

*Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore*¹

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"I know the proverbs, but I
don't know how to apply them."

INTRODUCTION

LIKE other forms of folklore, proverbs may serve as impersonal vehicles for personal communication. A parent may well use a proverb to direct a child's action or thought, but by using a proverb, the parental imperative is externalized and removed somewhat from the individual parent. The guilt or responsibility for directing the child is projected on to the anonymous past, the anonymous folk. A child knows that the proverb used by the scolding parent was not made up by that parent. It is a proverb from the cultural past whose voice speaks truth in traditional terms. It is the "One," the "Elders," or the "They" in "They say," who direct. The parent is but the instrument through which the proverb speaks to the audience.

The impersonal power of proverbs is perhaps most apparent in the well-known African judicial processes in which the participants argue with proverbs intended to serve as past precedents for present actions. In European courtrooms, of course, lawyers cite previous cases to support the validity of their arguments. In African legal ritual, an advocate of a cause uses proverbs for the same purpose. Here clearly it is not enough to know the proverbs; it is also necessary to be expert in applying them to new situations. The case usually will be won, not by the man who knows the most proverbs, but by the man who knows best how to apply the proverbs he knows to the problem at hand.

The distinction just made is expressed succinctly in the remark of an Ibo youth, studying at the University of California at Berkeley, which we have quoted as an epigraph: "I know the proverbs, but I don't know how to apply them." He explained that his Western-oriented education in Nigeria had cut him off from the daily use of proverbs. Thus, while he did recall the texts of a great number of proverbs, he was not really certain as to precisely how and when they should be employed in particular situations.

STUDYING PROVERBS AS COMMUNICATION

The distinction between knowing and applying proverbs is of the utmost importance for folklore field work methodology. Specifically, it makes the difference between recording texts and recording the use of texts a critical one. Folklore is used primarily as a means of communication, and it is as communication that it needs to be studied. Yet this is virtually impossible with the common practice of recording just the texts alone, a practice consistent with the mistaken emphasis in folklore upon the lore rather than upon the folk.

In 1929 Roman Jakobson, in a joint essay with P. Bogatyrev, noted that folklore and language were somewhat analogous in that both are collective social phenomena with definite regularities of pattern. This type of conceptual framework permitted and in fact encouraged the study of folklore as a systematic code. If language could be studied structurally, folklore could also be so studied. Although, unlike linguists, folklorists have been slow to study their materials in this way, at least the theoretical possibility of the analysis of folklore as code was cogently stated in 1929, and it has been brought to the fore of anthropological attention by studies by such scholars as Lévi-Strauss and Sebeok.

Jakobson and Bogatyrev had suggested that in folklore there was an analogue to speech (*la parole*) as well as to language (*la langue*), inasmuch as there were particular, idiosyncratic, actual texts of folklore utilized by individuals. Recently Hymes (1962) has urged as a general perspective that to the study of linguistic structures must be added the study of the structures of acts of speech. The goal is not simply the delineation of the structure of language as an isolated symbolic system or code, but rather the attempt to discover exactly how language is used in specific situations. Moreover, the conception of the structure of language is extended to include the sequential structure of forms of messages, wherever such linguistic "routines" appear. This approach to the study of language in culture Hymes terms the "ethnography of speaking." In this type of study, one is interested in not only the rules of a language, but also the rules for the use of the language. The question is not only what is a grammatical utterance, but also when does one use one grammatical utterance rather than another. It should be obvious that the notion of the "ethnography of speaking" is extremely relevant to the study of folklore. Applied to proverbs, for example, it would be concerned with precisely the sort of rules that the Ibo youth quoted at the outset had not learned.

In order to study the ethnography of the speaking of folklore (or, ethnography of speaking folklore, more concisely), clearly one cannot be limited to texts. One needs texts in their contexts. One needs to ask not only for proverbs, and for what counts as a proverb, but also for information as to the other components of the situations in which proverbs are used. What are the rules governing who can use proverbs, or particular proverbs, and to whom? upon what occasions? in what places? with what other persons present or absent? using what channel (e.g., speech, drumming, etc.)? Do restrictions or prescriptions as to the use of proverbs or a proverb have to do with particular topics? with the specific relationship between speaker and addressee? What exactly are the contributing contextual factors which make the use of proverbs, or of a particular proverb, possible or not possible, appropriate or inappropriate?

Notice that such a study of context is not the same as the more generalized study of functions of folklore. One can say that proverbs sum up a situation, pass judgment, recommend a course of action, or serve as secular past precedents for present action; but to say this does not tell us what the particular function of a particular proverb used by a particular individual in a particular setting is. There is merit in prefacing a collection of proverbs (or of any other form of folk-

lore) with a discussion of the various general functions of the materials (cf. Turner 1960), but this does not substitute for the accurate reporting of contextual data.

In a way, it seems to be an absurdly simple request to ask that students of folklore record the contexts of their texts. Other anthropologists, taking for granted the call for context that Malinowski issued in Part II of *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (1935), may assume that this is done. But while the accuracy of the linguistic transcriptions of folklore materials has steadily improved, the situation with respect to contextual data now is very much like that deplored by Firth (1926:246)—even the best folklore field workers report only texts. If context is mentioned, it is discussed in general terms, not in terms specific to given texts. Thus, for example, in an important article on the “dozens,” the characteristic form of verbal dueling among American Negroes (Abrahams 1962), 30 texts are reported and 13 replies, but there is no indication whatsoever as to which reply goes with which text; and it is not possible to guess this sort of relationship. Again, Abrahams (1964:6) has argued that it is vitally important to present with any corpus of lore some analysis of the conflicts which exist within the culture that uses it. The point is a fine one, but what is needed even more is collection of the actual use of the lore in specific conflict situations. If, for example, a folklorist wants to study verbal dueling, he should not limit himself to selected texts of insults together with a general discussion of the techniques of verbal dueling. He should, if he can, and admittedly it is not an easy task, present an accurate transcription of a verbal duel. The sequence (cf. Miller 1952) and the intensity of a series of insults represent data essential for an ethnography of speaking folklore. To report data in this way clearly would not preclude the usual presentation of texts and the standard generalized analysis of the materials and their functions. Without such faithful recording of actual events, however, future analysts are deprived of an opportunity to see how folklore works.

With particular regard to proverbs, the techniques or “rules” for applying them cannot be studied unless actual instances of individuals applying proverbs to life situations are recorded. In the absence of ideal circumstances, which would consist of recording a representative variety of such instances, together with interviewing informants as to their judgments of such instances, informants can at least be asked to construct what they consider to be the typical and appropriate contexts or situations for individual proverbs, and to recall such instances as they can. If a person does know how to apply the proverbs, the chances are good that he can report and envision situations in which the proverbs have been or could be appropriately used. Herskovits used this technique effectively (without explicitly explaining the technique at the time) in his work with Kru proverbs (1930) and was so pleased with the results that he was later led to propose the construction of hypothetical situations by informants as a generally useful methodological device for all types of ethnographic field work (1950).

In principle, the more varied the contexts of a particular proverb that can be

recorded, the more likely it is that the proverb and its significance in the culture from which it comes will be understood. By the same token, one should record the informants' associations and comments with regard to the folkloristic materials. If there is oral literature, then there is oral literary criticism, that is, native, as opposed to exogenous, literary criticism. The shelves of folklorists are filled with explanations of what folklore means and what its value is, but few of these explanations and valuations come from the folk. Native literary criticism, which could be considered as an aspect of "ethno-literature," the latter being parallel to ethnobotany, ethnozoology, etc., does not eliminate the need for analytical literary criticism, but it certainly should be recorded as part of the ethnographic context of folklore, both for its own interest, and because undoubtedly native interpretations and valuations of proverbs influence the decision to employ a particular one in a particular situation. Recording the text of a proverb and the situations in which it occurs may provide sufficient data for correlating the two, but if the goal is the delineation of the rules for using folklore in a given culture, then collection of the interpretation(s) of a proverb by members of the culture is equally essential.

Like other short forms of folklore, such as riddles and jokes, proverbs could be made the subject of an ethnography of speaking folklore especially easily and profitably. For one thing, proverbs are readily used in situations in which there is close interpersonal contact, often serving to release tensions related to that contact.

Unfortunately, as we have noticed, most proverb collections consist of bare texts. Sometimes even the versions in the original language are absent. Often the meanings are not only unclear, but misrepresented inasmuch as the collector has succumbed to the worst kind of ethnocentrism, explaining a proverb in one culture by citation of a supposedly equivalent proverb from his own. This all-too-common tendency to translate a native culture's folklore into the collector's own makes most collections of proverbs of extremely limited value to serious students. Few collections are of the caliber of those made by Firth, Herskovits, Herzog, and Messenger.

Working in limited time and apart from Yoruba society, it has not been possible for us to complete a study observing all the canons specified above. A selection of Yoruba proverbs, however, can illustrate the useful information regarding context that is quite easy to obtain, even in less than ideal circumstances. One of the most important of the many uses of Yoruba proverbs is in the training of children, and twelve examples are chosen from that sphere. The relationship between use of proverbs and channel is discussed in a separate section. The Yoruba text of each proverb is given with literal translation in an appendix.

SOME YORUBA PROVERBS OF CHILD TRAINING

- (1) "One should not say in jest that his mother is fainting."

One important aspect of Yoruba child training has to do with teaching the child the proper sets of relationships to be maintained between himself and his

parents, his siblings, members of his lineage, and unrelated elders. The nature of these relationships, at least in terms of ideal culture, is more often than not communicated to the child by means of proverbs. Children are expected to be obedient and subordinate to parents. The proverb "One should not say in jest that his mother is fainting" is one that a parent may use to let a child know that there are certain topics which should not be made the subjects of jokes. The proverb is usually cited immediately after a child has said something he should not have said. Among the topics a child should avoid in jokes are the important personal events in his parents' life. If, for example, a father had quarreled with his wife at some previous time, his child is not supposed to refer to this quarrel or discuss it with anyone. Even if one of the parents alludes to the quarrel in the presence of the child, the child is still not allowed to indicate that he has knowledge of the quarrel. If the child later on becomes angry with one of his parents, he must still refrain from mentioning the event. If the child did ever refer to the quarrel, he might well receive the proverb as a reprimand. As with all proverbs, there are other possible contexts for this one. For example, if a friend joked to another by saying, "I heard you are planning to assassinate the head chief of your village," the other might reply with the proverb to convey the thought that there are some things which must not be joked about. In this event, the proverb would be used only if the person citing it believed that the original comment was intended as a joke. Literally, the proverb refers to fainting which is interpreted in Yoruba culture as a significant passage from the normal state of life to another state. Such a passage is serious business and it is one of those things one does not treat lightly. Figuratively, the proverb could refer to any event of the family's history which brought shame to the family. For example, if a child's parents were in debt, this would be a taboo topic for jokes. Thus, in a child-training context, the proverb helps teach the child at an early age to discriminate between those messages he should and those he should not utter regarding his parents, a distinction which would be of particular interest to someone doing an ethnography of speaking, or a sociolinguistic study correlating speaker and topic.

- (2) "Untrained and intractable children would be corrected by outsiders."
- (3) "If a man beats his child with his right hand, he should draw him to himself with his left."

The role of the proverb as an agent of communication is even more apparent in an actual case in which the parents of a child disagreed as to the amount of indulgence the child should be given. The mother, who felt that her child should be given more rather than less indulgence, told her husband that the child was young and foolish, and that because of this he should be given much indulgence. The husband remained silent for a few seconds and then replied with the proverb: "Untrained and intractable children would be corrected by outsiders." At this point, the wife responded by saying, "If a man beats his child with his right hand, he should draw him to himself with his left." In the first proverb, one finds expressed several important cultural values concerning

the education of children. The parents' obligation to give proper and adequate training to their child is conveyed by the word "untrained" (*àb̀f̀k̀óó*). The child's duty to obey the instructions of his parents is suggested by the word "intractable" (*àk̀óigb̀ó*). If the parent or the child fails to fulfill his or her respective obligations, the community at large might take action, which would be a socially overt recognition or indication of such failure. However, the second proverb frames the cultural expectation that while parents must take active steps to discipline their child effectively, they should also feel and demonstrate parental love for the child. That is what is meant by beating a child with the right hand and drawing him close with the left.

- (4) "The chameleon has produced its child; the child is expected to know how to dance."

In some instances, a child's parents might have given what they considered to be good training, but nevertheless the child may have turned out to be unmanageable. In such a situation, the parents would no doubt be unhappy, but in order to assure themselves and others that they had done their part, they might say to one another, to the child, or possibly to an outsider, "The chameleon has produced its child; the child is expected to know how to dance." This means that the parents have fulfilled their obligations in bringing the child into the world and rearing him. It is the child's responsibility to use his opportunities and abilities to the fullest extent. The proverb might be used in a situation like the following. If a child told a friend of his parents that he was foolish, the friend would be annoyed inasmuch as a child is supposed to respect all those who are his elders. The friend would almost certainly tell the parents about the incident. (It is unlikely that the child would have uttered the insult in the presence of his parents.) The parents would assure their friend that appropriate disciplinary action would be taken. Later they might address the chameleon proverb to the offending child to tell him how displeased they were with his conduct and to remind him that his behavior at that point was his, not their, responsibility.

- (5) "Do not be like me; a thief's child takes after its parents."

- (6) "The offspring of an elephant cannot become a dwarf; the offspring of an elephant is like the elephant."

Yoruba parents do have responsibility with respect to their own behavior in the child training context. They are expected to do more than simply bring up their child in accordance with cultural norms. They are supposed to be good examples for the child. As evidence for this, there is a proverb which a parent might cite whenever he felt the other parent fell short of being a good example for their child. The proverb would be used to inform the guilty spouse of his mistake. In the proverb "Do not be like me; a thief's child takes after its parents," there is an explicit indication of the importance attached to parental example in the education of a Yoruba child. Suppose a father who quarrels with his siblings strikes them when he gets angry. The child sees this and later when

he becomes angry with one of his brothers or sisters, he hits him. The father, observing the child's behavior, is upset and he admonishes the boy not to do such things. When the father complains to the mother about the boy's actions, she might reply (not in front of the child) with the proverb to communicate the idea that if he is disturbed about what the child is doing, he should remember that he himself is the model for the child. It should be noted that this proverb is not limited in its use to indicating only the effects of bad parental example. It may also be used to show the effects of good parental example on the child. Essentially the proverb is an expression of the strong Yoruba belief that the parental influence to which a child has been exposed has a great deal to do with the type of person he ultimately becomes. The same concept is somewhat differently expressed in the proverb: "The offspring of an elephant cannot become a dwarf; the offspring of an elephant is like the elephant."

- (7) "If you talk of cutting off somebody's head in the presence of a child, he will always be staring at the man's neck."

Another type of parental responsibility which is an integral part of Yoruba child training has to do with the kind of conversation parents carry on in front of their child. On one occasion, the senior members of a Yoruba family were engaged in an evening conversation in the presence of their child. The young boy's father was talking about a neighbor in a very destructive manner. The boy was listening with unusually keen attention. The boy's mother noticed this and she became nervous and impatient as she listened to her husband. Soon, her patience ran out, and she suddenly sent her son on an errand. While the boy was away, she said to her husband, "If you talk of cutting off somebody's head in the presence of a child, he will always be staring at the man's neck." With this proverb from the wife, the destructive talk about the neighbor immediately ceased. This is an excellent example of the proverb as communication, and in fact as most effective communication. But what exactly is being communicated? If a parent expresses his bias about a person or refers to what he considers to be a fault in the person *in the presence of his child*, the child will always remember this bias or alleged fault whenever he sees the person in question. The proverb is urging that the parent take care not to transmit his personal bias to his child.

- (8) "We use a closed fist for tapping our chest."

With regard to the relationship between a child and his siblings, proverbs play an important role in showing how one child should behave towards another. Yoruba parents are very anxious to have unity among their children and they believe that a lack of such unity would have a serious disruptive effect upon the family's solidarity. They are, therefore, constantly on guard to insure that sibling unity is encouraged. A situation where there has been some evidence of intersibling rivalry or conflict will probably elicit a proverbial comment from a parent or older relative. For example, suppose one of two or three brothers is courting a girl. Ordinarily the other brothers visit the girl to show their interest in their brother's life and to display commendable family unity. If, how-

ever, the brothers fail to do this and either of the parents notices this, he might urge them to visit the girl by saying, "We use a closed fist for tapping our chest." In this proverb, one finds reference to traditional gestures. Inasmuch as gestures are often functionally equivalent to proverbs (in that they summarize a situation, pass judgment, or recommend a course of action), this is not surprising. The "closed fist" is an expression of unity and strength, while tapping the chest with the fist is a characteristic gesture indicating boasting. The gestural message is that unity is a desideratum of which the family is proud and furthermore a family without it is in no position to boast.

- (9) "A child trying to act like an older person will find that his age gives him away."

The importance of the principle of seniority and relative age in Yoruba social structure and verbal behavior has been described in detail by Bascom (1942). These factors are definitely manifested in the relationship between a child and his younger or older sibling. A younger sibling is expected to be deferential to an older child. It should be realized that it is not just that age is crucial with respect to Yoruba interpersonal relationships, but that its influence upon a particular relationship is in some sense never-changing. A younger brother is at and by birth destined to be a younger brother. But it is not just relative age which is fixed. There is apparently a notion of absolute age, especially in regard to the cultural distinction between child and adult. The suggestion that age is an almost absolute regulator or indicator of behavior, impossible to escape, is made in a proverb: "A child trying to act like an older person will find that his age gives him away." This might be cited in a situation in which a child was trying to act like an older person, but the child because of his age was unable to act properly. Let's say a boy gets married at a relative yearly age (e.g., under 20) or a girl (under 15) does this and the marriage does not work out well. An older person, perhaps the parent, might comment either to the child or to someone else upon the unhappy marriage by quoting the proverb which would convey the opinion that the child should have waited to get married until he was old enough.

- (10) "A white fowl does not know it is old."

- (11) "When a child acts as a child, a man should act as a man."

If a younger child is criticized for trying to act older than his years, so also is an older child criticized for acting like someone younger than his years. In a situation where an older sibling has fallen short of his obligations towards one or more younger siblings, he may be chastised for his failure. When the parents are not at home, for example, the oldest child is expected to assume the responsibility for the other children's acting properly. He is also supposed to see that the children do not hurt themselves. If for any reason he is careless, and one child goes outside to a place where he is ordinarily not permitted to go, and if the child hurts himself, the oldest child will be censured by the parents upon their return. Had the senior sibling fulfilled his responsibilities, the younger child

would not have been hurt. The parents might say, "A white fowl does not know it is old," or more probably "When a child acts as a child, a man should act as a man." Both these proverbs could also be used appropriately in contexts in which an adult does not act as an adult should. The significance of a white fowl depends upon the fact that white chickens are culturally regarded as distinct from red, black, and other color chickens. White fowl are used solely for sacrificial and ritual purposes, although the sacrificial chicken is eaten by the participants after the ceremony which has been prescribed by a diviner. The proverb suggests that the white fowl does not comprehend its higher status with respect to other chickens. Thus the proverb could be used in a situation in which an elder (not necessarily with white hair) does not appear to know, or act in accordance with, his privileged position relative to younger individuals. The second proverb is more hortatory in that it implies that a child cannot help acting as a child, which places the burden of regulatory responsibility squarely upon the shoulders of oldest sibling present.

(12) "The hand of a child cannot reach the high shelf, nor can that of an older person enter a calabash."

In Yoruba culture, there is not only a principle of seniority (Bascom) but also a principle of reciprocal responsibility. The young have a responsibility to the old and the old have a responsibility to the young. More concretely, the child has obligations to his parents; the parents have obligations to their child. The younger sibling has obligations to older brothers and sisters; the older sibling has obligations to his younger brothers and sisters. The interdependence between an individual and his elders is metaphorically rendered by the proverb: "The hand of a child cannot reach the high shelf, nor can that of an older person enter a calabash." For a child to reach his goal, the aid of an elder is essential. Things which children cannot do for or by themselves must be done for them by their elders. On the other hand, there are tasks which elders can perform only with difficulty if at all. For such tasks, children are expected to serve their elders. The proverb might be employed in a situation like the following. An uncle (paternal or maternal) asks a nephew, or any older individual asks a younger one to go on several errands such as fetching water from a pond. The youth does this many times. Then one day, the younger person asks the older for a favor. He sees that the older person has some pineapples and he asks to be given one to eat. The older person refuses. The following day the older person asks the younger to go on another errand, but the younger refuses to go. Later the older one is talking to another person of the same age as himself, not necessarily a relative, and he complains of the younger person's behavior. The third party responds by quoting the proverb as a means of explaining the appropriateness of the youth's conduct.

Notice how pale are the explanation of the proverb and the analytical phrase about principle in comparison with the proverb itself. Folklore is both communication and art. It has been studied as art more than as communication. Yet if it is studied as communication, its artistic qualities should not be over-

looked. Even in translation, this last proverb offers proof that there is art in the communication.

DISCUSSION

Much more might be learned about the import of each of these proverbs and the conditions governing their use through field study in an indigenous setting. Some provisional observations, however, can be made here.

Apparently the most important Yoruba rules for the use of proverbs have to do with the identity of the participants in the speech situation. It is the identity of the addressor which seems crucial for the genre to be used at all, and the identity of the addressee, or audience, which seems crucial to the appropriate use of a particular proverb.

Regarding the genre as a whole, the main consideration seems to be the age of the person speaking relative to the age of the addressee. The speaker is normally older for some proverbs, equal in age for others. Some proverbs might be appropriate to either case. Younger persons are not wholly excluded, but Yoruba etiquette dictates that a younger person's use of a proverb in the presence of an older person must be marked by a prefatory apology. The standard politeness formula runs something as follows: "I don't claim to know any proverbs in the presence of you older people, but you elders have the saying. . . ."

Of the present examples, it seems safe to say that an elder person would probably address numbers 8, 9, 10, and 11 to a younger person; e.g., a parent might say them to his child (but the elder need not be a parent). In contrast, numbers 3, 5, 6, 7, and 12 would be more likely to be addressed by an elder to another elder person, e.g., by a husband to his wife or by an adult to a friend or relative. Numbers 1, 2, and 4 could be used by either seniors to juniors or by age equals.

The topics or situations which might appropriately elicit a proverb are primarily concerned with a younger person's behavioral responsibilities toward his elders and an elder's behavioral responsibilities toward younger individuals. Numbers 1, 4, and 8 refer to a child's obligations to his family; numbers 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 refer to a parent's obligations to his child; and numbers 9, 10, 11, and 12 refer to behavior proper to one or the other or both. It is clear that the identity of the addressee is crucial with regard to whether a particular proverb is appropriate or not. For example, a child would most probably be a suitable addressee for numbers 1 and 8, but a child would rarely, if ever, be the addressee of numbers 3 and 7. In fact it is doubtful whether number 7 would be used to any addressee if the child in question were even present. The point is that the presence or absence of individuals other than the principal addressee may be an important factor governing the use of particular proverbs in speech (but not in drumming).

The use of proverbs is not restricted by need for knowledge of any special code other than the Yoruba language itself, so far as we know. Neighboring or other foreign languages are not, for example, used, as they are among the Jabo (Herzog 1945) for purposes of concealment and mocking, so far as our data go.

Nor is use of proverbs conditional upon skill in creative and adaptive change in message form. By the very nature of fixed-phrase genres of verbal art, the messages are culturally standardized in form and content. The creativity and adaptation lie rather in the successful application of these traditional materials to new situations. The relation between use of proverbs and channel, however, requires special consideration.

PROVERBS AND CHANNEL

Although most proverbs are transmitted by speech, some on occasion are communicated by drums. The type of drum (there are more than twenty different types of Yoruba drums) which is very often used to transmit proverbs is the "dundun" described by Bascom (1953). Although drummed proverbs may be used to insult an individual (especially in struggles for political office or for coveted titles), generally drumming is a channel of communication utilized for ceremonial purposes, such as a funeral, a marriage, a naming ceremony, or the installation of a chief. Proverbs may be drummed on any of these occasions so long as the particular proverb is deemed appropriate by the drummer or by the person hiring the drummer, appropriate in terms of the particular situation and the particular addressee. It is, however, somewhat less likely that proverbs would be used as often in funeral ceremonies as in happier events such as marriages.

Certain families specialize in drumming and the skill is passed on within the family (Laoye 1954). Part of the training in drumming is the accumulation of both a large store of proverbs and the knowledge of the appropriate occasions for their use. Thus drumming is a channel not equally available to all members of Yoruba culture. However, a nondrummer could ask a drummer to drum an honorific or congratulatory proverb for a friend's marriage. The drummer receives payment for this. With regard to a drummed proverb honoring a marriage, the nominal addressee is considered to be the bridegroom, not the bride. (This is related to the bias inherent in Yoruba patrilineal social organization.)

The techniques of drumming generally and drumming proverbs specifically are too complex (Bascom 1953) to be adequately treated here, but, essentially, suprasegmental patterns are extracted from the spoken versions of the proverb and the addressee is able to recognize the proverb whether he actually articulates the segmental phonemes or not. By moving the left arm by which the drum is held, the shape of the drum is varied, hence the tone is varied. The relative pitch differences and the rhythmic sequence of the drum tones are culturally perceived as being similar to the tone sequence found in particular proverbs (as is not the case among the Jabo according to the ethno-theory of Herzog's informants [Herzog 1945]).

- (13) "It will in no way hurt him if it falls upon him. A tree which fails to hold up a person when he leans against it will in no way hurt him if it falls upon him."

This proverb is one of several which are possibly more often drummed than spoken. The proverb would be most appropriate in a situation in which a person

dismisses the possibility of another person's being able to do him harm. For example, suppose a boy asks an older relative for money to attend school. The elder promises to support the boy. Later the elder fails to provide this support. Then the boy may bitterly complain to a friend about this relative's action or lack of it. The friend tells him that he shouldn't talk that way about this relative, because he might find out and as a result he might try to make trouble for the boy. The boy might then reply with the proverb to convey the idea that anyone who was too feeble to help another was surely too weak to be able to do that person any harm. In this context, the proverb would be spoken, not drummed. The situation, in part, determines the channel.

A situation in which the proverb would be drummed rather than spoken might be one like the following. A man is seeking a title, such as chief. A friend who has money and influence in the community promises to use them in his behalf. However, when the time comes, the wealthy man fails to honor his promise. The title-seeker is angry and he complains to many people about this breach of faith. Some of these people warn him about speaking ill of such an important person and some point out possible dangerous consequences, such as the rich person's using his influence against him. The would-be chief decides to hire a drummer, and he directs him to drum the proverb in order to tell the people of the community that in his opinion, since the man had shown himself to be too weak to live up to his pledge to support him, he was clearly in no position to hurt him, even if he did use his influence to oppose the attempt to get the title.

One extremely interesting aspect of the relation between channel and proverb concerns the effect of the former upon the form of the proverb. One might conjecture, for example, that it may be more than coincidence that the drummed proverb mentioned above has in Yoruba a clear ABA form, a form which is also common in Yoruba songs as well as in other traditional materials communicated by drum. Moreover, the ABA form is not common in spoken Yoruba proverbs.

Another proverb which is drummed more than it is spoken has the same ABA form.

(14) "It is palm-oil that I carry. Person bearing rock, please don't spoil that which is mine. It is palm-oil that I carry."

This proverb is used to refer to situations in which one person has something of great value whose worth could be totally destroyed by the act of a thoughtless person. The proverb might be drummed in a situation where an important person with a good reputation is threatened by an irresponsible young man with no reputation. The latter envies the important man's position and prestige and he seeks to spread malicious rumors such as that the man has taken bribes. Thus a man who has a reputation worth little is in a position to destroy the fine reputation of an honorable man as pieces of rock can ruin palm-oil. The threatened man might hire several drummers and tell them of the situation, but in this case perhaps he might not indicate the specific proverb to use. One of the drummers decides to employ the particular proverb because he judges it to be appropriate.

If there is a definite correlation between channel and proverb form, this has

important theoretical implications. For one thing, it would suggest that stylistic studies of folklore genres without taking channels into account might be misleading. What folklorists think is chance variation may in fact be a reflection of channel alternatives. The correlation could also provide a way of gleaning information from the scores of bare texts already reported. It might be possible, for example, to tell from the form alone that a particular Yoruba proverb could have been transmitted by drums.

As mentioned in the preceding section, the presence or absence of particular individuals is not important if the channel selected is drumming rather than speech. Drumming is a public, speech a private, channel. In terms of addressees, drumming is nonexclusive, speech exclusive. Spoken proverbs would normally be addressed to an individual or to a relatively small number of individuals. Drummed proverbs, in contrast, would be addressed to a larger group of individuals or to one individual in that situation where it was important that the message be made public. This latter factor suggests that situational circumstances are more crucial than addressees with respect to the selection of drumming as a channel for proverbs. In any event, the investigation of differences in a single genre of folklore as it is communicated in diverse channels represents a potentially rich area of inquiry.

CONCLUSION

If folklore is communication, then the ways in which it is used as communication must be taken into account. The study of folklore should include both the study of lore and the study of folk. The study of lore alone without reference to the folk by whom it is used is incomplete and may even be misleading. To borrow from a recent American indictment of the commercialism of Christmas ("Let's put the Christ back in Christmas"), we might urge: "Let's put the folk back into folklore."

PROVERB TEXTS

In the following texts, standard Yoruba orthography is employed. Two tones are indicated as: High Tone (/), and Low Tone (\). The phonetic equivalents of Yoruba orthography include: ɛ is e, ʃ is š, p is kp, and ɔ is ɔ. The reader is reminded that many collections of proverbs made by folklorists and linguists consist of just what is presented in this appendix. If the reader seriously doubts the necessity of collecting context, let him ask a non-Yoruba friend what some of these proverbs mean.

a ki fi iyá ɛni dákú ʃeré
we not use mother one faint play

- (1) "One should not say in jest that his mother is fainting."

àbíikó àkoigbó ode ni o ti kó ogbón wá ilé
untrained intractable outside is he have learned wisdom come home

- (2) "Untrained and intractable children would be corrected by outsiders."

bí a bá fi ọwó òtún na omo ɛni a fi òsì fà á móra
if we should use hand right beats child one we use left draw him to self

- (3) "If a man beats his child with his right hand, he should draw him to himself with his left."
 agemo bí omo rè ná ài mo jó di owó rè
 chameleon produces child his already not know dance becomes hand his
- (4) "The chameleon has produced its child; the child is expected to know how to dance."
 maşe fi iwà jo mí omo olè ni olè jo
 do not use behavior resembles me child thief is thief resembles
- (5) "Do not be like me: A thief's child takes after its parents."
 omo àjànàkú ki ya rará omo tí erin bí erin ni njo
 child elephant not becomes dwarf child that elephant born elephant is resembles
- (6) "The offspring of an elephant cannot become a dwarf; the offspring of an elephant is like the elephant."
 a ki sòrò orí bíbé lójú omodé lórùnlorùn ní ima
 we not talk head cutting before child at the neck is will
 wo olúwarè
 look the person
- (7) "If you talk of cutting off somebody's head in the presence of a child, he will always be staring at the man's neck."
 àgbájo owó ni a fi nsò àyà
 together fist is we use tap chest
- (8) "We use a closed fist for tapping our chest."
 bí omodé bá fé şe ise àgbà ojó orí rè kò jé
 if child happens want do deed elder day head his not allow
- (9) "A child trying to act like an older person will find that his age gives him away."
 adie funfun kò mo ara rè ní àgbà
 fowl white not know self his as elder
- (10) "A white fowl does not know it is old."
 bí omodé bá nşe omodé àgbà a ma şe àgbà
 if child happens doing child elder he will act elder
- (11) "When a child acts as a child, a man should act as a man."
 owo omodé kò tó pepe owó àgbàlàgbà kò wo àkèrègbè
 hand child not reach shelf hand elder not enter calabash
- (12) "The hand of a child cannot reach the high shelf, nor can that of an older person enter a calabash."
 b' ó wó lu ni kò lè pa ni
 if it falls hits one not can kill one
 igi tí a f' èhìn tí tí ko gba ni duro
 tree that we put back lean that not hold one stand
 b' ó wó lu ni kò lè pa ni
 if it falls hits one not can kill one

- (13) "It will in no way hurt him if it falls upon him. A tree which fails to hold up a person when he leans against it will in no way hurt him if it falls upon him."

epo ni mo rù
palm-oil is I carry

oníyangí ma ba t' emi jé
rock bearer do not — mine — (ba + jẹ = spoil or ruin)

epo ni mo rù
palm-oil is I carry

- (14) "It is palm-oil that I carry. Person bearing rock, please don't spoil that which is mine. It is palm-oil that I carry."

NOTES

¹All the Yoruba proverbs cited in this paper were contributed by Arewa, who learned them about 1945 in his native village of Oke-agbe in Western Nigeria. He also provided the translations and explanations of the proverbs. The authors are indebted to Dell Hymes for invaluable comments and suggestions.

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