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# Al-Ghuluwu fi al-amsal al-arabiy

*Of Postproverbials in Modern Arabic Literature and Perceptive Transformations in Afro-Arab Culture*

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## Abstract

*Al-Ghuluwu fi al-amsal al-arabiy* (Postproverbial) is a new trend in modern Arabic studies. It is a way to gain the perceptions of learners of the language into Afro-Arabic and Yoruba cultures in contemporary times. Through the learning of the subject matter, University of Ibadan students of Arabic Language and Literature explore how much common philosophy is shared between postproverbial expressions in Arabic and Yoruba languages. Afro-Arabic postproverbial demonstrates the trends of modernity within the culture. It absorbs and transforms wisdom accumulated over the few years with the experience of students in their various localities. This paper investigates the exposure to postproverbiality in Arabic among the students of Arabic language and literature who are predominantly Yoruba in the University of Ibadan and how the practice of postproverbials transforms their perceptions and values of Yoruba and Afro-Arab cultural concepts. Thus, two questions are raised: to what extent does the use of postproverbials in the Arabic literature course in the University of Ibadan shed light on Yoruba cultural aspects not regularly covered in Arabic Proverbs? How does the use of postproverbials in the Arabic literature course promote a new understanding among the students and make them discover and reassess their values and preferences in the modern time? The theoretical framework of the paper is adopted from A. Raji-Oyelade's "Postproverbials in Yoruba Culture: A Playful Blasphemy". The result of this study indicates that students employed their basic knowledge of Arabic language, coupled with their Yoruba cultural background, to re-create a number of postproverbial texts within the context of Arabic culture. It also exhibits their level of consciousness in the modern times.

## Keywords

postproverbiality – Arabic – Yoruba – values – culture

### 1 Introduction

The Arabic literature is a course in University of Ibadan and Arabic language is spoken by 420 million across the world, in countries like Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Iraq, Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, and others. Modern Standard Arabic is a descendant of Classical Arabic, a language from the 6th century. Its written alphabet is the Arabic alphabet, read from the right to the left. It is an ancient language and rich culture, with an equally rich bank of proverbs and sayings. There is a global trend of learning languages, which is increasing at this modern period which ultimately crumbles the wall between cultures and reduces the distance between the nations and continents.<sup>1</sup> The Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies was established to meet the needs and desires of Nigerian society in the study of Afro-Arabic Culture which remains a preponderant feature of socio-political and economic activities of the Nigerian populace and to meet the national and international diplomacy and the challenges of the world. The mission and objectives are geared towards training competent personnel for the growing national need for manpower in education, civil service and international relations, to train students to research into the impact of Afro-Arabic culture with reference to Yorubaland, Nigeria and Africa in particular, to meet the desire of Nigerians who want to learn Arabic Language and to bring about effective teaching of Afro-Arabic Studies in such a way that graduates at this level in the Department would be individuals who would have, not only an in-depth knowledge of the dynamics of Arabic scholarship, but also the professional ability to transit, with minimum problem, from theory to practice.<sup>2</sup>

Brosh (67) explains that societies have an increasing need to adapt to multiple, complex, and rapidly changing contexts and to interact directly with other cultures.<sup>3</sup> He depicts that the substantial and crucial necessity can best

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- 1 Brosh, H., (2013) Proverbs in the Arabic language classroom, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*.
  - 2 Bakalla, M.H. (1984). *Arabic culture through its language and literature*. London: Kegan Paul International.
  - 3 Brosh, H., (2013) Proverbs in the Arabic language classroom, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*.

be achieved through the learning of other languages, because they are the primary carriers of culture. Language is a social mechanism, and it is learned and used within a socio-cultural context. According to Borghetti (141), language is the main channel for social interaction between people of different cultures and it is steeped in the socio-cultural context in which those people interact.<sup>4</sup> Communication among people of different cultural backgrounds is thus complex and can sometimes be confusing. If not presented according to the specific cultural codes of a given language and in a given geographical area, a linguistically correct statement or request may come off as out of place or may even seem rude. Intercultural communication requires not only knowledge of the linguistic system itself, but also the development of intercultural competence, where learners become familiar with and subsequently understand the other cultural behaviour and subtle patterns common to the target language that shapes the form and content of the interaction. Byram (2008) explains that intercultural competence is the ability to interact with people from another culture in their language. Intercultural competence in Africa is one of the central aims of other African languages teaching and learning.<sup>5</sup> It incorporates a curiosity and an openness to the foreign culture, a knowledge of the society's cultural groups and practices, an ability to interpret events and processes in both the other cultures and one's own culture, and the ability to acquire new knowledge and apply it under the constraints of real-time interaction.

In the context of oral literature in contemporary Africa, Raji-Oyelade's (78) collection and analysis of proverbs and their postproverbial forms have attracted attention of the users and learners of Yoruba language.<sup>6</sup> Arabic proverbs are taught in the class of literature from classical to modern period in the Department of Arabic and Islamic studies, University of Ibadan. The learners are engaged with proverbial exposition in the course of discipline (Arabic) and their mother tongues.

4 Borghetti, C. (2011). How to teach it? Proposal for a methodological model of intercultural competence. In A. Witte & T. Harden (Eds.), *Intercultural studies and foreign language learning*. Vol. 10. *Intercultural competence: Concepts, challenges, evaluations*. Oxford, England: Peter Lang. pp. 141–159.

5 Byram, M. (2008). *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship: Essays and reflections*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

6 Aderemi Raji-Oyelade (1999). "Postproverbials in Yoruba Culture: A Playful Blasphemy", in *Research in African Literatures*, in Vol. 30, No. 1 (77).

## 2 الأمثال العربية Arabic Proverbs

Arabic proverb, like any other languages' proverbs is deeper in meaning and it is used to explain and comment on subject matters. Omofoyewa (45) in his work, "A Literary Exposition of the Sources of Arabic Proverbs", demonstrates that proverbs excited the interest of the learned right from the inception of Arabic literature; historians and philologists vied with one another in collecting and explaining them. Indeed, to their works this generation owes most of the legendary and historical materials. Omofoyewa examines the main sources of Arabic proverbs vis-à-vis the Qur'an, the Hadith of the Prophet (ﷺ) and the gamut of Arabic literature, with a view to establishing their literary worth and values.<sup>7</sup> He argues that familiarity with the background of the proverbial expressions is very essential to comprehension since a number of them are so tied to the stories and tales around them. Bryam (13), in his review of different definitions of proverbs, demonstrates that much is known about proverbs, their function, what they sound like, their age, and the story behind them, but there is still much debate as to what exactly constitutes a proverb.<sup>8</sup> Countless people throughout history have attempted to categorize, better define, and structure the use of proverbs, yet little is known about the cognitive foundations of proverb production, pragmatics, expertise, emotion, or about the micro-cognitive aspects of proverb comprehension. There are different definitions of a proverb, such as a short saying in general use, held to embody a general truth or a condensed but memorable saying embodying some important fact of experience that is taken as true by many people (*The Free Dictionary by Farlex*), or a brief popular epigram or maxim (*Merriam-Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*), or a complex, intriguing, and important verbal entity. Other definitions view a proverb as a brief saying presenting a well-known truth that is popular and familiar to all (Bakalla, 1984)<sup>9</sup> or a child of experience passed on to us by our ancestors (Penfield & Mary, 1988).<sup>10</sup>

7 K.A. Omofoyewa (2013). "A Literary Exposition of the Sources of Arabic Proverbs", in *Journal of Humanities And Social Science* Vol. 15, Issue 5 (45).

8 Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

9 Bakalla, M.H. (1984). *Arabic culture through its language and literature*. London: Kegan Paul International.

10 Penfield, J., & Mary, D. (1988). Proverbs: Metaphors that teach. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 61(3), 119-128.

The focus of this paper is pedagogical, using Witte's action inquiry methodology (13).<sup>11</sup> I investigated how exposure to proverbs in the Arabic language among the students of Arabic Language and Literature in University of Ibadan transforms their perceptions and the values they hold of their indigenous language and how the new knowledge facilitates new understanding and insights into Yoruba cultural concepts. Two specific questions were asked: To what extent has the use of postproverbial in the Arabic language class shed light on cultural aspects not regularly covered in the Arabic language classroom? Secondly, to what extent the use of postproverbial in the Arabic language class promote a new understanding of the African culture among students and make them discover and reassess their own values and preferences?

The participants in this study were 300 level students (12 males and 3 females), in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, who were admitted in the 2015/2016 academic session for Arabic Language and Literature. As part of his or her course duties, each student was asked to present two proverbs in Arabic followed by discussion, on one aspect of the Yoruba culture. Based on the presentation, the classroom discussion, and a process of reflection, the student was asked to write a five-page statement on the topic. Both presentation and paper needed to start with a proverb that related to that cultural aspect. After choosing a proverb, the student was instructed to explain its words and meaning, how it is used, and whether the proverb translates directly into his or her mother tongue, Yoruba as well as English, the instructional language of the University. Then the students had to describe the cultural aspect that the proverb pointed to and further elaborates on it through additional reading and interviews with other speakers. After submitting their papers, students were asked to answer two open-ended questions about how this activity has enriched their cultural experience beyond the classroom and to what extent they have gained new understanding of Arabic culture and reassess their own values and preferences.

In this paper, the proverbs that were selected for studies, including the original Arabic writing, transliteration and translation in English, are used for simple analysis. The phenomenon of transformed proverbs in Arabic language is what I refer to as *Al-Ghuluwu fi al-amsal al-arabiy*. In his essay on

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11 Witte, A. (2011). "On the teachability and learnability of intercultural competence." In A. Witte & T. Harden. *Intercultural competence: Concepts, challenges, evaluations. Intercultural studies and foreign language learning*. Vol. 10. Oxford, England: Peter Lang. pp. 89-107.

the phenomenon in Yoruba culture, Raji-Oyelade (79)<sup>12</sup> describes it as “the effect of the interplay of orality and literacy-modernity, the critical correspondence between an older, puritanistic generation and a younger, disruptive, and somewhat banalistic generation”. Ten Arabic proverbs were selected for study, and students were requested to complete the second clause of the proverbs provided, depending on their understanding of the postproverbiality in Yoruba culture.

### 3 Postproverbial in Arabic Literature (*Al-Ghuluwu fi al-amsal al-arabiy*)

In this study, I refer to postproverbiality as *Al-Ghuluwu fi al-amsal al-arabiy* because of its rhetorical transformation among the students who thought the traditional Arabic proverbs do not meet the philosophy of modern times, but who believe that there is need for modification of certain proverbs to meet the values of their generation. Raji-Oyelade (80)<sup>13</sup> posits that postproverbial or supplementary proverbs can be defined as alternate creations derived from and which stand against traditional proverbs. Raji-Oyelade highlights the structure of postproverbial expressions into two proverbemes or clauses; the first part of it is referred to as the main or signal clause, while the second part is referred to as the completing clause. Further investigation is also made into Raji-Oyelade's proposition on different kind of postproverbials, which he categorized into four major types. For the better understanding of this paper, I translate into English the proverbs selected for study and also provide their transliterations. The proverbs examined showed that the students value the use of proverbs in the Arabic language and literature course which serves as an important educational tool and were ready to engage in the learning process. The students agreed that they have enriched themselves both linguistically and culturally beyond the course materials and class activities. They dealt with the proverbs that were selected for the study and presented in their course materials which are later discussed in the class. A fundamental issue to be raised is that how is *Al-Ghuluwu fi al-amsal al-arabiy* brought into modern Arabic studies. It was discovered that the perceptions of the students on the first clause of the traditional Arabic proverbs give them the hint on the completion of the second

12 Aderemi Raji-Oyelade (1999). “Postproverbials in Yoruba Culture: A Playful Blasphemy”, in *Research in African Literatures*, in Vol. 30, No. 1 (78).

13 Aderemi Raji-Oyelade (1999). “Postproverbials in Yoruba Culture: A Playful Blasphemy”, in *Research in African Literatures*, in Vol. 30, No. 1 (78).



aspect of the proverbs. Most of the participants have not heard about the selected proverbs for study. They completed each proverb in a radical approach in line with their own perception.

In my analysis, the first clause of the proverb that the participants are asked to complete is not underlined. This study is limited to Category I of the basic structure which is the most popular category and widely known among the students. Raji-Oyelade further divided this category into three sub-types i.e. Simple (*Pop* Type 1a), Complex (*Pop* Type 1b) and the Parallel (*Pop* Type 1c). The traditional proverb is indicated as TP, while the radical is referred to as PP in my analysis.<sup>14</sup> All the examples given in this work are standard Arabic and not colloquial, seven out of them belong to Category I of the postproverbial and the last example belongs to Category II. The underlined clause indicates the completing clause of the proverb mentioned.

#### Example 1

من أحرق كدسه تمنى إحراق كدس غيره  
(*man ahraqa kadsahu, tamana ihraaqa kadsa ghayrahu*)

**Meaning:** He who sets ablaze his own business, shall wish the same to others. (TP)

من أحرق كدسه فليتمنى لنفسه فقرا ابديا  
(*man ahraqa kadsahu, fali yatamana li nafishi faqran abadiyan*)

He who sets ablaze his own business, should wish himself an eternal poverty. (PP)

Comment: In the traditional Arabic proverb it is a perpetual usage that what a man wishes for himself he does it for the others. The word business is mentioned in the proverb, an economic activity which brings about the level of standard of living. If destruction can be done by the owner of a particular business to himself or his business, consequently, the same act can be transferred to the others. The thought of the participants changed radically at the level of the completing clause. The trend in the Yoruba environment of the participants where proverbs are said by the young generations in line with their thoughts reflected in the completion, "he who sets ablaze his own business," the participants completed it as "should wish himself an eternal poverty". There is a common phenomenon between business and poverty in Yoruba cul-

14 Aderemi Raji-Oyelade (1999). "Postproverbials in Yoruba Culture: A Playful Blasphemy", in *Research in African Literatures*, in Vol. 30, No. 1 (79).

15 Abu Fadl Al-Maydaani (N.D). *Majma'a Al-Amthal lilimaydan*, Makatabat Mishkat Al-Islamiyyah.

ture, a man without business is expected to taste eternal poverty in his life. The participants submit to the thoughts emanated from the living environment.

### Example 2

أشد الفاقة عدم العقل (TP)<sup>16</sup>

(*ashadu li faaqati 'adam al-aql*)

**Meaning:** The greatest poverty is **lack of intelligence**. (TP)

أشد الفاقة عدم المال (PP)

(*ashadu li faaqati 'adam al-mal*)

**Meaning:** The greatest poverty is **lack of intelligence**. (PP)

Comment: Intelligence prowess is the beginning of fortune in Arab and Yoruba cultures, this proverb encourages the acquisition of knowledge and seeking for wisdom which will lead to the progress and development of human race. The traditional Arabic proverb mentioned above showcases the significance of intelligence in humans; however, lack of it is believed to bring about poverty in life. The participants are acquainted with the modern thought that suggests that poverty is borne out of lack of money.

### Example 3

الضامن غارم الضحك بلا سبب من قلة الادب (TP)<sup>17</sup>

(*Adominu gharimu dhahak bilaa sababin min qilati li adab*)

**Meaning:** laughing without a reason is **senseless**. (TP)

الضامن غارم الضحك بلا سبب من بداية الجنون (PP)

(*Adominu gharimu dhahak bilaa sababin min bidayati li junun*)

**Meaning:** laughing without a reason is **the beginning of madness**. (PP)

Comment: It is irrational behavior to laugh without a particular reason in both culture as it appeared in TP, however, in Yoruba context, the commencing of insanity begins when someone is laughing without reason as it is found in the completing clause *من بداية الجنون min bidayati lijunun*.

Examples 4–7 given below are in line with examples 1–3 above, where the signal clause remains as it is rendered by the speakers of the language of the proverbs, whereas the completing clause is where the rupture takes place.

16 Abu Fadl Al-Maydaani (N.D). *Majma'a Al-Amthal lilimaydan*, Makatabat Mishkat Al-Islamiyyah.

17 Abu Fadl Al-Maydaani (N.D). *Majma'a Al-Amthal lilimaydan*, Makatabat Mishkat Al-Islamiyyah.

## Example 4

ما يأتي بسهولة يذهب بسهولة (TP)<sup>18</sup>

"*maa yahti bisu'ulatin yadhhabu bi suhulatin*"

**Meaning:** Whatever achieved with ease is gone easily. (TP)

ما يأتي بسهولة لا يشكر (PP)

"*maa yahti bisu'ulatin laa yushkar*"

**Meaning:** Whatever achieved with ease is not appreciated. (PP)

## Example 5

أحضر الناس جوابا من لم يغضب (TP)<sup>19</sup>

"*Ahdar naas jawaban man lam yaghdob*"

**Meaning:** The best answer will come from the person, who is not angry.

(TP)

جيدا أحضر الناس جوابا من يقرأ (PP)

"*Ahdar naas jawaban man yaqrah*"

**Meaning:** The best answer will come from the person who reads very well.

(PP)

## Example 6

إذا تم العقل نقص الكلام (TP)<sup>20</sup>

"*Idaha tamma al-aqlu, naqoso al-kalam*"

**Meaning:** More reasoning, less speech. (TP)

إذا تم العقل زاد التطور (PP)

"*Idaha tamma al-aqlu, zaada al-tatawur*"

**Meaning:** More reasoning, more progress. (PP)

## Example 7

اصبر تنل مرادك (TP)<sup>21</sup>

"*isbir tanal muraadak*"

**Meaning:** Be patient and achieve your objectives. (TP)

اصبر ثم تظلم (PP)

"*isbir thuma tudhlam*"

**Meaning:** Be patient and you will later be cheated. (PP)

18 Abu Fadl Al-Maydaani (N.D). *Majma'a Al-Amthal lilimaydan*, Makatabat Mishkat Al-Islamiyyah, p. 47.

19 Abu Fadl Al-Maydaani (N.D). *Majma'a Al-Amthal lilimaydan*, Makatabat Mishkat Al-Islamiyyah, p. 63.

20 Abu Fadl Al-Maydaani (N.D). *Majma'a Al-Amthal lilimaydan*, Makatabat Mishkat Al-Islamiyyah, p. 69.

21 Abu Fadl Al-Maydaani (N.D). *Majma'a Al-Amthal lilimaydan*, Makatabat Mishkat Al-Islamiyyah, p. 69.

**Example 8**

حب الوطن من الايمان (TP)<sup>22</sup>

(*hubu li watani minali iman*)

**Meaning:** Love of one's land is part of faith. (TP)

حب النفس من الايمان (PP)

(*hubu al-nafsi minali iman*)

**Meaning:** Love of one's life is part of faith. (PP)

Comment: This category of postproverbial is Category 11 of postproverbiality. Raji-Oyelade<sup>23</sup> asserts that the rupture (change) takes place at the signal clause, rather than the completing clause. The traditional Arabic proverb states how the love of one's nation is important to the extent of being part of faith. Radical thoughts of the students bring about what I refer to as *Al-Ghuluwu* at the signal or main part of the proverb which rendered thus, "love of one's life". The replacement of love of one's nation with love of one's life indicates the alternate creation which the thoughts or perceptions of values of the younger generation submit to in this contemporary period. The traditional Arabic proverbs selected for study became postproverbial with the new trend in Yoruba culture in particular. This consciousness undermines the traditional Arabic proverbs which Raji-Oyelade referred to as playful blasphemy among the Yoruba younger generation *Al-Ghuluwu*, therefore is an alternate creation derived from and which stand against the traditional Arabic proverbs. In the study of Arabic postproverbial, it is hoped that common ground can somehow be sought and recognized between traditions and radicals and also between Arabic and Yoruba vastly different cultures, and through that common ground, we can appreciate the mutual differences of peoples in a way that understanding of the participants is determined by modernity.

#### 4 Feedback

In response to the practice of *Al-Ghuluwu* in traditional Arabic proverbs, a participant commented on how joyful and fulfilled he felt in learning the nature of transformation in the two cultural languages of contact. Other participants explained that in preparation for their presentations and in addition to reading

22 Abu Fadl Al-Maydaani (N.D). *Majma'a Al-Amthal lilimaydan*, Makatabat Mishkat Al-Islamiyyah, p. 72.

23 Aderemi Raji-Oyelade (1999). "Postproverbials in Yoruba Culture: A Playful Blasphemy", in *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (81).

literary texts selected for the study, the first attempt was to study Yoruba proverbs in which their thoughts were radically changed. In this way, they gathered authentic cultural knowledge that is not available in their Arabic literary texts. They also mentioned that this kind of engagement with the Arabic and Yoruba proverbs complemented and built upon the cultural knowledge they acquired in the study of Arabic language at the University level, from their study of such other disciplines as Islamic Studies, Anthropology, English, Linguistics, and Communication and Language Arts.

Participants in this study also felt that they were able to learn from the wisdom demonstrated in Yoruba postproverbials such as “Eni to jin si koto, oju e lofo”, i.e. “He who falls into a pit is blind” the traditional proverb of which is, “Eni to jin si koto, ko ara yoku logbon” simply translated as “He who falls into a pit, teaches the others a lesson”. A considerable number of students indicated that in paralleling the Arab culture with their own culture, they realized similarities between the two regarding postproverbiality.

## 5 Conclusion

In my findings, this paper submits that traditional proverbs are inherently philosophical while postproverbials usually direct and more radical. It was discovered that the use of postproverbial in the Arabic language class shed light on cultural and radical aspects not regularly covered in the traditional Arabic proverbs and also the use of postproverbial in the Arabic language class promoted a new understanding of the Yoruba culture among students and made them discover and reassess their own values and preferences in the modern world. The most important finding was that engaging students with the illustration of postproverbials promoted reflection on how students relate to different values and such activity made students reflect in depth about their own beliefs and values.

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