

A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Selected Annangs' Proverbial Social Language

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Abstract— Continuous creation, formation, maintenance and sustenance of proverbial social language in today's multifaceted, heterogeneous and monolingual traditional Annang societies are very necessary. This study examines the multimodalities in Annang's proverbial social language or proverbs. The linguistic and non-linguistic elements such as the facial expressions of the speakers and the listeners, the venues, time of delivery, colours of items and other semiotic modes; their influences and relevance are investigated in this study. The study also examines the multifunctional roles of Annang's proverbs. The study adopts a qualitative-descriptive research design and employs George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's (1980) Cognitive Theory of Metaphor. Data were purposively collected from the interactions of the author with the Annang people in Akwa-Ibom State and in Lagos State through participatory observation and recorded conversations. One of the major findings is that nouns are the linguistic features that significantly constitute the language choices of Annang proverbs. The study also reveals that multimodal elements including contextual settings, speaker authority, and facial expressions significantly influence the interpretation and effectiveness of these proverbs. The study therefore recommends that Annang proverbial social language should be applied intentionally and appropriately by all Annang people to act as a catalyst in moving people to positive directions in order to minimise avoidable conflicts, destructions and death.

Keywords— catalyst, facial expressions, linguistic elements, multimodalities, proverbs, Annang society.

I. INTRODUCTION

Proverbial social language is very important in maintaining and upholding cultural norms and values of a people. According to Rubikovna & Artakovna (2020), they are pictorial and concise sayings that are presented in various spheres to the people. They are “works of oral creativity of the people (Nikolaevna, et al., 2023: 295) in every traditional society. Social proverbs are about social life of a people (Zhao, 2012) and in this case, about the rich cultural heritage of the Annang people of Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria.

Proverbs or proverbial social language is used interchangeably here. They are the determinants of cultural identities (Usman et al., 2013). According to Adewole (2020) proverbs are essential ingredients of communication in Africa. They are rooted in cultures of a people in all societies, and can help to understand cultures (Rong 2013). Confirming this statement, Silas & Abru (2024) state that “proverbs are products of the people’s culture and intrinsically relate to the culture (520) of a people. They are “not just simple sayings but also repositories of cultural wisdom and values” (Nugraha 2023: 122). Also, Bochina, et al. (2021) observes the reality of proverbs having roots in the culture of any society. Proverbs according to Obelkevich (2015) are rooted in language, and language projects people’s cultures. Commenting on the functions of language, Rasulov (2021) maintains that language is an intricate part of culture, often serving as a repository of a society’s values, beliefs and tradition (20). According to Halliday (2023), language is the principle means of cultural transmission.

This study investigates the verbal and non-verbal modes of Annang proverbs; the facial expressions, venues, time of delivery are all important and interpretative during the interactions through Annang proverbs.

1.1 Motivation for the Study:

A lot of people devalue societal norms and values encapsulated in proverbs of a people. Some tend not to even understand how proverbs are used to enable people to live harmoniously with others in the society. Unfortunately, the transferable negative effects of these devaluation and ignorance have caused innumerable direct and indirect problems, discomforts, delays and deaths in a larger society. Also, insufficient research on the linguistic aspect of proverbs has necessitated this research and by so doing, it will provide a research material for would-be scholars who may be interested in research of this type. This motivation was earlier observed by Načićione (2020) who maintains that the linguistic aspects of proverbs have less been researched so far and therefore need to be investigated.

For example, where people have the mentality of depending totally on the wealth or properties of others or wait to inherit their fathers, mothers or relations' riches or properties, they have forgotten, or are ignorant of the proverbial social language "k'ubon efod k'iba owo fen," and as a result of this negative disposition, they wait to share their relations' properties and money; and once they feel cheated they come out to show their grievances through any devilish or demonical acts. Also, there have been cases of quarrels, fights, brutalities, destructions and deaths caused by people who struggle for their fathers' or relations' properties. In addition to this, the recent death of over fifteen (15) people in Kano mosque caused by unresolved sharing of family property motivated me to carry out this work. Should we be interested in other people's sweets rather than laboring for our own? This has been a major societal problem especially in traditional African settings.

In addition, this work is premised on the fact that some Annang proverbial social language that have therapeutic and curative functions should be investigated so as to serve as a resource material for people to attempt to use it to solve their various family and societal problems.

In a nutshell, with the present high level of modernization, civilization and globalization, the author is afraid that the rich cultural heritage of the Annang people might be compromised if not guided jealously. Therefore, there is need to preserve rich cultural heritage of the Annang people; hence, the relevance of this investigation.

The objectives of this study therefore are:

1. To identify the linguistic cues of selected Annang's social proverbial language
2. To explain the semiotic resources of Annang's social proverbial language
3. To suggest ways of preserving Annang's social proverbial language

1.2 Proverbial Social Language:

In traditional community gatherings, daily conversations, and even academic discussions, proverbial social language are important in expressions. They are principles of life and guidance to our daily work (Clasberry, 2010). Considering the functions of proverbs, Yalcouye & Abdiulaye (2021) maintain that they are used to serve strategic expressions in everyday life conversation and speech. They are proverbs that convey wisdom, cultural norms and values. They are "signs" and "models of various typical situations and relationship between things or phenomena in real life" (Utebaev & Sarsenbaeva, 2021). They are didactic and helps to impart knowledge, wisdom and advice.

They have various functions such as moral, social, expressive, cognitive, linguistic, cultural identity, rhetorical and conflict resolution functions. Agbenyo (2023) emphasizes the relevance of proverbs in the society. They reinforce social norms and cultural values of a collective experiences and wisdom of a people in a community and assist in maintaining social order and cohesion.

Expressively, proverbial social language allows people to expose their thoughts and emotions clearly thereby adding colours and depths to their expressions, conversations, communications and interactions. AL-Mutalabi (2019) concludes that we use proverbs to strengthen our arguments and expressions.

Cognitively, they assist in encapsulating universal truths and experiences, thereby making it easier for people to understand and remember cultural concepts. They also help in helping people to have cultural identity which is an important aspect of cultural heritage. Considering the cognitive advantage of proverbs, Volodymyrivna (2023) maintains that they reflect the rich historical experience of the people.

Rhetorically, proverbs help in people's speeches, debates, rhetoric and persuasion, thereby enabling them to exhibit authoritative tones and be generally acceptable through their credible arguments. According to Hatipoğlu & Daşkın (2020) proverbs are seen as a strong rhetorical force.

Studies such as those of Lomotey & Csajbok-Twerefou (2021) and Rohsenow (2023) reveal that proverbs are maximally used in conflict resolutions; they mediate into disputes and offer solutions in non-confrontational manners.

Scholars such as Načisćione (2020), Musinovna & Tadjibaevn (2021) and Spellerberg (2022) investigate work on linguistic functions of proverbs. Linguistic function entails the richness of language through its diversity, aesthetics, creativity and linguistic prowess of a culture. Its application of metaphor, rhyme and rhythm are worth investigating.

In addition, scholars such as Sulaymonovna (2023) and Bobuafor (2021) examine the cultural importance of proverbs. Culturally, proverbs help people identify themselves and their roots and transmit traditional belief and history of a community from generation to generation. It is through proverbs that the younger generation learns the culture of the present generation.

1.3 Multimodal Discourse Analysis:

Multimodal Discourse Analysis is a framework in which meaning is created and interpreted in communication using different modes (such as the verbal, non-verbal, visual modes). It focuses on modes of analysis "applied to objects and words inferred from semiotics" (Luca, 2020: 74). According to Kress & Bezemer (2023), multimodality names the field in which semiotics works. It is worth noting that spoken discourse are multimodal (Johnstone & Andrus 2024); Annang social language is mainly spoken therefore, it is highly multimodal.

1.4 Annang Society:

Annang Society comprises great hardworking, very strong and fearless Annang people who speak Annang language. Like other traditional societies, Annang society is well-structured in all ramifications (in terms of social structures, cultural practices, leadership, governance, economy, livelihood, education, modernity and development). The basic unit of the Annang society consists of families which are usually extensive and mostly polygamous. There are also age grades, villages and communities (based on kinship). Every village has a traditional head that oversees the affairs of the village. In most villages, the traditional heads are based on hereditary. There is also a council of elders whose wisdoms are sort by members of the communities. The society is highly patriarchal; women have not and may not be selected as village heads.

In addition, the Annang people speak Annang language (originated from a Niger-Congo language family). The language is very beautifully rendered by the original speakers who utter them with its natural fastness and grossness. Many non-speakers seem to equate it to Chinese language because of its agility and their inability to grasp isolated words during conversations or interactions.

Occupationally, the traditional Annang people are great farmers and marketers. They plant, and sell their yams (edia), pumpkin leaves (nko efere), cassava (iwa) and many others for their survival. Contemporary Annang people are highly educated and those who are not educated endeavour to send their children and wards to schools. So, with Western education, they work at government establishments and organisations as professors, doctors, engineers, lawyers, and at all fields locally and internationally.

More so, despite the presence and belief in Christianity by a lot of Annang people, some still practise traditional religion through worship of idols, ancestral gods and deities, "mme abasi". Some also believe in incantations and ritual ceremonies and sacrifices to the death parents (idiok). They also celebrate traditional marriages (ndo) and festivals such as "Ekpo" and "Ekong" masqueraders; and "abang" done during Christmas period.

To maintain peace and order, the Annang people have organized governance. Cases are also taken to the "Abong obio" who solves their problems. Difficult cases are transferred to the clan heads, who use their wisdoms to solve them. There is local court where people are tried and fines (with items like "ukot nsun" "ebot", "akuk," "Ndiyon" and other items). Besides these, some people also take others to "ukan," a traditional medicine professional who uses supernatural people to torture people to enforce truth on people.

Furthermore, Annang has a well-organized traditional leadership comprises the "obong" and "mbong" who are highly respected as a result of their knowledge and wisdom. There are also various clan organizations known as "nka" (such as "nka isong" for

the elders, “nka-iban obio” for the women in the villages, “Nka iden” for the men and many other. All these groups are for the betterment of individuals, groups, villages and community in Annang society.

1.5 George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's (1980) Cognitive Theory of Metaphor:

This theory allows a description of metaphoric verbal utterances (Romero & Soria 2005). In line with this, Schmit (2005) explains that the theory provides a basis for describing everyday cognitive structures using linguistic models.

Lakoff and Johnson opine that metaphor is mainly a linguistic device but a functional mechanism of human thought. They observe that the way we think, what we experience and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 2008); therefore, we cannot live without metaphor (Rudhel 2020, Csatar 2022). According to Shukurova (2020) metaphor is everyday language.

1.6 Statement of Contribution:

This study has contributed to knowledge by investigating the multimodal aspects of proverbial social language in Annang society. The functions of the postures, facial expressions, directions and other non-verbal cues of the Annang proverbs are remarkable and original. It has filled in a gap which no other work (to the knowledge of the author) has explored.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive research design. Data were collected through participatory observation and audio recordings of conversations with Annang people in both Akwa-Ibom State and Lagos State. As a native Annang speaker from Abak in Akwa-Ibom, the author engaged in natural conversations where proverbs are typically used, noting the contextual elements including settings, participants, and non-verbal cues.

Seven (7) Annang social proverbial sayings were purposively selected from these interactions for detailed analysis. The selection criteria included frequency of use, cultural significance, and richness in multimodal elements. The analysis follows a multimodal discourse analysis approach, examining both linguistic features and paralinguistic elements including facial expressions, gestures, vocal tones, and situational contexts.

The analytical process involved:

1. Transcribing the proverbs with contextual notes
2. Identifying linguistic features (lexical choices, grammatical structures)
3. Documenting observed non-verbal elements
4. Analyzing metaphorical constructions using Cognitive Metaphor Theory
5. Interpreting the integration of verbal and non-verbal modes in meaning-making

III. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Ku'kpon efod k'iba owo nfen:

Don't be too expansive in someone else's pant.

3.1 Analysis of Proverb 1:

This proverb is simple and straightforward; its short nature enables many to appreciate and understand it easily, basically because “Iba” (pant) is very necessary for every disciplined person and it is common for every category of people. This confirms Villers (2022)'s observation that the two basic qualities of proverbs are simplicity and expressivity. The selection of a simple dress that is affordable for everyone would enable everyone to be easy with the use of the proverb as there would be none who will feel isolated from it as a result of the wealth status.

Its phonological rendition is very comical and humorous and able to provoke laughter thereby making people to long to listen to it repeatedly. At the same time, it performs purgative and curative measures when people laugh, they directly or indirectly purges their emotions.

Metaphorically, being expansive simply means, having negative interest in another person's property, ideas, prosperity, etc. Negative interest will automatically lead to jealousy which is the base of every undeveloped people, family or nation.

Also, another person's pants simply put, is what does not belong to the person who is "covetous."

Symbolically, "buttock" and "pants" are private organ and dress. Therefore, are not expected to be used openly, but when buttocks are unnecessarily big, pants will be shown directly even with the pant. A covetous person cannot be hidden; his or her linguistic, non-linguistic displays will be conspicuous irrespectively of where he or she is or how he or she tries to cover it.

The serious outlook of the face of the speaker means the seriousness and the necessity of this proverb. If it is rendered in a casual interaction with others, it could as well show the lack of seriousness of the messages being communicated. Again, if the elders say it, it displays the level of importance but if said by people jokingly, it also expresses its frivolities.

2. Akpede ma' ndionyo mbo ke ufok ito ayakaba udua, nkpakesine afia iba.

If I had known that toilet will become a market place, I will have worn a white pant.

3.2 Analysis of Proverb 2:

Here, "iba" is chosen again because of its commonness and availability for everyone. It is a symbol of privacy and individuality. Therefore, the emphasis here is on the colour of the pant being worn. It is caution for everyone to be prepared at all time. Here, the speaker never knew that the toilet will become the market place, so instead of wearing white to show the world the level of his or her neatness, he or she decided to put on another colour (possibly black or red).

Denotatively, this proverb simply means lack of preparation before one carries out plans. Here, ignorance or lack of regards to the warning embedded in Annang's proverbs has resulted in people's regret and unfulfilled dreams. In the case of failed marriages, unpleasant relations, abandoned projects or other issues that turned out sour, many people normally find it very difficult to manage such situations. So, this work attempts to suggest possible dispositions of people through social proverbial sayings and the need to plan ahead of time in order to avoid regrets of all sorts.

3. Asana isang akud afia okpok

He that has travelled far has seen a white lizard.

3.3 Analysis of Proverb 3:

White lizards represent strange situations and experiences that someone encounters in the course of living. The people who have seen white lizards are people who have passed through the vicissitudes of life and tough times. To see a white lizard therefore means to pass through strange experiences. The choice of common nouns here, "asang isang" and "okpok" signifies the intention of the Annangs people to ensure that simple traditional objects are used in the formation of their proverbs. By so doing, they enable each interactant to easily understand them very clearly.

4. Akedi beneke Ebom akpa idionoke k' asefuru.

He who has never driven Ebom before does not know that it can fly.

3.4 Analysis of Proverb 4:

Ebom is a special bird that looks and behaves as if it doesn't fly. This social proverb is used when an individual makes light of sorrowful situation experienced by other. An individual that has never experienced loss of a close-relation (like husbands, wives, children, brothers or sisters) or other losses will not know how the people who experienced this normally feel.

This is a call for people to show human feelings to the plights of other members of the society who are in sorrowful moods as a result of unfortunate situations that have befallen other members of the society. Again, the behaviours of those who are fulfilled in life towards those that are still struggling matter a lot in the existence of harmony or pains in the lives of those who are passing through tough times. Therefore, everyone is called to be cautious of what he or she says so as not to hurt the feeling of those who are in pains.

The choice of "Ebom" shows the focus on noun as the linguistic feature of Annang proverb. The whole of this proverb revolves around "Ebom" and not "afehe" (driven) or "asfuru" (can fly) which are verbs nor "akedi" (pronoun) or other lexical features.

5. Aduo Usine, atop eti unam aduok

He that throws away, Usine (shrew rat) has thrown away good meat.

3.5 Analysis of Proverb 5:

People that look only at the outward for their judgments are likely going to give unfair judgments to things. In other words, physical appearance may be deceitful but the contents matter a lot. Again, taking erratic decision based on what others have said about another without verifying is also seen as very dangerous and deadly among the Annang people. It is therefore very necessary for someone to consider the contents rather than the container. This proverb is therefore a caution for those who are easily deceived by the outward to take precaution.

Again, the emphasis here is on “Usine” a noun and no other word classes. Although the verbs “aduo” “atop” and “aduok” are also important here, these would not have been visible if “Usine” was not involved. This confirms the predominant application of nouns in Annang proverbs.

6. Awo urukikot akono akan kiet akpena afehe iwot okpok

He that has been bitten once by a snake must be afraid of the head of a lizard.

3.6 Analysis of Proverb 6:

This is a precautionary proverb for those that have been seriously offended by others to be cautious of similar occurrences. For those who have experienced bad situations in life, this proverb is meant for them never to allow a repetition of such. Once people are careful not to repeat past mistakes, there are tendencies for harmonious experiences to occur. Careful decisions are sacrosanct to the effective interactions and communication with members of Annang society who have been injured emotionally. Here, common objects that are nouns are chosen in the creation and use of this proverb.

7. Aniwo idiono ikpat idiok owo ke ntan:

Who knows the leg marks of a wicked person in the dry sand?

3.7 Analysis of Proverb 7:

Everyone presses feet on the same sand so it is actually difficult to separate one’s foot mark from another. It is very different to understand the true nature and character of people because they seem to exhibit the same hospitably or hostile behaviour. To identify them therefore becomes very herculean. For those who trust people the admonition here is that they should be careful with everyone.

Once again, “Ikpat” (legs marks) signal the whole activities that surrounds “idiok owo” (wicked person), hence, the predominant application of nouns in Annang’s proverbs shown here. Again, one needs to be careful so as not to fall into the hands of dubious people in the society.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis above revealed that most Annang’s proverbs are precautionary proverbs intentionally formed from the commonest local objects around them. They are based on the choice of lexical items that are very common and easily available and identified by everyone. This facilitates quick understanding and gives express access to the Annang users. Observing the formation of proverbs, Villers (2022) maintains that proverbs are intentionally and unintentionally coined. In this study, it is revealed that these proverbs are intentionally created for specific purposes (of enabling people to understand them and for identification purposes).

Also, colour is very important in Annang proverbs. The interpretations of colours depend solely on the objects that they described as well as the contexts of use. Considering the use of colours, Obelkevich (2015) explains that they are used to “mean different things” to different people in different environments. A negative context automatically renders the colour negative and vice versa. In conjunction with this view, Mukhtidinovna (2021) observes that colour has an ancient history and contributes significantly to the characteristics of objects of the picture of the world.

The study also revealed that the time and venues of delivery of Annang proverbs, the person who uses and those who listen to them and the contexts of use are major factors in determining the seriousness or otherwise of this proverbial social language.

Confirming the importance of the status of the proverbs' user, Onwe (2023) maintains that a child understands how to use proverbs better after he might have listened to the adults. It therefore shows that just as it were in Annang society, adults are the custodians of Annang proverbs; but children have to first of all listen to the Adult before they can use it effectively. Again, delivery of proverbs at individual homes has little significance but once people gather either in the village square or at the family compound, the seriousness of the rendition becomes high.

This work equally found out that nouns are significant and predominant features that made up the linguistic choices of Annang proverbs. This is slightly different from Roberts (2018)'s view that the most highly significant features in proverbs are nouns and verbs.

Also, this study showed that facial expressions, position, movements, gestures and the voice of the speakers matter a lot in the interpretations of these proverbs. For examples, elders are expected to sit in their front houses while saying these proverbs, but when they stand, it indicates the abnormal audience whom they address. Salim (2023) observes that the function of nonverbal communication is reflected in emotions, gestures of people. Also, considering the significance of naming (Safyanova, 2013) names generally actualizes practical functions.

Finally the study revealed that, Annang proverbs have multiple interpretations due to its contexts of use. In line with this observation, Yankah (2015) maintains that there are potentials for multiple meanings in proverbs. Confirming the interpretations of proverbs in contexts, Appiah (2021) explains that contexts interact to produce meanings.

V. CONCLUSION

Proverbial social languages are “multifunctional and flexible instruments of communication” (Nwabudike, 2020: 529) in every living society. Annang proverbs therefore perform innumerable functions; they are the tools that create, maintain and sustain the rich cultures of the Annang people, and therefore their investigations are germane. The predominantly precautionary proverbs of the Annang people are meant to warn people who care to listen to avoid them so as to enable individual to live long and allow good interpersonal relationship among the Annang people to strive. The choice of lexical features from the Annang traditional society helps to sustain the cultural heritage of the Annang people.

Besides the linguistic features of the common Annangs objects, the multimodality of Annang proverbs reveals that the positioning and the contexts in which these proverbs occur determine their importance or otherwise. Therefore to sustain these long, indispensable instruments that express the cultures, norms and values of Annang people, and act as the identifier of the people's traditions, every Annang is admonished to deliberately use this social language

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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