

The Place of the Heart in Kakwa Proverbs

Jackson Waru Thomas¹ & Yosa Wawa²

Abstract

This paper is about the linkage between proverbs and sociolinguistics among the Kakwa people of DR Congo, South Sudan, and Uganda. The paper is particularly limited to the Kakwa perceptions of the heart in their proverbs. Proverbs enrich language greatly and help in educating people morally, legally, philosophically, and aesthetically. A total of eighteen proverbs pertaining to the use of the heart were selected from Wawa's book entitled *Kakwa Proverbs with Introductory History*, 2014. They were analyzed for their social settings among the Kakwa. It was found that the heart is central to anger, sorrow, happiness, bravery, and fear.

Keywords:

1. Introduction

According to Sande (2015, p11) one of the thorny issues has been a clear, comprehensive and satisfactory definition of proverbs. Although defining a proverb is not easy, there are various definitions. A proverb is a brief saying that presents a truth or some bit of useful wisdom (The World Book Encyclopedia, 2021, P 839). Sande (2015, p11) considers a proverb as a condensed form of language current among the folk by which a society informs itself and future generation about various values, beliefs, cultural practices and life's experiences as well as benchmarks for good conduct.

This is best understood from the definition, a proverb is a discourse deviant, relatively concrete, present (non-past) terse statement that uses characteristic markers to arouse cognitive ideals that serve to categorize topics in order to make a pragmatic point about them (Honeck, 1997,p18).

The Kakwa are found in an area whose parts fall in three different neighboring countries – South Sudan, Uganda, and Democratic Republic of Congo. The specific areas and towns in these countries are south-western South Sudan in and around Yei and Morobo towns, north-western Uganda in and around Koboko Town, and north-eastern Congo in and around Imgbokolo and Aba towns. They use proverbs a great deal. The Kakwa are mainly agriculturists but also practice hunting, pastoralism and fishing. The Kakwa language is rich in proverbs. The Kakwa refer to proverbs as, *Kuliata na gugupa ti Kakwa*, literally translated as Kakwa sayings that are thrown about (Wawa, 2014. p11). This makes a proverb as a kind of a statement that tells more in fewer words and summarizes information concisely and precisely. A proverb like *Gbute muḡu I keuwe a rima* which is translated as hit yourself on the head till blood comes out, and it means give to somebody one of your most precious belongings.

The above Kakwa proverb makes the use of proverbs as a domain of the elderly. This is because elders tend to speak less in terms of the use of words, but they want to make sure the words they use carry weight. Fischer and Yoshider (1968) in their study of Japanese proverbs noted that seniors use proverbs towards juniors to enforce moral standards. In sociolinguistics, language can be used to represent the speaker's sense of identity (Spolky, 1998, p58 and Johnstone, 2002, p 56). Spolsky (1998, p 41) refers to this as audience design. This can include advice, admonition, and caution (Sande, 2015, p18). In social relation, a speech event happens when there is a speaker or writer, listener or reader, a message, a topic, a channel, a setting, and motive.

¹ Lecturer, School of Education, University of Juba

² Associate Professor, School of Education, University of Juba

This paper investigates the place of the heart in Kakwa proverbs. They are taken from a book entitled *Kakwa Proverbs with Introductory History* by Yosa Wawa which was published in 2014. The said proverbs are presented in the Kakwa language, and then a verbatim translation is given as well as the meaning. There is a section on occurrence.

2. Data Presentation and Interpretation

The Kakwa proverbs are very many. Some are related to other body parts and human activities. The proverbs that are presented in this paper are the ones about the human heart. They are eighteen in number.

Bravery

1. *Teli logo lo 'bu'bukojini rima.*

Verbatim Translation: *Blood can be poured out of a strong heart.*

Meaning: Bravery can lead to death or injury.

While cowards always run away from danger, the brave ones are often ready to put up a fight. Through (because of) bravery one can therefore be killed or injured. Even the brave should avoid danger.

2. *Teli lo kemuru*

Verbatim Translation: *Heart of a lion.*

Meaning: Brave or fierce.

It is assumed that the lion is one of the bravest, fiercest, or strongest animals that ever lives. Parents longed to have brave or fierce sons. To make one's sons brave, strong or fierce, the Kakwa used to make a special dish of a lion's heart for the boys to eat. This was done with the hope of making them as brave or fierce as lions.

3. *Teli lo gboro.*

Verbatim Translation: *Heart of a leopard.*

Meaning: Brave and fierce.

It is assumed that the leopard another of the bravest, fiercest, or strongest animals that ever lived. Parents longed to have brave or fierce sons. To make one's sons brave, strong or fierce, the Kakwa used to make a special dish of a leopard's heart for the boys to eat. This was done with the hope of making them as brave or fierce as a leopard.

Self-control

4. *Teli lo kitu.*

Verbatim Translation: *The heart of a python.*

Meaning: Not easily moved.

The Kakwa believe that the heart of a python runs all along its body – from the head to the tail. Even if one smashed the head or the chest of a python, it will remain alive because the parts of the heart will still be active. A person who can control his or her emotions is said to have the heart of a python because he or she is not easily moved.

5. *Gbiyoro i teli.*

Verbatim Translation: *Weeps to the heart.*

Meaning: Hiding the show of sorrow.

It is considered honorable, for men in particular, to control their emotions in funerals in order to give women and children courage. It is a good male attribute or virtue not to show any signs of sorrow in trying moments.

6. *Teli lo lu i ki'di.*

Verbatim Translation: *The heart is at the back.*

Meaning: Stubborn.

The Kakwa people think and act with their hearts. A person who takes long to react or not easily gets excited is believed to have the heart placed far away from the usual place (such as the back of that person).

7. *Togole teli.*

Verbatim Translation: *Strengthen your heart.*

Meaning: Be brave, courageous or tolerant.

8. *Teli logo.*

Verbatim Translation: *Heart is hard.*

Meaning: Be brave, courageous or tolerant.

It is used to encourage someone not to despair, but be courageous enough to enable him or her to accomplish a given task.

9. *Tore teli.*

Verbatim Translation: *Tie your heart.*

Meaning: Be brave, courageous or tolerant.

Sorrow

10. *'Belengu i teli.*

Verbatim Translation: *Breaks in the heart.*

Meaning: Painful or great loss.

Excitement stimulates the sympathetic nervous system in the brain, which in turn stimulates the versomoma system, causing increased blood flow to the heart and high rate of heartbeat. Thus, excitement resulting from receiving bad news is said to cause the breaking of the heart.

11. *'Bo'bo teli.*

Verbatim Translation: *Touches the heart.*

Meaning: Painful or great loss.

Excitement stimulates the sympathetic nervous system in the brain, which in turn stimulates the versomoma system, causing increased blood flow to the heart and high rate of heartbeat. Thus, excitement resulting from receiving bad news is said to touch the heart.

Unkindness and Anger

12. *Teli lo potroru.*

Verbatim Translation: *Bitter heart.*

Meaning: Cruel.

A cruel person is first known by the unkind words he or she utters. Those words are assumed to have been composed in the heart and then come out through the mouth. Because the words that come out are not kind, they are equated with bitterness.

13. *Teli lo (na) a nyora.*

Verbatim Translation: *His or her heart has smoldered.*

Meaning: Annoyed.

Excitement such as anger causes the release of acids into the stomach, which tends to have a burning sensation. As these acids spread to the upper intestinal tract, the burning seems to be at the heart.

Kindness and Joy

14. *Teli lo trotro.*

Verbatim Translation: *The heart is luscious.*

Meaning: kindness.

The heart is believed to be the centre of memory and thought. All speech and actions are conceived and executed in the heart. Thus, the nature of one's heart determines the person's actions. A luscious heart is assumed to yield a kind personality.

15. *Teli lo rile.*

Verbatim Translation: *A pull small heart pulled small.*

Meaning: Gentle or patient.

An accepted virtue is that of a gentle or patient person who reacts to issues after giving them a deep thought. The one who is not accepted is the one who reacts spontaneously, often without weighing or collecting all information, or balancing the pros and cons of every action.

16. *A 'duki teli.*

Verbatim Translation: *The heart has fallen.*

Meaning: Remember or recall.

The effect of excitement on the heart muscles causes palpitation, which the Kakwa term as the falling of the heart. This palpitation sometimes occurs when one recalls some idea or item that could either have been displaced or forgotten.

17. *Teli lo ayuku.*

Verbatim Translation: *the heart foamed.*

Meaning: Ashamed.

18. *Teli lo lu saka i kiko*

Verbatim; *the heart stays on the road or path.*

Meaning: Expectant.

3. Discussion

All the above listed proverb are related to the human heart as one of the most important body parts. As stated in the introduction, the Kakwa people regard the heart as the centre of virtue as well as vice. All the proverbs listed above can be used in many ways. These proverbs are used to give advice, to caution, and warn others.

The first proverb in this list –*Teli logo lo 'bu'bukojini rima-* is used in most cases to caution the brave. This is because most of the Kakwa youth who believe that they are brave and react to every confrontational situation. This proverb is used to tell such people that one can always be victorious.

The second proverb which talks of bravery is for cautioning people from use of force all the time. It can be used like an idiom in many kinds of sentences. For example in this Kakwa sentence, *Aḡu teli lolu lo 'bani gbo'da beti lo kemuru.* Its translation is *let your heart not be like that of a lion.* This is caution said to somebody who is rude or unfriendly. Also the same proverb can be used to give advice. For instance, Kakwa sentence *Gbo'da naga ku teli be lo kemuru lo a loro.* The translation is: *being with a heart of a lion is bad.* This proverb is said to a person who likes mistreating others.

The third proverb has almost the same meaning and use. An example is a Kakwa sentence like, *Ti teli lo gboro lo kolokini koloki* and the verbatim translation is *let heart of the leopard be left alone.* It means to be harsh or rude is not good. This proverb is used to advise someone who is brutal.

The fourth proverb can be used as an advice for someone who is not easily sympathizing with another person who is in misfortune. Such a person can be advised thus, *Teli lo kitu lo a loro.* The translation is *having a heart like that of a python is bad.* For the Kakwa, any misfortune that befalls anybody is a misfortune for all. People have to console one another in such a situation.

The fifth proverb is about emotional control related to sorrow that is expected of men. This proverb is said to a man who weeps because of a loss of a very close relative and/or a dear friend. This show of sorrow from a male would make others to advise him in this way, *Ḥutu lalale lo gbiyoro i teli.* The verbatim translation is *a man cries in the heart.*

The sixth proverb, *Teli lo lu i ke'di* whose verbatim translation is *the heart is at the back*, can be used to admonish, warn, and even caution someone. The Kakwa proverb, *Ka'bi ʔutu lo gho ku teli I ke'di*. The direct translation is, *let a person not have the heart at the back*. This proverb is used to warn the stubborn to refrain from doing so. Also, it is to advise a person to be sympathetic with a person who is in trouble.

The seventh proverb, *Togole teli*, with the verbatim translation - *strengthen your heart*, is used to advise and console others who are heartbroken for a loss of a relative. Also it is used to encourage someone who is afraid to do certain things like, fearing to kill a snake or other dangerous animal. This is to make a person act as expected of him or her.

The eighth proverb about the heart in Kakwa Language is, *Teli logo*, whose verbatim translation is *hard heart*. It means to be brave, courageous, tolerant, and not easily moved. The Kakwa sentence, *Teli logo lo a loro* with the verbatim translation - *a hard heart is bad* is used in this case. This is said to somebody who is becoming stubborn.

The ninth proverb in the list is more or less like proverbs seven and eighth.

The tenth proverb in the Kakwa Language, *Beleʔgu teli* with the verbatim translation as *breaks in the heart*, which means painful or great loss - is a proverb for expressing sorrow because of a loss of a dear one. Any loss which is minor cannot warrant the use of this proverb. Such a proverb calls for sympathy on the part of the listeners.

The eleventh proverb, *'bo'bo teli* which means *touches the heart* is said when one experiences a great loss. The idea is that the heart is an organ which is more susceptible to emotion than the other organs. So, the misfortune is so great that it has reached the core of the person himself/herself.

The twelfth proverb about the heart is, *Teli lo potroru*. Its verbatim translation is *the heart is bitter*. This proverb is used to caution and sometimes to advise someone. In the Kakwa sentence *Teli laga potroru lo a loro, the heart which is bitter is bad*, is used to a person who is expected to have a change of heart or attitude from bad to good.

The thirteenth proverb in this paper is about annoyance. It is - *Teli lo (na) a nyora*. The verbatim translation is *His or her heart has smouldered*. It means he or she is annoyed. This emotion is believed to emanate from the heart. This proverb is used to give advice to people who can easily get angered. It is also used to warn and caution people who are short tempered to desist from it.

The fourteenth proverb is *Teli lo trotro*, with the verbatim translation *the heart is luscious*. This proverb can be used to give advice, caution and warn someone. It can be said to a person who is not easily embittered by bad happenings.

The fifteenth proverb in the list is used to praise people who act justly especially after being patient for a while before taking action. This proverb can also be used to warn people who act ruthlessly and without precaution.

The sixteenth proverb in the list, *A 'duki teli*, whose verbatim translation is *the heart has fallen*, is about recalling or remembering something or an event. Such an event has to be a very important and memorable one.

The seventeenth proverb in this list is about being ashamed. It is used to caution someone from carrying out a deed that might not end well, thus resulting to shame.

The last proverb, *Teli lo lu saka i kiko*. whose verbatim translation, *the heart stays on the road or path*, is used to indicate how someone becomes expectant. It is used to give an advice to a person who forgets to do other things because he/she is expecting someone or something.

4. Conclusion

The Kakwa have many proverbs which could number more than one thousand. A total of eighteen proverbs pertaining to the heart were selected for this paper. They are studied and presented from the sociolinguistic point of view. Like anywhere else, proverbs are mainly used by elders to give advice, warning and for attaining wisdom. The Kakwa people believe that the heart is an important organ of the human body. The heart in this paper is the centre of bravery, cowardice, love, hatred, sorrows, fear, happiness, anger, and stubbornness. They are used to caution, advise, admonish and also praise members of the community. According to Fatuase and Ebim (2022, p45) only the wise of the community can use proverbs appropriately and confidently.

References

- Fatuase, A.A., Ebim, M. A., (2022). A Sociolinguistic Study of Proverbs among the Yorubas in South Western Nigeria and Mbube People in South- South Nigeria. In: *International Journal of Languages and Culture* 2(1) pp 42-50.
- Honneck, R. (1997). *A proverb in mind*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Johnstone, B. (2002). *Discourse Analysis*. Massachusetts, USA: Blackwell Publishers Inc.
- Sande, N. (2015). Nsenga Proverbs in Zambia: A Linguistic, Ethnographic and Logical Analysis. In: *Kyoto University African Study Series* (014).
- Spolky, B. (1998). *Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: oxford University Press.
- The World Book Encyclopedia*. (2021). Vol. 15P .Chicago: World Book, Inc.
- Wawa, Y. (2014). *Kakva Proverbs with Introductory History*. Kampala, Uganda: Fountain Publishers.