

## ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF SPEECH ETIQUETTE IN PROVERBS AND SAYINGS AND THEIR ROLE IN TEACHING SPEAKING.

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**Abstract:** *Proverbs and sayings are facts of language. They are collected in dictionaries. There are special dictionaries of proverbs and sayings. It is impossible to arrange proverbs and sayings in a form that would present a pattern even though they have some typical features by which it is possible to determine whether or not we are dealing with one. These typical features are: rhythm, sometimes rhyme or alliterations. But the most characteristic feature of a proverb or a saying lies not in its formal linguistic expression, but in the content - form of the utterance. As is known, a proverb or a saying is a peculiar mode of utterance which is mainly characterized by its brevity. The utterance itself, taken at its face value, presents a pattern which can be successfully used for other utterances.*

**Keywords:** *proverb, sayings, idioms, phrases, speech.*

The peculiarity of the use of a proverb lies in the fact that the actual wording becomes a pattern which needs no new wording to suggest extensions of meaning which are contextual. In other words, the proverb itself becomes a vessel into which new content is poured. The actual wording of a proverb, its primary meaning, narrows the field of possible extensions of meaning, i.e. the filling up of the form.

That is why we may regard the proverb as a pattern of thought. So it is in every other case at any other level of linguistic research. Abstract formulas offer a wider range of possible applications to practical purposes than concrete words, though they the same purposes.

Almost every good writer will make use of language idioms, by phrases and proverbs. As Gorky has it, they are the natural ways in which speech develops.

Proverbs and saying have certain purely linguistic features which must always be taken into account in order to distinguish them from ordinary sentences. Proverbs are brief statements showing in condensed form the accumulated life experience of the community and serving as conventional practical symbols for abstract ideas. They are usually didactic and image bearing. Many of them through frequency of repetition have become polished and wrought into verse-like shapes are following:

“to cut one’s coat according to one’s cloth.”

“Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.” Brevity in proverbs manifests itself also in the omission of connectives, as in: “First come, first served.” “Out of sight, out of mind.”

I. But the main feature distinguishing proverbs and sayings from ordinary utterances remains their semantic aspect. Their literal meaning is suppressed by what may be termed their transferred meaning. In other words, one meaning (literal ) is the form for another meaning (transferred) which contains the idea. Proverbs and sayings, if used appropriately, will never lose their freshness and vigor. The most noticeable thing about the functioning of sayings, proverbs and catchphrases is that they may be handled not in their fixed form ( the traditional model) but with modifications. These modifications, however, will never break away from the invariants to such a degree that

the correlation and its variant ceases to be perceived by the reader. The predictability of a variant of a word – combination is lower in comparison with its invariant. Therefore the use of such a unit in a modified form will always arrest our attention, causing a much closer examination of the wording of the utterance in order to get at the idea. Thus the proverb “all is not gold that glitters” appears in Byron’s “Don Juan” in the following form and environment where at first the meaning may seem obscure:

“How all the needy honorable misters”

Each out-at-elbow peer or desperate dandy, The watchful mothers and sisters (Who, by the by, when clever, are more handy at making matches where “it is gold that glitters” Than their he relatives ) like flies o’er candy Buzz round the Fortune with their busy battery, To turn her head with waltzing and with flattery.” Out periphrasis, the meaning of which is deciphered two lines below; the Fortune”, that is, “a marriageable heiress! “ It has already been pointed out that the Byron is fond of playing with stable word-combinations, sometimes injecting new vigor into the components, sometimes entirely disregarding the semantic unity of the combination. In the following lines, for instance, each word of the phrase safe and sound gets its full meaning.

“I leave Don Juan for the present, safe – Not sound, poor fellow, but severely wounded:” The proverb Hell is paved with good intentions and the set expression to mean well are used by Byron in a peculiar way, thus making the reader re-appraise the hackneyed phrases.

“.....if he warr’d or loved, it was with what we call the best.

Intentions, which form all mankind’s trump card, to be produced when brought up to the test. The statesman, hero, harlot, lawyer, ward Off each attack, when people are in such meaning should pave hell.” The stylistic effect produced by such uses of proverbs and sayings is the result of a twofold application of language means, which as has already been emphasized, is an indispensable condition for the appearance of all stylistic devices. The modified form of the proverb is perceived against the background of the fixed form, thus enlivening the latter. Sometimes this injection of new vigor into the proverb causes a slight semantic re-evaluation of its generally accepted meaning. When a proverb is used in its unaltered form it can be qualified as an expressive means (EM) of the language; when used in a modified variant it assumes the one of the features of an SD, it acquires a stylistic meaning, though not becoming an SD.

We shall take only a few of the numerous examples of the stylistic use of proverbs and sayings to illustrate the possible ways of decomposing the units in order simply to suggest the idea behind them:

“Come! He said “milk’s spilt.” (Galsworthy) (from “It is no use crying spilt milk”)

“But to all that moving experience there had been a shadow (a dark lining to the silver cloud), insistent and plain, which disconcerted her.”(Maugham) (from “Every cloud has a silver lining”)

“We were dashed uncomfortable in the frying pan, but we should have been a damned sight worse off in the five.” (Maugham ) (from “Out of the frying pan into the fire“) “You know which side the law’s buttered.” (Galsworthy )(from “His bread is buttered on both sides”.)

This device is used not only in the belles – letters style. Here are some instances from newspapers and magazines illustrating the stylistic use of proverbs, sayings and other word-combinations:

“.....and whether the Ministry of Economic Warfare is being allowed enough financial rope to do its worst.”(from “Give a thief rope enough and he’ll hang himself).

“The waters will remain sufficiently troubled for somebody’s fishing to be profitable.” (Economist) (from “It is good fishing in troubled waters”). “Proof of the Pudding” (from The proof of the Pudding is in the eating). Here is a recast of a well-known proverb used by an advertising agency: “Early to bed and early to rise No use unless you advertise” (from “Early to bed and early to rise makes man healthy, wealthy and wise”)

**Proverb.** The proverb is generally considered as a brief, witty saying in common use that conveys a moral. It couches conventional wisdom in clever form and imagery thereby making it memorable and easy to pass on from one generation to another. In certain parts of the world, however, the equivalents of the word “proverb” do not refer only to brief, witty sayings, but also to extended allusions like the parable, anecdote, or any series of allusive statements cited to demonstrate a lesson in discourse (Finnegan 1970 : 419-23; Taylor 1962 :27). This article deals with the proverb, in the sense of terse, witty saying.

#### Cultural Truth

Proverbs state cultural truisms. The truism may be in the form of an empirically valid statement, or an existing superstition or social norm. It may even have a questionable logic, or make an unverifiable claim. In any case, the proverb’s cultural validity is hardly disputed.

#### Moral Precept.

The proverb cited mainly in situations of stress and conflict, may be either prescriptive or descriptive. It may advise a course of action by drawing attention to the moral or ethical benefits that accrue when that suggestion is taken or allude to the negative consequences inevitable if a line of behavior is ignored. The Maori saying, “Broil your rat with its fur on lest you be disturbed by someone’s draws attention to the negative consequences of ignoring a suggested line of behavior and the Ba-Congo proverb, “Water drawn by old men quenches thirst,” points to a positive result in consulting men of experience. Rather than explicitly prescribe behavior, the proverb may be merely descriptive, highlighting a common irony or tendency in life.

#### Education

The lessons often embedded in proverbs make them a ready tool for moral education. In actual fact, however, it is only in rare instances that proverbs are ostensibly used to educate, for proverbs are generally not used in isolation. Instances of the didactic use of proverbs as an end in itself may be found among the Chaga. In this culture, proverbs are used as a mode of instruction during initiation ceremonies (Finnegan 1970:413 ) The Maori of New Zealand offer another such example. To ensure that valuable facts about economic lore in the environment are grasped, various proverbs are repeated to the youth by the elders side by side with technical instruction.(Firth 1926 : 148 ) Other than that, the proverb is normally triggered in the course of ongoing discourse, and unless the motivation for that discourse itself is didactic, the proverb it triggers need not have an educational intent.

### Persuasion

Generally, however, the element of education in the use of proverbs can be subsumed under the rhetorical function: the use of proverbs to persuade. The proverb user seeks to alter or reinforce the listener's conviction or attitude by referring him to lessons from parallel events in the proverb world. By getting the addressee to agree with moral precept in the proverb used, the speaker thereby hopes to win him over to his viewpoint. Thus in a situation where a truant has missed his evening meal, an Akan mother may cite to him the proverb. "The chicken that is nearer its mother eats the thigh of the grasshopper."

### Contradictory proverbs.

Despite the moral element embedded there in a culture's repertoire of proverbs does not necessarily portray a consistent philosophy. Thus it is not uncommon to find within the same culture, proverbs advocating apparently opposing principles. The Chinese proverb, "Know a man by his looks," has an antithetical counterpart in "looks are borne in the hart": and the English proverb.

"Look before you leap" is rendered questionable in "He who hesitates is lost."

Proverbs are unsystematized; they are based on a variety of cultural experiences that require the exercise of individual discretion in various moments. Haste may lead to disaster in one situation but yield fruitful results in the other. The speaker uses the proverb only as it suits his discretion in a specific rhetorical situation.

### Style

Certain stylistic features, however, appear to be common with proverbs in general, and set them apart in discourse. This includes terseness, impersonal character and the use of devices like rhyme, metaphor, hyperbole, assonance and parallelism. The proverb may be a straight literal statement, as is the Arabic saying, "Covetousness is the punishment of the rich," or be presented in the form of simile,

as in the Akan proverb, "Wife is like a blanket; when you wrap yourself in it you itch, when you cast it off you feel cold." Most proverbs, however, are metaphorical and refer to life outside the human realm, as in the Maori proverb. The greedy pigeon bolts its food, the parrot eats it bit by bit, and the Moroccan, "Every beetle is a gazelle in the eyes of its mother." The proverb may also be an exaggeration as in the Solomon Islands saying, "When a chief declaims, the very ground is rent asunder."

Whether literally or metaphorically rendered, proverbs are relatively terse. The proverb's relative brevity may derive from the omission of certain words, for rhythmic effect, as in the English proverb, "Forewarned forearmed where the verb "to be" is elided. Bantu languages in Africa are particularly known for elisions in

proverbs. Not only are whole words left out, but vowels are frequently elided, especially the final vowel of a word. The terseness of expression grammatically possible in Bantu, can be illustrated from the Tswana proverb, "Young birds will

always open their mouths, even to those who come to kill them," which in the original, is only three words (Finnegan 1970:400 ) A common device used in proverbs is parallelism, which may be expounded structurally and semantically, and may present synonymous or contrastive ideas. The English proverbs "Many men, many minds," is an example and so is the following from Akan, "the right washes the left, and the left washes the." Structurally balanced prepositions that permit a pause between them, may

be used for rhetorical effect in certain cultures, where the speaker utters the first part only and expects the addressee to complete the proverb (Yankah 1989 a: 169-71)

#### Illiterate Societies

Proverbs have fallen into relative disuse in literate societies and are more readily employed in cultures of predominant illiteracy such as in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Even in these cultures, proverbs use diminishes with the progressive acquisition of Western education.

#### Power of Speech

One major reason for the close relationship between proverbs and illiterate societies is that the latter rely solely on the spoken word for communication and since face-to-face communication carries considerable hazards for both speaker and addressee, various strategies have to be deployed to minimize such risks and these include the use of indirection of which proverbs are a typical example. Since most proverbs are metaphorical in their application to situations, delicate matters may be discussed more conveniently with little or no threat to face. In the absence of this mode of indirect communication the forces unleashed by the spoken word can hardly be contained. The power of the spoken word is acknowledged in several cultures in such sayings as the Arabic. The wound caused by the lance head is curable; but that caused by the tongue cannot be cured." According to a Japanese proverb the tongue but three inches can kill man six feet high." According to the Yoruba, "Speech is like an egg; when dropped it shatters;" and an Indian proverb says "Words will secure you an elephant and words will also bring you to the feet of an elephant."

Couched in an impersonal form, the proverb avoids the impression of a subjective judgment on the part of its user. Rather, the speakers viewpoint is objectivized and presented as coming from a neutral source, the voice of a third party.

The application of a proverb in a particular situation implies that the situation at hand is not unique or completely new, but has the trappings of something that has occurred before. That way, an apparently new turn of events is subsumed under a preexisting pattern. There is nothing in this world that has not happened before," say the Akan.

#### Authoritative Source

Part of the rhetorical power of the proverb derives from its authoritativeness or rather its ascription to authoritative sources. In several cultures in Africa, for example, proverb authorship is ascribed to elders or ancestors. Even though proverb authorship may also be attributed to specific individuals and sometimes nonhuman entities, the collective category considered responsible for proverbs are the elders, to whom are attributed the qualities of wisdom, responsibility and exemplary behavior.

"The elders say..." is the prefatory formula that triggers proverbs in several African cultures. The belief in the prophetic power of words spoken by elders is supported by the Akan saying "The mouth of the elder is more powerful than a charm."

In several Western cultures, however, the proverb is prefaced with a formula attributing it to an indefinite source. They say... "Besides the use of a "source" to enhance a proverb's rhetorical value, a "activity" may also be used. The proverb speaker may use an active phrase such as, "You know that..., Remember that .....,"

etc., to imply that the statement that follows is conventional knowledge, a cultural fact of truth and truth and should facilitate appreciation of his argument.

### Aesthetics of Speaking

Cultures where proverbs are intensely used recognize also the proverb's aesthetic value in speech. Among the Somali, it is said, proverbs, "put spice into speech." The Igbo say, the proverb is the broth of speech," broth referring to the nicely flavored water in which meat is boiled. They also say the proverb "is the palm oil with which words are eaten," implying that words are hard to swallow without proverb lubrication. Among the Yoruba, it is said, the proverb is the horse of conversation droops, the proverb picks it up." In above statements, the proverb's use an agent of beauty and vitality in speech is the point of emphasis. The Akan also say they use the proverb to "hoist a tree on speech" (Yankah 1989b) . Reference here is to the high attention value of the proverb, made possible by its saturation with poetic devices. Since proverb use is part of the process of persuasion, a speaker expects the audience to react to his message if he succeeds in getting them to focus their attention on it, since his words are competing for attention with other stimuli in the environment. The point in using the proverb then is to highlight a point or make it more conspicuous, indelible is memorable, for the purpose of giving the listener something substantive to ponder over. In the absence of such a speech landmark, an argument may be submerged in the swift flow of discourse.

Equally important is the use of the proverb in Africa to "tie a knot around discourse." Here, it is the proverb's ability to lend density, coherence and the finality to argument that is at issue. Argument expressed in proverbial language is often pithy and the successful decoding of dense rhetoric is highly valued in several nonliterate societies. Where this skill is observed among children, it is taken as a sign of early wisdom. The Yoruba say, "It is half a word that we speak to the wise child; when it gets inside, it becomes whole. " The Akan also say, "A wise child is addressed in proverbs, not in plain speech, and "In is a fool to whom a proverb is told and then explained."

### Norms of Usage

In various cultures, proverb use is governed by social norms; and a good proverb speaker does not only know its logical application and meaning but also its appropriate social use: which proverb to select and avoid in what social situations, or whether it is discreet to use a proverb at all. Normally, proverbs may be used among peer groups or from a socially superior to a subordinate. In situations involving fewer interactants a proverb, may not be used by one much younger than the listener, particularly if it has a didactic flavor or else this the speaker may preface it with an apology or incorporate his audience in the authorship formula, "It is you the elders that say..." That way, the speaker implies that he is unqualified to teach words of wisdom to the elders assembled. In several cases, a proverb in the offing may be abandoned by the speaker if the social context is not suitable. This is true of several cultures in Africa.

### Nonoral Channels

Even though proverbs in predominantly illiterate cultures are mostly expressed by the spoken word, other channels may be used to communicate the proverb. These include the talking drum, particularly in cultures where the language spoken is tonal.

Akan and Yoruba drum proverbs are very well-known. These are proverb verses that are uniquely identified with the drum and are uncommon in oral circulation. Their major structural features are repetition and parallelism.

Also common is the phenomenon of proverb symbols on royal umbrella tops, orators' staffs, and also gold weights and textile design (Cole and Duran 1977; Yankah 1989b) Indeed among the Akan, proverbs are so integrated with human life that a purposeful negation of cultural etiquette may be decoded as proverbial behavior and elicit an appropriate response.

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