

Sustaining Oku Heritage: Proverbs as a Tool for Cultural Conservation and Community Empowerment

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Article History

Received: 07.06.2025

Accepted: 12.08.2025

Published: 16.08.2025

Abstract: The present study aims at collecting and translating Oku proverbs literally from the Oku language to the English language as well as establishing the basic truths or intended meanings about them as perceived or conceived by their native users so as to determine whether Oku proverbs can be leveraged for community empowerment and cultural conservation. Only the qualitative approach was used. For this to be realised, some literature related to this study was reviewed, ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation was done alongside interviews with the Oku community members, especially focus generated group discussions and dialogues with some traditional leaders, notables and elders from Oku; followed by a discourse analysis of the proverbs in question. After collecting, interpreting and analysing the data based on some definitions of proverbs related to this study, it was resolved that Oku people put proverbs in perspective as they think deeply before coining their wise sayings based on their daily practical encounters or experiences that in turn serve as life lessons learned or acquired. These wise sayings are deemed necessary to be recounted and passed down to posterity as pieces of advice, moral lessons, instructions, rebukes, far-sightedness, corrections or warning; all intended to inculcate the knowledge and wisdom of individual and community empowerment as well as the urge for cultural conservation. It is hoped that with this knowledge, the Oku indigene will put this to practice in their interpersonal relationships as they evolve and live together so that their community can advance in harmony and their culture prudently enriched and preserved. With these findings, it was concluded that Oku proverbs can be leveraged for community empowerment and cultural conservation as reclaiming Oku proverbs can foster community resilience, promote cultural pride and support sustainable development.

Keywords: Proverbs and Meanings, Translation, Community Empowerment, Cultural Conservation.

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I-INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Oku is a village and a subdivision in Bui Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. One can travel to Oku either from Bamenda via Babungo, kom, or kumbo depending on one's geographical

location. It comprises seven extended family groups, all from the Tikari ancestry, that nature converged from different biological relationships to form a large family that was later named Oku. The seven family groups that constitute Oku are the mbele, ebdzeng, mbulum, ediom, ekem, ebdzeh and eblum.

Citation: Ndi Eunice Ndem (2025). Sustaining Oku Heritage: Proverbs as a Tool for Cultural Conservation and Community Empowerment. *Glob Acad J Linguist Lit*; Vol-7, Iss-4 pp-83-93.

"To speak a language is to take one world, a culture" says Frantz Omar Fanon (1961), a linguist and philosopher. It shows how tight is the connectivity between language and culture; when the aspects of language are discussed, at the same time the culture is involved with it. Moreover, Lim (1975:3) states that linguistics is the scientific study of language. It means that linguistics also deals with framework or theoretical methods that could be classified as the scientific method; in this case scientific method for human and social studies. Language analysis is done systematically within the framework of some general theory of language structure. Language and linguistics from those statements above are dealing with a huge definition that covers whole world and its culture while linguistics tells us how to understand language using some framework and theories of human and social studies. We can conclude that language is connected to every single thing of our life, from social matters to cultural scopes.

Language is a communication tool either written or spoken forms, both are used to express the ideas, concepts and wits. Human languages are different from systems of nonhuman communication. The final term that relates to language is communication. It means that language is used for communication (Wardhaugh, 1972:3-8). Language is a living practice which downs from generation to others periodically and is utilised and practiced repeatedly in the society. Language belongs to a community and when the members of the community interact with each other, they use language to deliver and share their ideas or to express what they have in their minds, and as consequences of using the same language they will influence each other in any sides of living matters and the language as well is also influenced. Someone's speech will be completely at variance with the speech of his native environment. Speech is a human activity that varies without assignable limit as we pass from social group to social group, because it is a purely historical heritage of the group, the product of long-continued social usage. (Sapir; 1921:2)

Much more complex is stated by Saussure. He stresses that language is collective not individual. It is a treasure buried of a practice speech to those people who belong to the same community. A virtual existence of grammatical system lies in each brain or more precisely in the brains of a collection of individuals; since language is not a complete language in an individual, but it exists only if it is a collective. (Saussure via Bauer; 2007:2)

One of the types of written communication is proverbs. The wisdom of proverbs has guided people in their social interactions for thousands of years

throughout the world. Proverbs contain everyday experiences and common observation in succinct and formulaic language, making them easy to remember and ready to be used instantly as effective rhetoric in oral and written communication. (Mieder; 2004: xi). According to those statements above, the researcher concludes that proverbs create in a formulaic language, short and contain wisdom of the society to be used in a common and everyday expression because it is easy to remember as rhetoric in communicating with other people. The formulaic language and its content are the parts of this study especially the parts related to the cultural factors and how effective the rhetoric of proverbs indicates the culture of the society. More over Mieder stated in his book; *Proverbs: A Handbook* that there are literally thousands of proverbs in the multitude of cultures and languages of the world. It means there is a huge space, chance and challenge to explore and to observe the proverbs as an academic field of study since they are related to linguistics elements, wisdom, moral values and cultural values that those things are very close and important to people's lives either as tools or strategies of living in order to have a well behaved life.

The term proverb is taken from Greek language *paremia* which is one of the parts of phraseology. The linguists have decided to refer all formulaic phrases as phraseological units or phraseologisms and proverb is one of the most important study of phraseological units. The phraseologists do and should include proverbs in their linguistic studies, while paremiologist; which is addressing to someone who studies proverbs. People might be confused to differ between proverb and metaphorical expression but here is the difference between those two terminologies. It is a metaphorical expression when the expression using a figure of speech so that a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another, thus making an implicit meaning while proverb is much more bound in its construction to deliver the message.

It May be direct or literal or metaphoric meaning. The study of proverbs mostly concerns to the bottom of that "incommunicable quality" of have been called by the paremiologist as "proverbiality" which deals with: The structure of the proverbs, stylistic markers including alliteration, parallelism, rhyme, ellipsis, hyperbole, paradox, personification etc, social situation or social context that in turn gives them meaning, functions, and cultural aspects. Based on those reasons above the researcher is very interested to study proverb in the point of view of cultural connectivity; why the cultural meaning of the proverbs is connected and like the other countries

that have equivalent meaning of the mentioned proverb.

2, Definition of Key Terms

Proverbs

After a keen review of literature on proverbs, the following definitions of proverbs were retained in relation to the present study.

To begin with, The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs (2004:14) states that the study and collection of proverbs is called paremiology from the Greek word paroimia which means proverb.

Ahmed Manea Hoshan in his article defines proverbs as simple and concrete sayings popularly known and repeated which express a truth, based on common sense or the practical experience of humanity. He goes further to state that they are traditional sayings which offer advice or present a moral in a short and pithy manner. Also, the Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs (ibid 2004:14) states that proverbs are often metaphorical and that those that describe a basic rule of conduct may also be known as maxims.

Also, La Vista Church of Christ apart from defining a proverb as a short teaching that contains far more than it might appear on the surface, writes on the objectives of proverbs based on biblical interpretation of proverbs with emphasis on Proverbs 1:2-7 that spells out clearly that proverbs are intended to know wisdom and instruction, to understand the sayings of understanding, to receive instructions in wise behaviour, righteousness, justice and equity, to give prudence to the naïve, to the youth knowledge and discretion, a wiseman will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel, etc. The following analyses of proverbs in Oku are in line with this definition of proverbs.

Translation

Barnwell (1986:8) says “translation is re-telling as exactly as possible, the meaning of the original message in a way that is natural in the language into which the translation is being made” This definition of translation applies to the context of the present study because after giving the word -for-word translation from Oku to English, the intended natural meaning of the original message is also given for better understanding in order to avoid mistranslation and misinterpretation in understanding the words of the wise and their riddles as well as when rendering from Oku to English and other languages. The purpose of original meaning translation is because the literal versions are plainly inexact as they are mostly metaphorical. For this reason, literal translation of proverbs from Oku to

English will be meaningless if the natural or original meaning is not highlighted.

Meaning

Meaning in the present study is the disclosure of some intended truths that have been carefully and intentionally enclosed or embedded in the lexical meanings of some words and expressions (proverbs in the present study).

Cultural Conservation

According to UNESCO institute for statistics (Conservation of cultural heritage /UNESCO UIS UNESCO UIS <https://uis.unesco.org> 2025.), the conservation of cultural heritage refers to the measures taken to extend the life of cultural heritage while strengthening transmission of its significant heritage, messages and values.

3 THEORETICALFRAMEWORK

Due to the nature of this paper, the study of proverbs, the framework that will be used is Larson's concept of Translation. Proverbs are structured in metaphorical forms and they make some problems of translating them in order to meet the equivalence of the translated text to the original text. Larson suggests some techniques of translating proverbs that are formed in metaphorical expressions.

Larson proposes the five strategies of translating metaphorical expressions as follow:

First, the metaphor may be kept if the receptor language accepts if it sounds natural and understood easily and correctly by the people of receptor language. Secondly, a metaphor may be translated as simile, thirdly, a metaphor of the receptor language which has the same meaning may be substituted; and then the fourth strategy is the metaphor is added with some explanations and the last strategy is the meaning of the metaphor may be translated without keeping the metaphorical imagery. Larson (1984:254).

Those strategies are applying in this research to find the equivalent meaning of proverbs in Oku and the researcher is going to explain more about those strategies in the next sub chapter of this theoretical review in line with the equivalent translation proposed by Nida & Taber as explained below since the theory of semiotic of translation proposed by Jacobson was not applicable to the data translated in this research but it is also essential to describe it. Jacobson as cited in Toury 1980:14 states that the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into an alternative sign in which it is more fully developed. A verbal sign can be interpreted in three different ways: it can be translated into other signs of the same language, into another language, or into another, verbal system of symbols. These three

kinds of translation are also called: Intralingual translation or rewording. This is an interpretation of the verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language. One could say similes are used. Interlingual translation or translation proper. This is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of another language. Intersemiotic translation or transmutation. This is an interpretation of the verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal systems. The researcher decided to shift the application of the translation theory from Jacobson's semiotic translation theory to Nida & Taber's equivalent translation theory because of the reason stated above, Jacobson's theory of semiotic translation is much more suitable to apply in verbal language while the data of this research are proverbs which are non-verbal language. The similar reason also applies to the others strategy, such as the metaphorical translation as offered by Larson. It is shifted when the Larson's theory are not suitable in finding the equivalent meaning of the proverbs.

Larson's Concept of Translation

Larson (1984: 15) classifies translation into two main types, namely form-based and meaning-based translation. Larson says that form-based translation is a kind of translation which is following the form found in the source language. This translation is called literal translation. The second one he calls as meaning-based translation which is a technique of translating text from source language into target language by emphasising that each meaning in target language should be translated to the natural form in the target language. This method is also called as idiomatic translation. Moreover, Larson states that the translation must give careful consideration whenever a metaphor is found in the source text (1984: 252).

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

1- Overview of African Cultural Heritage and Proverbial Wisdom

According to Dickson Adom *et al.*, 2022, African proverbs are instructional vehicles through which the cultural values in Africa are imparted to generations but considered as the most ubiquitous genre of folklore. They recommend that African leaders at various levels must assist research efforts aimed at cultural preservation and propagation of the philosophical insights in African proverbs.

Also, AfrikLens, December 1, 2024 says African proverbs are pearls of wisdom that have been passed down from generation to generation. African proverbs are rooted in the rich cultures and traditions of Africa and capture the essence of life's lessons and provide guidance for everyday living.

Moreover, Number Analytics <https://www.numberanalytics.com> in *The wisdom of*

African proverbs: a philosophical exploration, African proverbs have long been a cornerstone of the continent's cultural heritage, offering insights into the complexities of human experience and the natural world and that they contain a wealth of philosophical wisdom that remains relevant today.

Then, Madukaski, Francis Chuks: 2020 says Igbo proverbs are the custodian of ethical and moral power house for the Igbo people.

And Chukwunonso VITALIS Ogbo and EJIKEME UWA J.O. Ndubisi, 2024 argue that the key to preserving African culture lies in making it accessible to younger generations through education, documentation, and languages.

5- SIGNIFICANCE OF PROVERBS IN THE OKU CULTURE

HERNADI & STEEN (1999:11) and Fair (2000:5) quoted in the Oxford dictionary of proverbs *ibid* say that proverbs dig deep in the history of mankind, and they are not confined to a specific country, culture or language but go beyond all frontiers and Oku is not exempted.

According to sampled informants, Oku proverbs are created or coined owing to day -to-day real life experiences and critical thinking. For now no particular person has been identified for formulating a particular proverb because the Oku ancestors did not claim author's rights. They simply and selflessly formulated proverbs one day at a time as events unfolded and as deemed necessary by any individual who could contemplate on an issue or happening and then be prompted to say something with a deeper meaning about it. Others then acquired the expressions and used as per context then passed down indirectly or directly to generations without any formal setting. Oku proverbs are open class expressions as contemporary proverbs are being formulated and will be formulated as life continues among the Oku community with new experiences. This insinuates that some proverbs may die down if not used regularly especially if such experiences no longer occur to prompt usage and thus the need to preserve and sustain them. So Oku proverbs are formulated according to significant and thought provoking happenings, incidents and events that are a call for concern and lessons learnt from there are retained with the hope of passing down these life issues and possible lessons to others so as to raise awareness and guidance for more wisdom and the betterment of societal peace, progress, harmony, wellbeing and understanding. For instance, when someone misbehaves or does something strange or something that drag the name of the village to mud as per the Oku customs, the proverb 'əbkouh sey jia chii di or əbkouh ne bah chiih di' (Oku people don't live

like that) is said to mean that the act is not according to the Oku tradition and should be discouraged. Therefore, Oku people use proverbs in perspective as their proverbs provide insight on the various aspects of their daily encounters, especially aspects of their culture and life experiences. One can use an Oku proverb to throw more light on a given situation or thought as well as use it as a lens through which to view and understand real life situations or community dynamics as further explained in the present study.

Oku Proverbs reflect the Oku culture's values, such as respect for the creator and creation, *Wel wiy Feyin'* (no one is God) - respect and support for humanity '*wel lu wel bek wel,*' (someone is someone because of someone) -and human rights '*wel chia wè , wè boukte əbwoh se wen*' (if someone surpasses you, cheer for him) as per the Oku customs, respect for the Oku beliefs and traditions, respect for the Oku traditional rulers and rites, among others. They also suggest that Oku people are visionary and hardworking, and demonstrate the spirit of community fellowship and development (*Keghoo kemok lòó kejia kul eyfuh (one hand cannot tie a bundle), Eylie bef eytione (saliva which is bad is that which is spat)*

Without its proverbs, the Oku language would be incomplete, and the community's ability to navigate complex real-life situations would be significantly hindered. The limited use of these wise expressions directly impacts the successful resolution of challenges, as proverbs offer profound insights and guidance. For the Oku people, the integration of proverbs into daily interpersonal communication isn't just a linguistic preference; it's a vital link to their heritage. These ancestral sayings are passed down through generations, ensuring the preservation of Oku culture and providing a timeless repository of wisdom for posterity.

6- PROVERBS AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Proverbs can be a powerful tool for community empowerment in many ways including the following:

a. Preserving Cultural Heritage

For a community to achieve meaningful empowerment, its culture must not only be preserved but proudly projected. A distinct and vibrant cultural identity can serve as a powerful catalyst for societal growth and development. Take, for example, the proverbs of the Oku people—rich in meaning and deeply embedded with cultural wisdom. These expressions encapsulate values, customs, and traditions that, when harnessed, have the potential to generate income and drive communal advancement. Through the study and application of Oku proverbs,

individuals can internalize and practice the ways of their ancestors, fostering outcomes that are both educational and economically beneficial.

The following proverbs illustrate key elements of Oku cultural heritage and highlight various pathways to community empowerment.

Kekume Shiəŋ Nyof

"A juju displays following the chanting of fans and followers"

This proverb carries both the zeal for community empowerment and cultural heritage. Although this means that for every project to succeed there should be motivation and encouragements to galvanize efforts, the aspect of the Oku culture, that of juju dancing is identified. One cannot talk about the Oku culture without having the masquerade juju display in mind.

Bəə kwiyfon ɛ wè əblɛɛ-a wɛ wè yien lɛ?

"Is it kwiyfon that has taken refuge in your stomach that you feed so much"? Kwiyfon is the highest rulling secret society in Oku and the Oku tradition and the Oku people believe that nobody can feed as much as the kwiyfon does. For this reason, gluttons are said to be 'kwiyfon' possessed in Oku. This also suggests that Oku people are conscious of their feeding habits and rebuke gluttony and thus not extravagant because they have to save in order to ecomise and develop themselves and their community.

Ntumse ne jof se te fone

Errads are good for fons (fon- the highest traditional ruler in Oku)

This proverb is used to express disappointment or dissatisfaction when someone especially a child refues to carry an errand for an elder. In the Oku culture no messenger is expected to disobey the Fon when assigned to a task.

Wè yie ka wè tel fenyak ɛ wele ketuu*

"You are eating as if you shall one day hit a garden egg on some one's head"

This simply means that it is not good to be glutting as overeating is not only bad for the health but is waste of food and a decrease in financial resources that could be an impediment to economic empowerment.

*É sɛɛ jia sole əbfon, Sole Woh Ntieh

You do not rub the Fon and rub your hands on the ground.

This means that you cannot share something to others without keeping yours.

This proverb was coined by someone who shared things and kept his but another came and rebuked him for keeping something for himself and he then responded that you do not rub the highest traditional ruler and rub your hands on the ground.

Wan vɪn, wɛ nɛy yɪɛ kɛfəm ə wɛl

This child, you shall one day inherit a death man's homestead.

This is a piece of advice which the Oku man sounds to his child, that over-feeding can fetch him trouble someday. The idea of inheriting a death man's homestead is to caution recalcitrant and lazy youths to be conscious, hardworking and focus in life because if they stray they will be found wanting and lacking in the future and may become vagabonds and may end up managing on others' possessions.

Keghoo sɛɛ jia kɔk əbɕio keyum

No hand goes to the mouth empty.

This means that man shall live by the sweat of his labour. This proverb encourages the Oku man to work hard in order to subsist.

Wɛl kóó kenyiamen ka əb nɛy kóó báà.

A hunter who catches a wild cat will surely catch a leopard someday.

This proverb emphasizes the importance of diligence and perseverance in the pursuit of success. It suggests that the key to achieving meaningful outcomes lies not in external circumstances, but in the level of effort one dedicates to their endeavors. When an individual is fully committed and consistently applies themselves, tangible success is a natural consequence of their hard work.

Wɛ lalenmen ɛnsokɛ shik ɛ nyoktɛ ɛ kfəy

You have delayed until the Nso people have come and burned down the bushes and gone back.

History holds that when the Nso people went out for war, they fought hard in burning the neighbouring bushes. Oku is a neighbouring village to the Nso and lived this experience from the Nso people in the past. When you tell someone from Oku that you are going somewhere to be back soon, they usually allude to the Nso people who took advantage and burnt the bushes owing to the delay by the Oku people at the war front. The message in this proverb is that one should honour one's words if not he/she will be taken for granted and those waiting will stop waiting and quit and if you ever return, you will not find anyone again there for you. So Oku people are cautioned to be assiduous and faithful to their promises for societal harmony.

Kekfəktɛ ə wɛlɛ sɛɛ jia lɛɛsɛ wɛn* / *Əbkwakɛ ə wɛlɛ sɛɛ jia lɛɛsɛ ŋwɛl

A farm does not deceive its farmer.

Man shall live by the sweat of his labour, for there is no food for a lazy person. So do not get weary or discouraged in your efforts to work and earn a living because no harvest or reward is little. Be committed and faithful at your post or place of work for reward lies ahead. He who sows in tears reaps in joy. This proverb is a call for excellence at work with greater yield or results for the wellbeing of the worker in particular and the advancement of the society in general.

***Wɛ tɛn əbkwak ə wɛl wɛ shik vɪɛ wɛɛ* / The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.**

If you refuse accompanying someone to his farm, go to yours.

This means that you need not deny offering someone assistance which he has asked for except you are occupied in one.

This is a conditional statement that suggests that one might refuse an offer because they believe they can find a better opportunity elsewhere. So in the Oku culture, one is not expected to be idling around but to be actively doing what is useful and yielding. Either you are working on your farm or assisting your relative in his own but not to be seen doing nothing useful to yourself or to the community.

Ketame kfəle ka ke yɪɛn*

"An elephant excretes as much as it feeds".
/You reap what you sow/ you can't give what you don't have/ What goes in must come out.

This has diverse meanings: The quality of shit a man passes is always according to what he eats. Again a man cannot give what he does not have. Also hard work can always be rewarded by high income or yield. Emphasis here is on hardwork that leads to a high yield.

***ɛylɪɛ bɛf ɛytionɛ* /No contribution is too small/Great acts are made up of small deeds**

"It is the spit that is spat out that is bad".

This means that we should never minimize what we have as contributions for the needy and others because half a loaf is better than none and little drops can make an ocean.

***Wɛ tɛm nyam ɛ felik*/strike while the iron is hot/opportunity knocks (comes) but once**

"A hunter has shot an animal in the smoke".

It means that if you are to do a thing and lack an opportunity, try to be very watchful so that when the opportunity comes, exploit it without any waste

of time as missing a valuable opportunity can lead to regret and the fact that it might not come round again. Oku people are encouraged to be ambitious and determined to be great achievers.

Eyshie sɛɛ jia tɔme nyam*.

“The eye does not shoot an animal”.

This just means seeing an animal is quite different from catching it because the eye is just one weapon out of many that the hunter can have. After seeing, the gun, spear and the cutlass must be employed. Therefore, Oku people should be determined to reach their coveted goals instead of daydreaming.

***É sɛɛ keele əbluumen ɛ əbkwak ɛybum*.** / Don't brag about yourself-let others praise you.

“The strength of a man is measured during hunting season or at a hunting ground”.

This means that instead of boasting, it is good for you to go straight and show that you are up to the task. For example, show that you are intelligent by writing and passing an examination instead of telling people that you can pass. This encourages the Oku man to strive for excellence and not to be mediocre.

Therefore, Proverbs help preserve cultural knowledge, customs, and traditions, promoting a sense of identity and community pride.

b. Promoting Critical Thinking

Proverbs offer valuable insights and guidance on navigating life's challenges, encouraging critical thinking and problem- solving skills.

Mbək lòó ɛy jia kuy è chia ketuu

The shoulders cannot grow above the head.

Just as the eyes cannot rise higher than the brow, the shoulders cannot grow above the head. This goes in line with the African proverbs like “A child can be taller than his father but can never be older than his father” and “The young can walk faster but the elder knows the road.”. This suggests that no matter the rank and file in any context of situation the younger members of the community in question as well as subordinates can never take the place of their elders or rise above their leaders respectively as long as they remain in their elderly or leadership positions. This insinuates that elders and leaders should be respected by their younger ones and by their subordinates respectively. This is therefore a proverb of respect for hierarchy and age at all levels that unveils an aspect of the Oku tradition-that of respect for leader and elders. In Oku a child who does not submit to or obey his/her parents elders and leaders is considered a bad child and deserves rebuke.

Wè sɛy kentan é ke koo wè

“If you admire a disease, you will be attacked by it”.

kentan is the name of a certain disease in Oku. If you envy or admire a challenge that someones is facing, it means you are claiming it and the person's fate can befall you. Again, if you imitate a patient, you will be attacked by his illness. For this reason, the Oku man is advised to have sympathy for others in difficulties and not to envy and minimise the issue at stake. They should offer the needy their support or favour as in a normal case instead of claiming their challenges for self-centered reasons.

Əbtame fekak se kolen lu nə fenəne ko ke se nyia nyian.

“Before the branch of a tree breaks off, the bird was already anticipating or banking on it”

This means that one should not be too fast in taking certain decisions because he/she can be accused of going beyond their duty. For example, in Oku this proverb is most often used to criticise women who rush into new sexual and marital relationships after the demise of their husbands. The Oku tradition requires that a wife should remain faithful after the death of her husband until all the necessary widowhood rites are done and the widow transferred to the rightly man according to tradition to replace her late husband. So if a man dies today and instead of his wife taking some time for mourning, starts flirting, it means by implication that she was wishing for his death so as to be flirting with others.

***Wan ə ngvəə lòó əb jia fuosen wè gwɛ* Like fatehr, like son/ Like mother, like daughter**

“The chicks of a hen can never resemble the cheepers of a partridge”.

This simply means that the offspring of any creature will always resemble that creature and not a different one, resembling not only in appearance but in behave or. In other words, don't be surprised if your child behaves the same way you do.

Keghoo ndu ɛyshas nè ɲaɲ nè ɲaɲ é ke tay əbwal

“If the hand repeatedly goes to the anus, it will be soiled with shit”.

Having in mind that fecal matter exposure can lead to fecal contamination, too much of a thing becomes a disease and monotony can be boring and exaggeration can dangerous and upsetting.

Kenuh kejuɲ ko joffe kèn se ghe ghone

A good thing happens only to those who have children

This is said by a parent who is disappointed by the disobedience of his offspring or by someone who does not have a child to support him.

Wel naay wè, wel naay eytiy ə wen

"If someone cooks you, another man will cook his stone"

You are a very rigid man and difficult to change. This discourages stubbornness and stiff-necked attitude because development can be slowed down when people are unyielding.

Njiε sεε dən ey nyon wan

"When a sheep is old, it sucks the breast of its young"

The old solely depends on the young to survive since the young also depended on them to grow grew. Children should cater for their parents in their old age.

***Kekakele (kekaka) keyume sεε jia lu ε ndaa* /No one is useless in this world who lightens the burdens of another**

"There is never a useless container in a home" or 'An empty vessel does not exist in a home'

No family member should be minimised, whether young, old, thin, fat, literate or illiterate. This is because everyone has a gift and duty. It is the same with real containers because a broken bucket that cannot still hold water can at least hold dirt. Old containers can also be recycled and used. This is also said by someone who is marvelled about a job or something well done by someone considered an imbecile or someone considered unable to perform such a task with good results.

Keghoo sεε lo fikse kebiy , kebiy yε fikse keghoo

As a hand rubs the lap, the lap rubs the hand

This means one good turn deserves another. When you do good for someone, you do it for yourself. This is a call for people to be kind to others because what goes round comes back.

Wan kuo ε nyii əbbiy

"A child dies in the mother's hands".

The Oku man had to say this because someone's child died in a different person's hands and when the mother cried, all she said was: "Had it been my child was with me, I would have known what to do". Again the proverb is a piece of advice that one needs to be careful with other people's property because if anything goes wrong with them, you will be rebuked.

***Jio lu emncakte ***

A river drops

This suggests that little drops can make an ocean

These are sample proverbs that suggest critical thinking and contemplation on the part of an Oku man.

c. fostering and Promoting Community Unity and Social Cohesion

By sharing common values and principles, community members can work together more effectively, promoting unity and cooperation.

***Lòó keghoo kemoke jia kul εyfuu*.**

"One hand cannot tie a bundle"

This helps to explain the great difficulty that comes when cooperation or collaboration is absent during every piece of work being done as many hands do light work. Collaboration makes things go easier. Collaboration is a powerful tool of societal development.

É təme mε nè əblune nε wè təme nè fenyake-a?

"While others are throwing wild garden eggs at me, you are instead throwing edible garden eggs aren't you".

This is a kind of praise that the Oku man gives to the one who loves him during such a time when he is hated by many.

Əbfon nēy yε bin nε ghele faale, wè yεn mε nè ngvəə wè yε ke ge mε faale nε lu wè

"If the Fon (His Royal Majesty) is dancing and receiving gifts from people and you see me coming with a fowl, know that it is for you".

This is simply a gross exaggeration of the expression of gratitude and praise for the good a person has done for you.

d-empowering individuals

***Lòó eytiy εymoke təm əmnən se eydio*./Kill two birds with one stone**

"One stone can shoot many birds".

One can use one action or opportunity to achieve various objectives. Just with a single effort one can attain many results. So we should learn to take advantages of our situations and actions to dsssssss o more than expected.

Keghale ə wele jia luume wen é wè jia yεn kenyiŋen ə wen

"Until a person experiences a defecation reflex that one can see how far he can run".

This means that except a man is in trouble you will never know that he can battle himself out of it.

Proverbs can inspire and motivate individuals to take action, make informed decisions, and develop a sense of purpose and direction.

d- Providing and Transmitting Traditional Knowledge, Wisdom and Guidance

***Wè lu nɛ wè vii keghoo se ngaa ɛyshas*.**

"You have put your hand into the antelope's hindquarters"

The Oku man believes that the antelope is very strong when fighting with its hind legs. If you send your hand there, you have looked for enough trouble. Therefore the equivalent meaning of this proverb is that you have looked for great trouble.

***Wè lu nɛ wè shok febun nɛ keghoo*.**

"You have put your hand into the squirrel's hole".

The squirrel is known to be very dangerous as it bites. Therefore it is advisable never to send your hand into its hole. This proverb usually means that you have looked for trouble.

***Wè lu nɛ wè shik əmghuu*.**

"You have provoked əmghuu".

Əmghuu is one of the great shrines of Oku and its god is generally believed to be very angry when its virgin forest is tampered upon. No Oku man tries to touch just a leaf from there except he wants trouble. So when the Oku man uses the proverb he is merely saying that you have looked for trouble.

***É ko koo wan ka é nɛy koo kenyii*.**

'They have caught the child as they will catch the mother'

If the young one of a creature has been caught, surely the mother will not go free. This means that if your child is caught in a trap, you must watch out because the same trap will be set for you. If they can harm your child, they can also harm you.

***Enəke wiɣ ɛnyie*.**

"Labour is not tantamount to enjoyment".

Those who labour do not necessarily enjoy. This contradicts the saying that those who sow in tears will reap in joy as some people labour in vain. Therefore we should watch out and pray not to labour in vain.

***Fuu jəm baa jof*.**

"It is bad to possess a quite needy thing in a dream".

It means that if you are promised a present by somebody, you need not lay all your trust in it because he can disappoint you, then it will be that you possessed the present in a dream. This is sometime very painful.

***Kelan kemoke lòò ke bese əbvəye keson*.**

"One cocoyam can spoil a pot of pounded cocoyam".

This means that the attitude of one poorly behaved person in a group can tarnish the group's image. For example if an Oku man loans from someone and ends up not paying back, he man will

fear lending money to Oku people because the one man who refused to pay is the one cocoyam.

***Fekake fɛy ɛ ba njame ɛyem*.**

'A tree has fallen on the owner of an axe's farm'

The tree that falls on a man's farm that possesses an axe has done justice. A man should be given the kind of temptation that he can bear. This is a very good example. Let no illness come upon a person who has no money to buy drugs.

***Wan vine dia tuume sebee é ghone ghele diane ten*.**

"This child is building a dangerous bridge that people's children will cross on".

This proverb usually goes to a child who misdirect and also gives bad doctrine to other children.

***Wè cheme sam jio é yeghe é wè yɛ lu səə*.**

"No matter your skills of swimming, you can never be a fish".

This means that if you imitate, you can never be the person you imitate. For instance, no matter how far one has learned and can speak a foreign language of a particular country, one can never become an indigene even if they naturalise. Also, an adopted child can never inherit the genes of the people of that family.

***Wè toomen bee è lii so ɛ ndaa ɛykuo*.**

"You have mixed cam wood and taken it into a bereaved home".

The Oku man uses cam wood for celebrations and enthronements. This proverb is mostly used when someone goes to borrow money from someone who is broke.

***Ngək se wele ketuu make wele ten*.**

"One is responsible for ones suffering".

We are the cause of most of the challenges that we face, at times owing to our carelessness, negligence, ignorance, naivety etc. This simply means that it is quite easy for an individual to escape problems and also solve those that come already, especially if he respects the adage "Do not trouble trouble until trouble troubles you".

***Wel chia wè wè bæy kebam ə wen*.**

"If someone is above you, carry his bag"

If someone is above you, instead of being jealous or envious, humble and give him due respect.

This means we should respect those in higher social positions or those in positions of authority.

***Fenən əbchio sɛɛ jia bakle ndaa*.**

"A noisy bird does not build a nest".

This is to say a man who is capable of doing a thing does it without making noise because talking about it is one thing and doing it is another. Some people talk more than they do.

***Ghaa é yɛ tum fetəm fe tum kekakele*.**

'Let a calabash that is assigned to a task not send a broken gourd'.

This means that if an elder is assigned to do a piece of job, he should not for any reason assign his junior who cannot do it.

***Kekakele keyume sɛɛ kum əbchio se ɲaɲ*.**

"An empty vessel makes the loudest noise".

A man of wisdom keeps quiet for others to praise him. He does not blow his trumpet himself. A foolish man rather talks much about himself.

***Wan lɛm ge no ə wene jia buune fene əb ko jia buune sɛy*.**

"A child who makes the mother not to sleep will stay awake also"

A wise man makes sure everyone is in peace. For whoever brings trouble and wants others to continue in the trouble must work hard to maintain the trouble.

***Ghaa fenən felee buu séy*.**

"May no bird lack a gizzard"

This was a challenge given to someone who spoke nonsense when he was not invited to say anything. What he said was as insignificant as the gizzard of the smallest bird. Anyway, what he spoke was as relative to his knowledge as the sizes of gizzards are always relative to the size of the bird.

***Kefuu loo ke jia kok ɛ ngaa é wan gok*.**

"A rat cannot go up to the ceiling and its pup stays back"

If a rat goes up to the ceiling, its young must follow. This means that whatever thing a man does, he must know that his children can imitate and do excellently as he does. So we must always try to do but good things so that our children can emulate.

***Mɛ so nè ntoo koo nè ɛyshike*.**

"I am boring with a needle and catching with a piece of cane"

This proverb simply explains that I am suffering, and also not sleeping but struggling to survive.

***Wè kwaa əbghun nɛ fəye əmnfəɲ*.**

"You are scratching the skin and it is instead flour that is dropping"

This means that someone is very poor.

*** Wè foo Ntaanen é wè seese kɛn nè Ngek*.**

"Ntaanen if loaned can only be reimbursed with Ngek"

This means that in character, there is just no difference between Ntaanen and Ngek. Even in appearance some times.

Proverbs offer wisdom and guidance on important issues, helping community members navigate complex challenge and make informed decisions by embracing and applying these proverbs, the oku community can empower individuals, promote unity and cooperation, and work towards achieving their goals.

CONCLUSION

It is a common adage that experience is the best teacher. From the analyses of the above proverbs in the Oku language, one can conclude that Oku proverbs offer guidance and wisdom for everyday life. From their everyday experiences, Oku people observe prudently, think critically and then coin their wise sayings owing to their practical daily life experiences. As they move on a daily basis and relate with their fellow natives, they encounter both pleasant and unpleasant life realities that affect their lives both positively and negatively and such vivid life affecting experiences provoke their thoughts, teach them life lessons that make them think twice and guide them to create or coin thought provoking slogans, adages, maxims, idioms, etc. that have all been analysed in this study as proverbs. Their intentions to invent such proverbs are positive as they coin them to pass down the knowledge of wisdom to their posterity in the form of pieces of advice, moral lessons, corrections or warning intended to counsel and guide Oku indigenes for their wellbeing in their daily walk with one another in their society. If the Oku people heed advice and make good use of the wisdom embedded in such proverbs by putting it to practice during their interpersonal relationships as they live together and interact with one another, love, peace and harmony will reign in their community.

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