There are occasions when decisions should not be allowed to be made by the one directly affected’. I can see no way in which an outsider could guess to what this refers. Not only must one equate a person with a gourd, in this case one shaped like a bottle, but one must consider stirring to be like making decisions. For an English speaker, stirring would usually be about making trouble. What is more, the way in which a gourd could stir its contents is by being shaken.

2.5.4 Metaphoric proverbs containing proverbial-type nouns

Just as literal proverbs can have proverbial nouns embedded in them, so can metaphoric ones. Whereas such literal ones are fairly simple to understand, the addition of a metaphor within the main part of a proverb complicates things. In the next example, the act of defecating stands for any dangerous action.

(20) **O-gyi-mf̄ə-ə deŋ ə foŋ kakəə s̄e.**

He who eats oil must be careful of defecating.

If you do something dangerous, you may be thinking of being in trouble.

2.5.5 Summary of 2.5

From the above examples, we see that hearing the surrounding conversation will enable someone who can speak that language to realise that what seems to be a literal proverb is really a metaphor that speaks about people.

This is part of *proverbial competence*. We also see that proverbs, even literal ones, may require *cultural knowledge*; and that a proverb that is literal apart from having a

proverbial-type name within it, is not necessarily difficult. But metaphoric proverbs range from difficult to excessively hard.

Those factors that affect *proverbial competence* include:

- ◆ the number of apparent referents, as in (14)
- ◆ whether qualities, people or situations are being referred to (15)
- ◆ knowing an equivalent proverb in a different language (15)
- ◆ awareness of a dead metaphor (17).

The areas of *cultural knowledge* that we have seen influence comprehensibility include:

- ◆ knowledge of the high value placed on the extended family (11)
- ◆ knowledge of how important greetings are in that culture, and of the English culture that would value fathers spending more time than they currently do interacting with their children (12)
- ◆ whether an action is seen as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (13)
- ◆ knowledge of vocabulary such as plants and animals (16)
- ◆ knowledge of the power of the elders (17)
- ◆ knowledge about the supernatural powers within a culture (18).

Most of the above would come under the heading of values: about family, greetings and supernatural beings. Values are often used as an insight into the worldview of the people (e.g. Awedoba 2000). They can also be used as a way of ordering proverbs within a book, each chapter following themes (e.g. Bloomsbury Books 1994). An example of this is “Age, Youth and Wisdom” or “Appearance, Conduct and Dress.” Knowing about such values, together with specialist knowledge of the vocabulary, is what is needed by the outsider, i.e., *cultural knowledge*. The *proverbial competence* factors are more applicable to the insider, or an outsider who knows the language and culture well.

2.6 CHUMBURUNG DUPLICATES

Of the Chumburung proverbs which were to appear in the literacy book (Demuyakor 2000), several were quite similar in form and structure, and identical in meaning. The one with the most forms in the book seems to be ‘Two Xs cannot live together.’ The first example is literal, the others metaphoric. Thus:

- (21) **ŋkpaŋbɛɛ dapo na ŋkpaŋbɛɛ nupo maa kyena loŋ koŋko-rɔ.**
Snide-remarks teller and snide-remarks hearer don’t stay/live in one house.
- (22) **Abwayepo anyɔ maa kyena gyireŋ koŋko-rɔ.**
Two blacksmiths don’t stay/live in one forge.
- (23) **Ataŋkpɔraŋ anyɔ maa kyena bo koŋko-rɔ.**
Two monitor lizards don’t stay/live in one hole.

The fact that some kinds of people find it hard to live together would be common across cultures. It is also likely that if you know one of these proverbs, you will be able to guess another one. It is even more likely that knowing two such proverbs in one language will help in understanding a third like it.

Thus we can add another factor to the list on *proverbial competence* above, i.e.,

- ◆ presence of duplicate proverbs in that language.

2.7 BASIC SEMANTIC STRUCTURES

Several proverbs have already been mentioned that have a basic semantic structure: (8)–(9), X is like Y; (10)–(11), X is better than Y; (21)–(23), two Xs cannot live together; and (13)–(16), X is not equal to Y.

From the Chumburung (2), ‘Slowly slowly the chameleon climbs the hill’ and ‘Slowly slowly a chicken drinks water’ we get the form ‘slowly slowly X does Y’. There is a similar proverb in English, ‘More haste less speed’.

From the Chumburung ‘One finger does not take guinea-corn’ and (6) ‘One tree does not catch the wind’, both meaning ‘It is always better to get help from others’, we get the form One X does not do Y.

It would seem that there are some structures which are likely to reoccur in one language, and occur in different languages also.

- So to our list of factors affecting *proverbial competence* we could add
- ◆ same *basic semantic structure* as in that or another language.

3. THE GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE OF CHUMBURUNG PROVERBS

We will examine the kinds of sentence that can occur in a proverb, with a view to showing whether any of them have parallel parts; and then move on to questions of pithiness and wit. For further details on the grammar of Chumburung, see Hansford (1990).

3.1 SIMPLE SENTENCES

Some Chumburung proverbs are in simple sentence form. For example:

- (24) **Kiyee bweetə maa nyera epo.**
 Much meat does not spoil soup.
 Don’t be proud.

3.2 COMPLEX SENTENCES.

Some proverbs however are in quite complex sentences, such as:

- (25) **Ŋnyare amo ye, ‘kaye kaye’ ne ɔ maa kpa-ɔ se ne mɔ a yɔ Salaga-ɔ ɔ moŋ sɔ tɛre.**
 That man says it is because he does not like shouting at it that when he went to Salaga he did not buy a goat.
 We sometimes avoid doing certain things just because of the little troubles that they will cause us later.

This comprises a sentence containing a pre-proverb formula (Yankah 1986b), with indirect speech within which is a reason clause which itself contains direct speech, followed by a subordinate temporal clause, and the main clause.

3.3 PARALLEL CLAUSES

Crystal (1992) says that some proverbs are made of parallel parts. A complex sentence, and hence a proverb, comprising only two clauses could have the clauses related in a number of ways.

For example, the first clause may be a conditional clause, such as:

(26) **Fo e naa kəŋe naŋpə, kəŋe e sa a fo dɔɔ kagyase.**

If you walk with a sweet friend, sweetness will cause you to farm on stony ground.

If you put all your trust in a friend, s/he may let you down.

However the two parts are sequential; if this, then that will happen. They are not parallel parts.

Several Chumburung proverbs begin with a noun and a relative clause, 'The one who...', followed by the main clause:

(27) **Ɔko ne kowɔ a duŋ mɔ-ɔ sere teŋtaŋ.**

The one who is bitten by a snake fears the earthworm.

If you have had a bad experience, you will avoid another.

Probably the most interesting type is one which follows from this kind, but where the noun subject and its relative clause abbreviate into a headless relative clause, as in §2.5.2 example (13) and §2.5.4 example (20). Thus **Mɔ ne o gyi mfɔ-ɔ**, 'He who eats oil', abbreviates to **O-gyi-mfɔ** and becomes a proverbial-type noun acting as the head of the main clause. Thus:

(28) **Ŋ-waa-keɛ mɔ ka maa gyi apoteɛ.**

The wife of one who tries and sees will not eat soup-without-salt.

One who tries will surely get something to eat.

Although now reduced to one clause, it is semantically similar to the conditional clause; if this, then that will happen.

Another type is where two co-ordinate clauses are joined by a conjunction, as in

(29) **Kekato maa su na mɔrɔbɔ te.**

The eye does not cry and/whilst the nose sits.

We are affected by the troubles of a relative.

In this case the two actions are simultaneous, and parallel. Concerning the proverbs in the Old Testament, Douglas (1980) says that parallel clauses can be *antithetic* or *synthetic*, that is, the second part may say the opposite to or the same thing as the first part. The example just quoted is that of comparative or synthetic parallelism.

Contrastive or antithetic parallelism is seen in proverbs such as

(30) **Ɔkɔpɔ e taŋ se, ɔyerapɔ maa taŋ se.**

A defecator will forget, (but) the one who clears up doesn't forget.

If you suffer for someone, after some time he forgets, but you who suffered will not forget.

3.4 OTHER STRUCTURES

Just a few of the Chumburung proverbs are in the form of a rhetorical question. An example (which happens to be antithetic parallelism) is:

- (31) **Fo nyi ndoo, fo nyi nyange aaa?**
You know today, do you know tomorrow?

No Chumburung proverb so far discovered is of the form where there are two clauses and the first is proverbial and the second explanatory.

Thus the structures that are available for Chumburung proverbs are quite varied, and only a few have parallel parts.

3.5 PITHINESS

Only a few Chumburung proverbs seem to fit the category of pithy, which one dictionary defines as ‘condensed and forceful’. An example of a condensed proverb would be the following, where there are no subject nouns:

- (32) **Nya ndee waa ndoo.**
Get yesterday make today.
If only my old age were like when I was young.

The meaning of this can be taken literally. The following example is short, but not apparently condensed from a longer form, and is metaphoric.

- (33) **Nlo de egeb.**
Pots have ears.
If you tell someone something, be careful or it will spread everywhere.

(It is the rim of a pot which is called the ‘ears’ in Chumburung.) Compare the English equivalent, ‘Walls have ears’.

3.6 WORDS

Awedoba (2000) says that archaic expressions and neologisms are found in Kasena proverbs. I have found no trace of any words in Chumburung proverbs that are no longer used, except in my own proverbial name, **Ba-kote-ane**, meaning ‘They imitate us’ where the verb **kote** is no longer in use, being replaced in all other cases by **kaase-ro** meaning ‘to copy’. The only new words that are apparent in Chumburung are the proverbial-type nouns within proverbs.

The only class of word that I have noticed that is missing from proverbs is the ideophone. An example in ordinary speech might be **elelee a gyi melele melele melele**, which translates as ‘lightning “ate” [IDEOPHONE]’ meaning rather tamely, ‘The lightning went flash.’ Whilst ideophones are a common method of spicing up normal Chumburung speech, and hence have a poetic function, they do not seem to be needed in proverbs, which have their own poetics.

3.7 PROVERBS AND RIDDLES

Okpewho puts both proverbs and riddles together in his chapter entitled “Witticisms”. The basic aspect that makes both witty seems to be that they are composed of

metaphors. The ability to produce an apt proverb in an appropriate setting also requires wit. Such a proverb will receive a chorus from bystanders of “Ahaaa!”

However, in Chumburung there is no way in which one could confuse proverbs with riddles. Firstly riddles are always prefaced by the phrase **Mboreg?** meaning ‘Riddles?’—to which the answer is quickly given, **Ane e ya**, meaning ‘Let’s go.’ Then the initiating person poses the first riddle of a sequence. Most of them start with a phrase like **N se de mō**... which translates as ‘My father has a...’ For example:

(34) **N se de mō gyi-ana. Bamō ya kyuwi-ro, bō kyō abee, amaa bamō ya buŋge-ro, bō ta.**

My father has his children. When they get up, some are bigger than others, but when they bend down, they are the same height. (Dɔŋkɔ 1987).

The answer is your fingers, which are displayed to prove the point.

Just a few riddles are made of nonsense words, but the correct answer in real words follows the tone pattern of the question. I have had no intimation that there is anything specially tonal about proverbs in Chumburung.

4. PROVERBS AND CONTEXTS

In this section we will look at the various activities which are conducive to people using proverbs. It will also show examples of speakers using their *situational competence* to produce an appropriate proverb.

4.1 IN WHAT CONTEXTS DO PROVERBS OCCUR?

Arewa and Dundes’ (1964) examples were of advice being given to children. Obeng, who wrote about the advice that his parents gave him, says that proverbs can be used for “summing up a situation, passing judgement, reprimanding, recommending a course of action, serving as past precedents for present actions... praising, cautioning, speaking the unspeakable, persuading hearers, asserting someone’s status, and teaching a moral”. Although Christensen (1958) says that “One facet of Fante culture in which proverbs play a prominent role is judicial procedure”, he also gives many examples of their use in other contexts. What he stressed, however, was that, when elders were asked about a proverb, “the answer was frequently couched in terms of a dispute or court case”. Messenger’s (1959) list of contexts says that proverbs “are used in all manner of situations – as a means of amusement, in educating the young, to sanction institutionalised behaviour, as a method of gaining favour in court, ... and to give point and add color to ordinary conversation”.

4.2 COURT CASES

Messenger gives details of four cases in indigenous courts among the Anang (also called Ibibio) in Nigeria. He says that at least one justice admitted to being swayed by the use of proverbs by both plaintiff and defendant. “Anang justices of long standing were unconscious of and only slowly came to realize the influence of proverbs upon decision making in the courts.” However, in one of his cases, he also cites a proverb given by the chief judge to the plaintiff and his supporters, “If you visit the home of the toads, stoop”. This means that they had expressed unwillingness

to take oaths, thereby forfeiting the case. Arewa and Dundes point out that it is not the man who knows most proverbs, but the one who knows how to apply those he knows whose case may be won. And in one of Messenger's cases the defendant inappropriately applied a proverb to the further chagrin of the justices, who then found him guilty!

Siran, however, points out that in all the cases presented by Messenger, "proverbs were used by *litigants*. ... But *none of the judgements* referred to proverbs" (his emphasis). He goes on to show that the particular chief that Messenger was trying to elicit proverbs from was very reluctant, because he said that proverbs were all lies. "The chief speaks plainly", unlike a diviner, who will not talk plainly; "he is never boxed inside his words if things do not work out right." Siran concludes that "it must now be emphasized that using proverbs may... amount to an avowal of frailty, of scheming and deceit".

Gonja even has a proverb about proverbs (Kponkpogori 1966), which Yankah (1986b) calls a metaproverb:

(35) **Angasa e naa bara kolu.**

Proverbs bring (are the cause of) quarrels.
Insinuations bring resentments.

On the other hand, Okpewho cites Arewa (1970) when an **oba** and his junior chief both quoted proverbs to an agricultural officer considering setting up a project. One could argue that this is not within the context of making a judgment on a matter of litigation, however.

Okpewho quotes Yankah (1986a) who believes that "Issues deliberated during judicial proceedings are often too grave for judgment to be based exclusively on competence in proverb use".

4.3 CHUMBURUNG COURT CASES

I wondered what might happen in a Chumburung court. What proverbs would be used and by whom? So I asked to be allowed to attend the chief's court at Banda. Although this man is chief of the whole of one of the five sections of Chumburung people, the cases which I saw being judged were of people from that town.

4.3.1 First case

The chief's court is a round hut with a central pole and many gnarled sticks holding up a thatched roof making it an airy and cool place to spend long sessions. The chief, Nana Omap-ko-moj-te, sat in his folding chair with his feet on a sheep skin. To the right stood what in Ghana is called 'the linguist'. His job is to represent the chief to the litigants and vice versa. On a bench to the left were seated the man who was accused; the Omankrado (literally town-holder, who relates to the outside world) with his special stick; the chief of the young people; and the linguist of the Omankrado. On the right was a man standing in for the Odikuro (an elder who governs his own town or village), and then the woman who was making the accusation. In this case, however, all those attending spoke Chumburung. The linguist opened the case and then Nana asked the woman what had happened. She told us how the accused man had hit her and she fell, so she had to go to the clinic for treatment. Sometime

during the dispute, she had thrown water at the man. The man then said that because they had fought, they had been taken to the police station. Various others asked for further details or spoke on behalf of the woman. The chief then summed up by saying that trouble had come between the two, and cited the proverb:

(36) **Kadwii kɔŋɛ, kadwii preepree, nɛɛ deŋ o nuu?**

Whether the medicine is sweet or sour, who is the one to drink it?

And he gave the answer—"the man", which caused general laughter. It then turned out that the man had hit the woman three times, and the chief asked if she was guinea-corn. Then it was revealed that the man was already married to someone else but the child by this woman was his. However, he had never paid the traditional gift of a cloth for the woman or monthly support for the child. The woman said that the child was on her back when she fell, so also got hurt. There was discussion about the fact that the child would not be able to go and live with the father until it was about seven years old. The chief cited the proverb:

(37) **Kateeregyi ya wɔ mfɔre, nyaŋɛ ɔ bee ɔ ba.**

If a young goat eats salt, tomorrow he'll come again.

This implied that what was a small problem had become magnified with time. Various people then made what are known as 'apologies', involving kneeling before the chief on behalf of the man. The linguist said that the one who is at fault pays for the drink (usually a local gin). Also the clinic bill was brought out. The Omankrado, the young people's chief and the linguist then took themselves off behind a nearby house, and came back with the conclusion that five bottles were required. After further apologies it was reduced to three: one for the chief, because they caused him trouble; one for the elders (similar to the costs); and one for the lady to sell to get supplies like soap for herself and the child. After the bottles and the money to pay the bill had been brought, the chief started to cite the proverb given in full in (27) above:

(38) **Ɔkɔ nɛ kowɔ a duŋ mɔ-ɔ...**

The one who has been bitten by the snake...

Only he didn't finish it but left it up to us to add mentally **sere teŋtaŋ**, meaning 'fears the earthworm'. It seemed he meant that the man would learn by his mistake. This is a case of proverb shortening, as in the one Finnegan (1970) cites—"Young birds will always open their mouths, even to those who come to kill them"—as being reduced to only three words, presumably 'young birds', 'open', and 'mouths'.

The bottle for the elders was poured as a libation and those in the hut, about twenty by this time, were offered a drink. When the linguist announced that the case was finished, we all stood up with alacrity and relief. It had taken nearly two hours in all.

In this case, although it was the chief who used the proverbs, it was indeed to mitigate Face Threatening Acts. The proverb about sweet or sour medicine seems to be at a pivotal point in the case, although I have no mention in my notes of the chief actually pronouncing the man guilty. The problem was then expanded upon, and the proverb about salt comes just before apologies were made, so one could conclude that it is at this point that the man is judged. The punishment is then spelled out, but not by

the chief. The last proverb the chief quoted, the one about being bitten by a snake, was added at the end as a deterrent.

4.3.2 Second case

When I attended the second case, about a widow remarrying, it was not all in Chumburung, so I did not understand so much. The litigants were Kabre and Bassari. The fine included a sheep, money and bottles of gin. They asked for the fine in bottles of gin to be reduced, but the linguist said:

(39) **Bə moŋ naa keyaa koŋkə sə ba yə owure-aye.**

They don't walk on only one leg to go to the chief's place.

He then explained that you must bring two bottles, not expect a reduction. I take it that this means that one is for the chief and one for the elders attending the case. He also said:

(40) **Fə ɛ moŋ ŋu kyəŋ, gyəŋŋə nəɛnɛɛ.**

If you haven't seen a waterbuck, bow down well.

This means that one must respect the chief well. In addition to being a proverb, this seems to be a pun also.

In this second case, it was the linguist who spoke the proverbs, but they were both after judgment had been given, and concerned the punishment.

In neither case did any of the litigants use proverbs. In fact they all seemed fairly cowed by the proceedings rather than in a mood of dispute.

4.4 PROVERBS HEARD IN OTHER CONTEXTS

As already mentioned by Finnegan, I hoped that some proverbs would be spoken naturally during my trip. Those cited at the court cases were indeed natural. I don't think there was much reactivity to my presence except in the second case when the court was awaiting the arrival of the fines, and the linguist spoke directly to me to clarify some points. But I was also on the look-out for proverbs spoken in other contexts.

4.4.1 Old Testament Committee

Later we attended a meeting of the Old Testament Committee, comprising translators and pastors interested in starting the translation of the Old Testament. This OT Committee also includes the chief mentioned above, but he holds no special position. The following proverbs were noted and later explained to me. Referring to a problem that they had with one member, there were two proverbs spoken:

(41) **Mfɛŋ nə fə a dəɛ kiyii-o, mfɛŋ dəɛ nə fə ɛ kporəwɛ.**

There where you climb a tree, there also will you climb down.

This meant that that particular member would need to take steps to solve the problem. This was spoken by the Literacy Co-ordinator. Another was:

(42) **Ɔkə ya sa fə kadwii, m̀ dəɛ m̀ ɛ gyɛ nə ɔ kaapə fə kimeɛ.**

If someone gives you medicine, he it is who will show you how to swallow it.

This was said by the chief, Nana Ɔmaŋ-ko-moŋ-te. It meant that they would work with that member in helping solve the issue.

After the meeting, another member acknowledged to me that when he confessed some wrong he himself had done, it had caused wrongs by others to come into the open. He used the proverb,

(43) **Kowɔ ɛ moŋ lee, beŋ maa daree.**

If the snake doesn't come out, neither will the stick.

A problem can only be solved when it is acknowledged.

These examples all deal with some kind of conflict situation.

4.4.2 Conversation

This article began with the proverb about the pregnant woman, and how it was quoted to me in two different contexts, both in informal conversation. It says:

(44) **Ɔkyee ya nya kame, kaŋ ɲkemaɔ ɔ kowe.**

If a woman has a stomach (is pregnant), surely she will give birth.

Once something has happened in a process, you know the rest will follow.

4.4.3 Songs at funerals

Okpewho (1992) says that proverbs can occur in “performance of chants of a somewhat ritual kind”. Kponkogori et al. (1966) give a Gonja example in a song. My discussants confirmed this for Chumburung. The kind of song it can occur in is known as **nkywiisi** and these are mostly sung at funerals. They differ from other types of song, and their content is that of a dirge. Of the ten songs of this type that I had written versions of, seven had indeed been sung to us at the time of funerals. Four of the ten had metaphoric proverbs (**akpare**). Sometimes these are at the very beginning of the song, sometimes a bit later, but they do not occur in any chorus that is repeated several times. An example is:

(45) **Kyenkyenka, nse ɛ gyɛ ne ɔ sɔɔ mɔ eee?**

Mɔ a waa kepateye kyenkyenka, ne nse ɛ gyɛ ne ɔ sɔɔ mɔ aaa?

Mɔ a waa kuruma kyenkyenka, ne nse ɛ gyɛ ne ɔ sɔɔ mɔ aaa?

Kebab, who will buy it?

I have become a vulture kebab, and who will buy me?

I have become a donkey kebab, and who will buy me?

This I was told means, ‘No-one likes me.’

We have seen examples where proverbs are used in different contexts, ordinary conversation and songs, and by officials in court cases. All of these were delivered orally.

4.5 PROVERBS IN LITERATURE

I turn next to Chumburung written material, some of which was oral and tape recorded, some just written.

4.5.1 Folk Stories

Bird (1979) suggests that some proverbs “bring to mind various folk tales”. Although we have many folk stories published in Chumburung for the literacy project, not many of them incorporate proverbs. When they were delivered orally, taped, and later transcribed, it is unlikely that a proverb has been edited out for supposed literary style. But some of the stories were written directly, and for these we cannot be sure. Whatever the method, there is fairly often the ending, ‘So that is why...’ However, the story of Rabbit, Elephant and Hippo and how Rabbit tricks the two large animals into a tug-of-war ends with:

- (46) **Kanyiasɛŋ kyɔ keyaalɛŋ nɛɛ.**
Knowledge exceeds strength.

It is very like (10) and is one of the literal type. Similarly the story of Vulture and Tortoise becoming friends ends with:

- (47) **Na yii ɛ bɔ ɛswɛɛ, kanɔ ŋkɛmaa o de mɔ krarɔkpa.**
And no matter how long a stick is, it has its holding-place.

This means that there is no case that cannot be solved. Appended to this is, ‘as the elders promised’. In another story, the closing proverb is:

- (48) **Aseŋ maa kpa sese, sese ɛ deŋ ɔ kpa aseŋ.**
Trouble does not look for a person, it is a person who looks for trouble.

This is the song that tortoise sings in the bush but fails to sing when brought before the elders. The story concludes, ‘That is why today, if you go to the bush and find something, you should not show off about it’. The form is two parallel and antithetic clauses.

4.5.2 Oral History

We also asked various elders in different towns that we visited to tell us something about the history of their town and customs of olden times, and we tape-recorded these oral accounts, which were then transcribed. In an account of the founding of his town, Boafore, one old man, Ebwiya Kwameɛ ɪjwaɛŋwaa, was complaining, as old people often do, that the young people nowadays don’t take much interest in tradition, and said,

- (49) **Fɔ ya tayɛ mɔ kusɔŋ, dee nɛ mɔ a ku-o, mɔ ɛ tɔwɛ mɔ a n gywii fɔ.**
Nɛ fɔ mɔŋ tayɛ mɔ kusɔŋ, dee nɛ mɔ a ku-o, mɔ ɛ tɔwɛ mɔ a n gywii fɔ aaa?
If you open my door-hanging, the dream that I have had, I will tell it to you.
And if you don’t open my door-hanging, the dream that I have had, will I tell it to you?

This was spoken in the presence of myself and three or four young men who were teachers in the literacy programme. The form of parallel and opposite clauses (contrastive or antithetic) makes it particularly poignant.

5. CREATIVITY

It is generally agreed that proverbs are handed down from generation to generation. As Arewa and Dundes say, a proverb is seen as a voice from the cultural past. “It

is the ‘One,’ the ‘Elders’ or the ‘They’ in ‘They say’ who direct.” For Chumburung, this pre-proverb formula is **Abreṣe ye-εεε**, which means ‘the elders say’, but it is not always used.

What are the ways in which the current generation can be creative in proverb use?

5.1 HOW CAN A PROVERB TELLER BE CREATIVE?

Yankah (1986b) says that creativity can be achieved in three senses: “1) the creation of novel proverbs, 2) the timely invocation of an effective proverb in a fitting rhetorical situation, and 3) the adaptation and manipulation of existing proverbs.” His paper deals only with the last, but he shows how a person might even be able to use a proverb to mean exactly the opposite of what it normally means.

This last seems to be included in what I have called *proverbial competence*, on the principle that you need to know various things about proverbs in general to be able to adapt them. The second is what I have termed *situational competence*, knowing what is happening in the discussion and actions so as to be able to contribute a piece of advice that exactly fits that situation.

I would like to focus on the first point, and show that the creation of proverbs, even in Chumburung, is still happening. Some proverbial-type statements with known authors are known as aphorisms. Gross (1987) says that the first aphorisms were “medical teachings and sayings of Hippocrates.” An example would be ‘It’s not that I’m afraid to die. I just don’t want to be there when it happens’, attributed to Woody Allen. They have a wit peculiar to themselves, they are not metaphoric, and they seem to have arisen from written sources.

Mieder (1999) ends his article with some, which he calls “proverbial aphorisms”, from well-known names like Nietzsche and Brecht. These have clearly been invented relatively recently. He also cites lesser authors of books of quips, quotes and aphorisms. Whilst one may or may not know that ‘Like charity, obesity begins at home’, the expression ‘If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it’ has, I think, a wide circulation today.

Simpson (1982), in his introduction, comments that some English proverbs that sound old, such as ‘A change is as good as a rest’ don’t occur until the twentieth century. This is much like Hobsbawn’s thesis in his book *The Invention of Tradition* (1983). Bloch (1977) tells of how one George Nichols invented a proverb or aphorism from a remark in 1949 by a colleague, Captain E. Murphy. Now known as Murphy’s Law, with numerous variations, it states ‘If anything can go wrong, it will’. These examples serve to show that even what might be considered traditional sayings are not necessarily old. So somehow they have been created. We will first look at proverbs with a pre-verb formula other than the type, ‘The Elders say’.

5.2 ATTRIBUTION TO ANOTHER PERSON OR ANIMAL

None of Yankah’s three ways of being creative deal with the kind of saying that Okpewho mentions, namely a “wellerism”. Weller was a character in one of Dickens’ stories whose speech was colourful, so a wellerism is “a dramatic form in which a statement is put in the mouth of a *fictional* person or thing” (my emphasis). He cites from the Asaba Igbo of Nigeria, “The madman says...”; and from the Ganda of Uganda, “‘I’ll die for a big thing’ says the biting ant on the big toe”.

In Rattray's list (1914) of Asante (Ashanti)/Fante proverbs, we see similar examples of where a proverb is put into the mouth of an animal, such as 'The monkey says...', 'The fowl says...', 'Spider says...', and also 'The fool says...'.

In Chumburung, many animals other than those mentioned by Rattray are similarly utilised, including the weaver-bird, the cricket and the honey-bee. One proverb has 'The cat says...', as in:

- (50) **Gyeranbowa ye isoori bəye ɛ teŋ eɛbɔ.**
The cat says bad games cut the ear.
Anything unpleasant has an unpleasant ending.

Also 'Baboon says...', as in:

- (51) **Puroŋ ye ɔko kifwiikee moŋ du feye fo fəŋfəŋ a fwiikee-ɔ.**
Baboon says someone's peeping is not like your own peeping.
One is more sure of something when doing it oneself.

This example would probably be taken to be fairly literal apart from the fact that it is Baboon who is saying it. In the case of both the animals Cat and Baboon, what is said seems to bear little connection to their habits, and one wonders whether there is flexibility in choosing which animal to utilise. A comparison of one proverb across languages is:

- (52) **Gyono ye, 'Lee da na n lee da' ɛ gyɛ isoori kɔne.**
The dog says, 'Fall down and I fall down' is a good game.

The equivalent in Nawuri (a language adjacent to Chumburung) has the cat as the speaker (Lange n.d.).

But in another proverb about the chameleon (see also example (2)), the speaker is chosen precisely for characteristics that illustrate the proverb.

- (53) **Deekreeke ye menaŋmenaŋ bware, ne bəyɛbəyɛ mə bware.**
Chameleon says quickly quickly is good and slowly slowly is good.

5.3 ATTRIBUTION TO SPECIFIC CREATORS OR INCIDENTS

5.3.1 Known creators and incidents in other cultures

Okpewho suggests that "every proverb must have started its life as the product of the genius of an individual oral artist", but he gives us no example to prove this. However he cites Schapera (1966), who says that the Tswana of southern Africa have a class of proverbs which are "Both localised in distribution and specifically attributed to a *particular chief* of the tribe concerned" (my emphasis). He does not, however, class them as aphorisms, possibly because the name is not used as a pre-proverb. It seems that they were created in sessions of litigation. Further Okpewho cites examples from Alagoa (1968) of specific historical incidents which sparked the creation of certain proverbs among the Nembe Ijo of Nigeria: the confrontation of two royal cousins, two British explorers one of whom was saved from death by the delay of a king, and one depicting intergroup relations.

5.3.2 Chumburung known creators

Amongst the Chumburung proverbs collected, there are examples with a specific named person as the creator. (Unfortunately the events that produced them are not known.) In the following proverb, Emmanuel Amoako-Adjah wrote in brackets that it is himself who is the spokesperson. The Chumburung spelling of Adjah is Agya, and Akwasi is his day-name:

- (54) **Agya Akwasi (myself) ye fo ya neŋ leekpa fo ɔkyenabεεpo a kekyaŋ-ɔ-rɔ, nyiŋŋi si feye fo kemo-ɔ gbaa moŋ lee.**

Amoako-Adjah says that when you set your neighbour's house on fire, remember that your own is never safe.

Evil done to a close person reflects so much on the doer too.

Another is:

- (55) **Kwamena Agya ye fo aa teere ya yɔ ketaapa-rɔ, a bo gya, a lee feye fo e teŋ ketaapa-ɔ, na mɔ mɔ e wo.**

Kwamena Adjah said that to go to get thatch with a goat is painful, because whilst you are cutting it, the goat is eating it.

It is painful to try to settle a dispute in the presence of someone who has no understanding, because whilst you are settling things, he is unsettling them again.

This is in all probability Emmanuel Amoako-Adjah's own father, Kwamena being his day-name. Possibly in imitation, Isaac Demuyakor has also invented one.

- (56) **Abrese-yii De-mo-ya-ko ye fo ya ŋu tenapo e kpa a ɔ lee da kemaŋtaŋ-no, ne fo ya towe gywii mɔ feye 'O mo daa, fo e kpa a fo lee da kemaŋtaŋ-no' ɔ towe a o gywii fo nee feye 'Ŋ kee kemo gbaa'.**

(proverbial name) + (father's proverbial name) says, if you see a blind man about to fall into a pit, and you say to him, 'Elder brother, do you want to fall into a pit?' he will tell you that he has seen it.

If you help someone achieve a goal, later he will say you were of no help to him.

In another example given by Isaac Demuyakor, it is his mother who is spokesperson:

- (57) **Kumundii Bre-aye Yawa Ane-a-bo-to ye, 'Akyee e deŋ ba doo, weete anyare maa gyi.**

From Brai in Kumundi, (day name) + (proverbial name) says 'If women farmed, men would not eat.'

In terms of proverbial competence, this is fairly easily comprehended whether or not said by a named person. In fact this one seems to be literal, whereas most of this variety are metaphoric.

My discussants confirmed for me that someone can make up their own proverb. The woman said she could say "My father said..." and a listener could then quote the same proverb but using the personal name of the inventor. No mention was made that this type is called anything different from **anase** or **akpare**.

It is interesting to speculate whether those who invented a proverb intended it to become part of the pool of proverbs that are deemed to have come down through the ages. I doubt it. On the other hand, if such a proverb does get remembered, will the name continue to be attached to it, like an aphorism, or will it become an unattributed proverb prefaced by ‘the Elders say’ as Okpewho suggests?

The pool of available proverbs in Chumburung must be much larger than the 230 used in the literacy book. Finnegan (1970) said that there were more than thirty peoples with more than 500 published each, and for Hausa there are 2000 written. For comparison, making a quick count of one chapter of a pocket book of English proverbs (Bloomsbury 1994), out of 127, I only knew ten.

6. CONCLUSION

Christaller’s collection of “3000 proverbs in use among negroes of the Gold Coast speaking the Asante and Fante language” was condensed into a mere 830 by Rattray (1914). These collections have informed all subsequent researchers whether they speak that language or not. We have seen that this interest in proverbs applies also to minority languages such as Chumburung. Proverbs are still being cited in ordinary conversation, in story telling, in singing, in naming children as well as the more standard contexts of conflict situations. Chumburung divide their proverbs into literal (**anjase**) and metaphoric (**akpare**), and using their *situational competence* are able to employ them neatly, whether they are literate or not. Living in the home area means that people acquire *proverbial competence* by hearing them in such situations. Those living outside the home area will be denied the number of repetitions and other proverbs being cited more than once, and hence will find them harder to understand, although they may well have the *cultural knowledge* that may be lacking in the total outsider.

That proverbs are deemed an interesting genre is shown by the fact that they are being preserved by insiders, to teach their meanings to both Chumburung children and outsiders. Furthermore the pool of proverbs is being expanded by the addition of new examples of both types by living people.

Bangnikon (1999) says “...the increase in reading and greater sophistication that results from formal education and development will cause the Dagara proverbs to change or even die. At best they will be regarded as vulgar sayings”. I beg to differ as regards the Chumburung. Since we know that people are today creating new proverbs, it is clear that *tradition* is not dying out!

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