

## **The Past as The Present: Social Transformations in Proverbial Expressions**

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### **Abstract**

The proverb is a wise saying based upon a people's experience and is a reflection of the social values and tradition of the people. The African proverb also serves a veritable medium for the projection of a variety of social goals. Traditional proverbs were communally owned with no known authorship. Postproverbials on the other hand are modern proverbs coined from existing proverbs or created from social interaction mostly in urban areas. These proverbs subvert traditional proverbs and are meant to elicit laughter at social gatherings. Postproverbials are not ethnic based and do not also have a known 'originator'. Most of the postproverbials are circulated in online communities. It should be emphasised that in both the traditional and modern context, the African proverb has remained relevant. The paper is inspired by the works of Aderemi Raji-Oyelade (1999, 2012) who describes postproverbials as "ultramodern alternative to the typical conventional proverb". The focus of this paper is to examine the tenets of the postproverbials used by comedians and entertainers in urban Warri and its environs in Delta State of Nigeria. Using the functionalist theory, part of the objectives of the paper is to analyze the socio-cultural content and context of postproverbials indicating the traditional proverb, its postproverbial and the pidgin version.

**Keywords: Proverbs, Postproverbials, Tradition, Pidgin Proverbs, Past, Present.**

## Introduction

contemporary situations and needs, especially for a generation that is becoming globalised and is worth two in the bush". Contemporarily, hybridized in culture. especially in conversational and comic contexts, The adaptability and improvisation of this proverb takes new forms such as: i. "One bird traditional proverbs to new alternatives breeds the for hand reach million for bush."; ii. "Keep your fascinating phenomenon of postproverbials which one bird well and catch the ones wey dey bush this paper delves into. Postproverbials are a join". The former makes changes to the initial contemporary twist on traditional proverbs proverb only in language (it uses pidgin) and the emerging within urban African societies. The quantity ascribed to bird, but retains the moral value current study explores postproverbials that are of contentment captured in it. However, the latter circulated in Nigerian online space, especially by alternative to the original proverb makes changes in comedians and entertainers in urban Warri and its the language, structure, and meaning of the proverb. environs in Delta State. A total number of twenty It promotes the idea of adventure and lack of postproverbs have been collected for the study, contentment with initial achievement. These from comic videos of some comedians: Real Warri recreations of the initial proverb portray the Pikin, Talking Drum, I go Die, Slim Saint, AY, phenomenon of postproverbials. Postproverbials are Akpororo, amongst others. These videos are "ultramodern alternative to the typical conventional sourced from comic entertainment events such as proverb" (Aderemi Raji-Oyelade p.). Proverbs, AY live shows, De9ja Spirit Talent Hunt, and more. according to Chinua Achebe, "are the palm oil with which words are eaten" in African societies (). It understand how postproverbials reflect and has long served as a repository of the people's potentially challenge traditional values within a indigenous wisdom, worldview, and heritage. The changing society, the role of humor and subversion social values, norms, knowledge and wisdom of their transmitting cultural knowledge in contemporary African societies are easily transmitted from one Africa, and how subversion of traditional proverbs generation to another through the proverbs that is a highlights the evolving nature of language and part of its oral traditions. As lubricating witty expression in urban settings. These needs stem from configurations that foreground conversational the observation that traditional proverbs which has situations, the proverbs retain their relevance by long been a cornerstone of African societies, lending themselves to recreations to suit offering timeless wisdom and reflecting the social

fabric of its various communities, currently exists in and potentially reshape social values in a rapidly changing African society.

With globalization, digitization and more, Africa is a currently a continent in flux, with rapid urbanization and social change. This raises an enthralling question: how are these transformations impacting the way proverbs are used and understood in urban African societies? The study responds to this question by delving into the emergence of postproverbials, a contemporary phenomenon where traditional proverbs are playfully subverted and reinterpreted, often for comedic effect. This trend is particularly interesting in urban environments like Warri, Nigeria, where comedians and entertainers are utilizing postproverbials to engage audiences. By examining the use of postproverbials in Warri, this work provides valuable insights into the ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity in African societies.

The work is inspired by the work of Aderemi Raji-Oyelade, who views postproverbials as a contemporary response to traditional proverbs. By focusing on Warri's urban environment, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how postproverbials function within a specific social context and how they might be employed for social commentary and entertainment. By analyzing the socio-cultural context and content of these postproverbials, alongside their corresponding traditional proverbs, this research seeks to understand how these modern expressions reflect

## Functionalism and the Evolution of

### Proverbs: A framework

This study utilizes functionalist theory to analyze the social transformations evident in the emergence of postproverbials in contemporary Africa. Functionalism, as articulated by theorists like Bronislaw Malinowski and Talcott Parsons, posits that social institutions and practices serve specific functions within a society, contributing to its stability and well-being. Applied to proverbs, this framework suggests that these sayings function to: i. transmit cultural values and norms: proverbs encapsulate the collective wisdom and morals of a society, guiding behaviour and promoting social cohesion; ii. maintain social order: proverbs can offer advice for navigating social situations, resolving conflicts, and enforcing expectations; iii. facilitate social control: proverbs can subtly reinforce power structures and discourage disruptive behavior. However, societies are not static. Functionalism acknowledges that social institutions adapt to changing circumstances. In this context, the rise of postproverbials can be understood as a functional adaptation of traditional proverbs to a rapidly urbanizing Africa.

### Postproverbial Discourse: A Review

The traditional definition of a proverb is offered by Achebe using another proverb: proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten. Ruth

Finnegan states proverbs as 'a feeling for language for imagery and for the expression of abstract ideas through compress and allusive phraseology' (2012:390). According to Ruth Finnegan, proverb 'is a saying in more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and salt and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it (2012: 383). Finnegan further accentuates the poetic qualities of a proverb. According to her, 'in addition to terseness and relative fixity, most sayings classed as proverbs are also marked by some kind of poetic quality in style or sense and are in this way set apart from more straight towards

Radicalized proverbial utterances which subvert the logic and the pattern of conventional proverbs, which supplement an essentially traditionalist imagination with an iconographic and modernist consciousness in order to exact a transformative and transgressive structure of the typical utterance.

maxims (1991:383). Postproverbials are By his definition, traditional proverbs are subverted imaginative revisions of traditional proverbs found and transformed as a result of modernity.

in different communication scenarios physically and Oral and written traditions have an interface. They in entertainment platforms on social media. Studies serve as repository of storing and transmitting have examined postproverbials from sociolinguistic, philosophical information. As observes by Walter feminist and philosophical perspectives. Among Ong (2002:171) 'reading a text oralizes it'. such studies are Akinwotu (2016) which examines Momaday (1984:37) also observes that 'it is in the semantic contents of Yoruba proverbs, Mieder and transmission over many generations of the essence Littovkina (1999). Ademowo and Balogun (2015) of human experience that makes oral tradition so examined the representation of sexuality and sex-powerful' Ong (2002:34) is of the view that 'in a related issues in the postproverbial expressions. primary culture...your thought must come into Charles Akinsete (2019) discusses the conceptual being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in misunderstanding of the post proverbial, and repetitions or antithesis, in alterations and Ahmad Kipacha (2019) focuses on the use of assonances...in proverbs which are constantly heard postproverbial on the Tanzania political space. by everyone so that they come to mind readily and

Raji-Oyelade (2012), which examined the which themselves are patterned for retention and emergence of postproverbials in a modern Yoruba ready recall, or in other mnemonic form'

society. In defining what a postproverbial is Raji-Oyelade (2012:2) writes that they are:

Culture is dynamic. In effect the traditional culture of telling proverbs by elders has in many

instances given way to the use or infusion of imported items as a result of urbanity and western education. With media technologies, there has also been a hybridization of traditional communication. New media through the use of the internet, youtube, facebook, telegram, twitter, whatsapp etc. enables various forms of digital contents which supersedes the traditional content. The latter tend to be localized in dissemination. Ademowo and Balogun also identified some sources of postproverbials to include talk-shows, sermons and speeches, music, film, music, drama among others (11). The postproverbial is 'situated in the subfield of transgressive paremiology, that is the collation, study and interpretation of alternate proverbs which are radical and parallel compositions instead of conventionally accepted and given proverbs in traditional societies. (Raji-Oyelade, 2012:27). Wolfgang Mieder also notes that 'changing times and situations require forms of expression that traditional proverbs can no longer supply'. (1993:58). Mieder (1997:3) describes the ambivalent usage of proverbs by politicians to

deliberately negate, manipulate or entertain their audience or voters to their advantage. Chinua Achebe is of the view that African literature (including proverbs) constitutes an avenue for 'exciting possibilities' (1973:99). Mieder's assertion speaks to the modern trend in the application of proverbs. Raji-Oyelade argued that the fixity of the traditional proverb is being questioned by a new tradition of 'supplementary proverbs' and he forges ahead to refer to such

supplementary proverbs can be defined as alternate creations derived from and which stand against experience, wisdom, and above all truth' (1985:11). He further added that the cosmopolitan imagination or the city who

'The varied use and function of proverbs as cultural signs and strategically placed rhetorical devices need to be investigated in much more detail by paying attention to different historical periods. Much can also be learned by socio- and psycholinguistic approaches that look at proverbs from the point of view of cognition, comprehension and communication. Above all, much more attention should be paid to the continued employment of proverbs in the modern age of technology, the mass media, the internet, and general globalization'

out of ‘deliberate reaction is to fragment the fixed2. **TP:** He who has gone far must not stop at the form of the proverb’ (76) leads to the creation of gate.

postproverbial. It should be not that postproverbial **PP:** It is the end of the journey that matters.

is not limited to Yoruba societies alone as our study **PV:** Our eye go see ninety-nine, we go still dey has shown. Raji observed that postproverbials arego. /We don see ninety-nine, na one wey ‘modernist recreations that are derived from and remain?

exist side-by-side in rather equal phonocentric**Meaning:** Progress should not be abandoned when status with traditional proverbs’ (76). success is near. The PV captures perseverance even at the final stage.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

Through a random sampling method, thirty-**Themes:** Perseverance; endurance; completion.

five postproverbs were selected from entertainers at**3. TP:** Respect is the oil that smoothens social gatherings and from online sources. Therelationships.

study offered the traditional proverbs and the pidgin **PP:** Respect has no birthright.

variants predominantly used by the entertainers. A **PV:** My respect for you/una na 100.

clear explanatory commentary on the meaning and**Meaning:** Respect sustains human relationships, themes of each set (TP–PP–PV) is given tobut it is not automatic; it must be earned and demonstrate how the various proverbial formsmaintained.

reconstruct meaning according to context. **Themes:** Respect; social ethics; reciprocity.

TP=illustrates traditional proverbs

**4. TP:** When the world tilts, even the straight road bends.

PP=illustrates postproverbials

**PP:** All fingers are not equal.

PV=illustrates the pidgin version

**PV:** Things no balance.

**1. TP:** It is with a dry mouth a man talks about what **PV:** Things no balance. **Meaning:** Life is inherently unequal and unstable; is serious.

**PP:** That word is pure fact; I no add emoji orimbalance is a natural condition of the world. **Themes:** Inequality; social realism; imbalance. laugh

**PV:** I no put water for mouth talk this one. **5. TP:** Wealth is the footpath of man.

**Meaning:** Serious matters are spoken plainly and **PP:** Man is not born merely to eat and drink.

without frivolity. The PP and PV stress sincerity **PV:** I come this life come fill zobo cup?

and truthfulness in communication. **Meaning:** Human existence transcends material consumption; life demands purpose beyond pleasure. **Themes:** Truth; seriousness; integrity of speech.

**Themes:** Purpose of life; materialism; existential reflection. **PV:** When elders climb up, them go dey see things well for down.

**6. TP:** The one who twists words hides the truth. **Meaning:** Elders possess wisdom gained through

**PP:** The one who befriends everyone is a talebearer. **Meaning:** aexperience that youth cannot easily acquire. The PP humorously challenges generational authority,

**PV:** Dey turn matter around like barber chair. while the PV restores experiential insight.

**Meaning:** Manipulating words obscures truth; distortion often masks dishonesty and gossip. **Themes:** Wisdom; age and experience; generational knowledge.

**Themes:** Truth versus deception; speech ethics; manipulation. **10, TP:** A child that looks down when elders counsel travels far in life.

**7. TP:** The rain does not choose one roof. **PP:** Follow a leader that knows the way to avoid

**PP:** Suffering is like a group chat; no one can mute it. long journey [in life].

**PV:** Hand touch everybody. / Everybody head full. **PV:** E no far, e no far, na so Moses take carry Israel trek for forty years. /Follow who know road (make you no lost for bush).

**Meaning:** Suffering is universal and unavoidable; hardship spares no one. **Meaning:** Heeding wise counsel shortens life's

**Themes:** Shared fate; communal suffering; human condition. **Meaning:** journey; ignorance and poor leadership prolong hardship.

**8. TP:** One who has accepted death fears nothing. **Themes:** Guidance; leadership; obedience;

**PP:** After the worst has happened, fear is uninstalled. foresight, delay/success in life; blind trust may be destructive.

**PV:** Death no dey kill who don die. (If all of us through with selling you go home (die)).

**Meaning:** Those who have confronted death or the market. **PP:** The world is a market place; so, leave me in

**Themes:** Courage; resilience; existential acceptance. **PV:** This world na pawpaw, them no dey wait for person.

**9. TP:** What an elder can see sitting, a child cannot see it even if he climbs on a tree. **Meaning:** Life is temporary and competitive;

**PP:** What the children can see when lying down, everyone has a limited time to fulfil purpose before death. The PP ironically resists existential closure, while the PV stresses life's indifference to elders make una dey climb.

individual delays.

depict the implication of excessive cheerfulness. It

**Themes:** Transience of life; mortality; urgency; results in misunderstanding of character and existential realism.

development of poor opinion about the person who

**12. TP:** When the fight is fierce the warrior laugh excessively. The moral in the proverb is overcomes the weak.

moderation and consciousness of the impression

**PP:** The weak can overcome the warrior with a one makes on others.

lethal weapon.

**Themes:** Appearance versus reality; emotional

**PV:** Na sense them take dey beat strongman. repression; mental health.

**Meaning:** Traditional strength does not guarantee victory; intelligence and strategy can overpower to run.

**15. TP:** The horse behind looks at the horse ahead

brute force. The PP modernizes power through

**PP:** The leading horse takes the first position.

technology; the PV foregrounds “sense” as social

**PV:** No be who fist start race dey win am.

capital. Sense signifies wisdom.

**Meaning:** Leadership and success are not

**Themes:** Power dynamics; intelligence versus strength; survival strategies.

determined by who starts first but by strategy and endurance.

**13. TP:** He who gives you advice is a friend.

**Themes:** Competition; leadership; patience; merit.

**PP:** He who gives you money for your rent is a friend

**16. TP:** He who falls into a pit teaches others a lesson.

**PV:** Na person wey help you be your friend.

**PP:** He who falls into a pit is blind.

**Meaning:** True friendship is proven by practical

**PV:** Person wey fall for pit go learn him lesson.

help, not mere advice or words. The PP shifts value from moral counsel to material support.

**Meaning:** Personal failure can educate both the sufferer and observers; experience is a harsh

**Themes: Friendship; materialism; pragmatism; social support.**

teacher. The PP satirically removes moral depth, while the PV restores it.

**14. TP:** He that smiles a lot, it is always hard to know when such a one is angry.

**Themes:** Experience; learning; consequence; wisdom.

**PP:** The person who smiles a lot is likely to be mad.

**17. TP:** A child who will not allow his mother to rest will himself stay awake.

**PV:** Too much of laugh na madness.

**PP:** A child who will not allow his mother to

**Meaning:** Excessive cheerfulness can mask danger, rest should be administered with Valium 5.

instability, or suppressed anger. The PP and PV

**PV:** Pikin wey no gree make im mama rest, go

exaggerate this by using the metaphor of madness to follow her do all night.

**Meaning:** Disruption invites reciprocal suffering; **Meaning:** Success depends on fortune and wisdom; troublemakers ultimately suffer the effects of their discernment complements luck.

actions. The PP medicalises discipline humorously, **Themes:** Destiny; wisdom; opportunity; judgment.

while the PV uses a religious metaphor of ‘all night’ **21. TP:** Partying never tires the dresser.

create an imagery where the leader and the laity **PP:** Partying never tires the dresser, not in the keep awake through the night. time of corona virus.

**Themes:** Cause and effect; discipline; **PV:** Party no dey tire pesin wey like to dress responsibility. well well.

**18. TP:** The hand of the child does not reach the **Meaning:** Those who enjoy celebration never tire rafter, that of the elder does not enter the gourd of preparation; the PP situates this truth within crisis

**PP:** The hand of the child does not reach the conditions.

rafter, only if he has not climbed the stool **Themes:** Pleasure; vanity; resilience; social

**PV:** If pikin no reach ceiling, na because e performance.

never learn how.

**22. TP:** So we may not be blinded by the tall,

**Meaning:** Limitations are often circumstantial, not pointed tree, one must watch from afar.

natural; effort and innovation expand capacity. **PP:** So we may not be blinded by the tall

**Themes:** Potential; empowerment; agency; growth. corona tree, it takes a salute from a distance

**19. TP:** Joint eating is not sweet if one does not **PV:** Pesin wey no wan blind, na from far e dey have it. look big tree.

**PP:** Joint eating is not sweet for one who is **Meaning:** Caution and distance ensure safety when stingy. confronting danger or overwhelming power.

**PV:** Follow me chop no dey work for pesin wey **Themes:** Prudence; foresight; self-preservation.

get tight hand. / Chop alone na to die alone.

**23. TP:** Washing the left hand with the right,

**Meaning:** Communal life demands generosity; washing the right hand with the left hand makes selfishness destroys collective joy. The PV adds a them clean.

moral warning about isolation.

**PP:** Washing the right with the left hand lays

**Themes:** Community; generosity; social ethics. off corona virus

**20. TP:** With the head(luck) we pick the good

**PV:** Hand wash hand, na so life take dey move.

walnut.

**Meaning:** Mutual support sustains society;

**PP:** With the eyes (senses) we pick the good cooperation ensures collective well-being.

walnut.

**Themes:** Reciprocity; solidarity; communal ethics.

**PV:** Na better head dey collect better kolanut.

**24. TP:** One’s palm does not betray the bearer



**PV:** Na where person power reach, na there he dey do reach. **PP:** Kindness done to an ungrateful person bears trouble,

**Meaning:** Entitlement without contribution is absurd; capability defines expectation. **PV:** No matter how bath pig, e go still enter mud.

**Themes:** Responsibility; merit; political satire. **Meaning:** Kindness to the ungrateful is futile; **32. TP:** A person that asks questions never misses character overrides effort.

his way. **Themes:** Ingratitude; human nature; moral realism.

**PP:** When a person enquires from an evil one, he's bound to be misled.

**PV:** Pesin wey dey ask question no dey lost.

**Meaning:** Seeking guidance prevents error, but sources of information matter.

**Themes:** Knowledge; discernment; moral guidance.

**33. TP:** Any time a person wakes up is the person's morning.

**PP:** When one wakes up late, one is a late-comer.

**PV:** Person wey get work to do no dey sleep till the sun rise.

**Meaning:** Time discipline is shaped by responsibility; seriousness determines productivity.

**Themes:** Time management; diligence; work ethic.

**34. TP:** The person you see in the sun today will be under the shade tomorrow.

**PP:** The person you see in the sun today will sweat.

**PV:** Person wey do anyhow go see anyhow.

**Meaning:** Actions determine future outcomes; today's behaviour shapes tomorrow's fate.

**Themes:** Karma; moral causality; accountability.

**35. TP:** The good done for the vagina is a waste; the more you wash it, the more it smells.

These pidgin proverbs operate as postproverbials themselves. They recontextualise traditional African wisdom within urban, humorous, and contemporary linguistic frames, while retaining core philosophical meanings about truth, endurance, respect, imbalance, purpose, manipulation, shared fate, and existential courage. Across all sets of proverbs above, the movement from TP - PP - PV demonstrates postproverbiality; revealing how traditional proverbs encode communal wisdom; postproverbials reinterpret them with irony and modern sensibilities; and pidgin versions localise the wisdom into accessible, urban, and pragmatic moral lessons. Together, they show how Nigerian Pidgin revitalizes African proverbial philosophy for contemporary social realities.

The sets of proverbs TP – PP – PV overlap themes and can be thematically grouped under nine (9) dominant theme groups each made up of three related themes: Truth, Speech, and Integrity

(proverb sets 1,6,30, 32); Perseverance, Endurance, and Completion (proverb sets 2, 15, 26, 29); Respect, Social Ethics, and Human Relations (proverb sets 3, 7, 19, 23); Inequality, Power, and Social Realism (proverb sets 4, 12, 27, 31); Wisdom, Knowledge, and Experience (proverb sets 9, 10, 16, 28); Purpose of Life and Existential Reflection (proverb sets 5, 8, 11, 29); Leadership, Guidance, and Direction (proverb sets 10, 15, 32); Character, Human Nature, and Moral Consequence (proverb sets 14, 24, 34, 35); Family, Identity, and Social Background (proverb sets 17, 25, 33).

The sets of proverbs in group one portrays values of sincerity, honesty, manipulation of words, and responsible speech; revealing the moral weight of words, and that truth demands clarity, restraint, and discernment. Proverb 32 depict the power of humility in learning from others. As the one who asks questions accepts that he does not know the way, thereby submitting to the leadership of the one being asked. The sets of proverbs in group two emphasizes the value of completing any task that one has started. They promote the values of patience and persistence, while revealing that life always rewards endurance and completion. However, the PP and PV for proverb 26 warns that patience must be intelligent, not blind. The proverbs in group three educates the society on human, social, and relational skills and ethics. It emphasizes

the need to support one another in society (pb 23), smoothen relationships through respect (pb 3), contribute to society while receiving from it (pb 19), and be considerate of others because bliss and sufferings are not personal, but goes around (pb 7). In group four, the proverbs highlight the place of wisdom in negotiating power and equalities. Proverbs in group five reiterate the process of indigenous knowledge acquisition: listening to elders (teachers), observation, attention, and action. Any lack in this process, as captured in the TP, PP, and PV of proverb 16 in ‘blindness’, regret, and being a negative example for others. In group six, there is a reminder about the transient nature of life, thereby invoking in the audience a sense of purpose and urgency in life’s tasks and goals. The proverbs in group seven teaches the values of directed and guided efforts as key elements in life’s pursuits. They supersede speed and competition, and prevents wasted efforts. The proverbs in groups eight and nine portray human nature and family dynamics respectively. The characteristics that define an acceptable nature in every being, according to the proverbs in group eight, are: moderation, discernment, humility, and carefulness. In the proverbs in group nine, the family is used as a metaphor and context to explore actions that define one’s identity in society. For instance, a troublesome child hurts itself by keeping awake (pb 17); one’s association (lineage) defines his identity (name) (pb 25); one’s wake up time (realization) is his morning (achievement) (pb 33). All sets of

proverbs: TP, PP, and PV demonstrate that across Akinwotu, Samuel A “ Proverbs of Yoruba: the time, proverbs still function as a vehicle of social semantic contents of Yoruba proverbs” *Essays on education, construction and reformation, while Language, Communication and Literature in Africa*, 2016:89

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### Conclusion

In our findings, we submit that traditional proverbs are inherently philosophical while postproverbials, though have some sense, are trivial and often infused with humour. Majority of the traditional proverbs can be recreated to reflect modern trend and idiosyncrasies. Re-inventing traditional proverbs at social gatherings make very light serious matters. This trend cannot be stopped as use of postproverbials is a response to the changing realities in urban centres. Laughter from an audience encourages the comedians to coin more of such postproverbials. In spite of this, it is imperative that the wisdom inherent in the traditional proverbs should be emphasised by users of postproverbs.

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