

A SURVEY OF ANIMAL IMAGERY IN NIGERIAN PROVERBS

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Abstract

Proverb is a very integral part of African rhetoric. It serves varied functions ranging from admonition, satire, and praise. They mirror the society and justify societal issues. Nigerian proverbs are mainly derived from plants and animals due to the fact that the people's abode are close to certain natural phenomena like land, seas and forests. Animals play vital roles in Nigerian folklores, especially in the aspects of folktales and proverbs. Hence, animal imageries abound preponderantly in Nigerian proverbs. The random use of animal imageries in proverbs have some implications in Nigerian societies. The thrust of this paper, therefore is to identify some of the animal imageries which are prevalent in the proverbs of the following Nigerian societies- Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, explain their meanings and their implications as social facts in Nigerian society. Data for this study are gathered from discourses among elders who are fluent speakers of some of these Nigerian languages. More data are abstracted through non-participant observation. The analysis of this study reveals that there are lots of animal imageries in Nigerian proverbs. The study also reveals that animals such as 'goat' *ewu* (Igbo), 'akuya' (in Hausa), *ewùré* (Yoruba) tortoise *Kunkuru* (Hausa), snake *agwo* (Igbo), maciji (Hausa), ejo (Yoruba) feature in Nigerian proverbs. The essence of animal imagery in Nigerian proverb is to mirror what obtains in the society.

Key words: proverbs, imageries, animals, survey.

Introduction

In Nigerian society, there are various modes of education target at different classes of people in the society. Amongst children and youths, the use of folktales, tongue twisters, riddles and jokes and some idioms are very common. On the other hand, proverbs, anecdotes and some other idiomatic expressions are mostly used among adults.

Proverb is a very important part of Nigerian folklore. In Nigerian societies, proverbs are not just mere utterances for entertainment or amusement; rather proverbs carry enormous authority and meanings with them. Hence, Nigerian proverbs could be seen as rules of life, tools for sanctions, satire, praise, education and discipline in the society. It is also worthy of note that in most Nigerian societies, proverbs are not deployed by everybody. In Nigerian society such as Yoruba and Igbo, proverbs are mainly appreciated when used by certain groups of people in the society, which are the elders. In such societies, proverb is a medium for discuss and interactions among elders. Achebe captured the essence of proverbs thus:

Having spoken plainly so far, Okoye said the next half a dozen sentences in proverbs. Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten (Achebe 1958: 6)

In most Nigerian societies, it is expected that every adult is familiar with the use and interpretations of the proverbs. Hence proverbs are not normally interpreted after they are rendered. The following African proverbs substantiate the above claim. The Igbo will say- *Onye a tũrọ ilu kọwara ya, mata na ego e jiri lụọ nne ya lara n'iyi* 'If a person is given the explanation of a proverb thrown to him, the bride price paid on his/her mother's head is useless'. In kikuyu, it is said that 'we speak by proverbs. He who is intelligent will understand'. While Ashanti proverb has it that when a proverb is given to a fool he will demand for the meaning. Implying that proverbs are not meant to be interpreted.

Most of the Nigerian proverbs make use of animal imagery as a tool for conveying them. Animals have continued to be key players in Nigerian literature. Animals feature in idioms, folktales, legends, myths. In fact, they mirror African societies. Following Adejumo (1985: 451)

Diop, similar to la fontaine, the seventeenth century French fabulist who used animals to instruct human beings, used animal characters for a unique effect through his presentation. Their role as archetypes is supremely manifest, for example, 'Leuk-le-lievre' is rabbit, 'Bouki' is fox and 'samba-de-la-nuit' is Tom Thumb and most of these characters play in similar role in different countries.

The focus of this study therefore is to identify some of the animals that feature in Nigerian proverbs, the animal imageries contained in them, and their implications in the Nigerian society. Data for this study are abstracted from participant and non-participant observations, extant compilations of proverbs, internet sources and live discourses.

Animal as a mirror

Animals have always been used in Nigerian folklore to mirror what obtains in Africa societies. In most Nigerian societies, animals (characters, actions and utterances) are very symbolic in their folktales. For instance in most Igbo folktales, tortoise is symbolic of either greed or wisdom or even craftiness. Anyachebelu 2019 studies symbols contained in Igbo animal tales. The study concludes that there are lots of symbols contained in the Igbo animal tales which are very vital in Igbo society because they mirror what obtains in the Igbo society and they are very useful tools in the training and indoctrination of the younger members of the society.

Emenanjo (1977: xvi) throws more light on the symbolic nature of animals characters in Igbo folktales thus:

Perhaps it may not be out of place to point out that all the animal characters are symbolic of one thing or the other. Mbekwu, the ubiquitous tortoise without whom no folk-telling session is complete represents *àmàmihe* (wisdom) in the widest sense of that word. Down-to-earth and as selfish as Mbe might be, and occasionally trapped to stew in his own juice, he always exploits his wisdom and the folly of his co-animals to wriggle out of the tightest corners. Agụ (the Tiger) stands for strength and agility, Atụ (the Rhino) for monstrosity; Enyi (the Elephant for unruffled strength, hugeness, and the ultimate in any series, Egbe (the Hawk) is indicative of agility and ruthlessness; Ûgò

(the Eagle) represents beauty and excellence while Èbùlù (the Ram) is the stock figure for strength and extreme innate endurance, and so on.

Some animals are held in high esteem in Nigerian culture. Most Nigerian proverbs hinge on animals' behavioural pattern to express their meanings. Some semblances can be seen in the character traits of humans and animals and much can be learnt by man from this. Hence, most African proverbs hide under different animals' characteristics or manner of behaviour to pass messages of great importance to members of the society. The Holy Bible also makes some analogy between animals and humans. In some of the bible portions, God used animals to describe human traits. For instance, in 1 Peter, the Bible uses 'a roaring lion' to liken to the devil, who can make noise but has no power over God's children, 'Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour' (1 Peter 5: 8). A lion is a wild animal that usually look for and attack other animals especially; when they are alone. That is when they are separated from the other animals. In the same vain, the devil attacks God children that have wandered away from the fold. In another instance, the Bible also uses ant to symbolize hard work and diligence, 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise' (Proverbs, 6: 6). Ants are animals that work diligently, especially in the dry season. Hence, the Bible uses such illustration to dissuade people from laziness and idleness.

Furthermore, some animals are totemic in African culture. Such animals are highly revered and are not to be harmed, rather they are to be protected and taken proper care of. Some of such animals include python, snake, and tortoise.

Laye (1959) gives a clue to the African belief in totemic animals; while the author's mothers attempts explaining to him the status of a particular snake in their community thus: "My son, this one must not be killed: he is not as other snakes, and he will not harm... 'This snake', my mother added, 'is your father's guiding spirit' Laye (1959: 15).

"When he was within reach, my father would stroke him with his hand, and the snake would accept the caress with a quivering of his body; never did I see the little snake attempt to do the slightest harm to my father... when my father felt that he had stroked the snake enough, he left him alone; then the snake would coil himself under the edge of the sheep-skins on which my father was seated..." (Laye, 1959: 21)

In Idemili Local Government Area of Anambra State, pythons are revered and even worshipped by traditionalists. This, Achebe (1964) captures in *Arrow of God*, through the mouth of Moses, one of the earliest converts. Following Achebe (1964) Moses narrates,

'One day six brothers of Umuama killed the python and asked one of their number, Iweka, to cook yam with it. Each of them brought a piece of yam and a bowl of water to Iweka. When he finished cooking the yam pottage the men came one by one and took their pieces of yam. Then they began to fill their bowls to the mark with the yam stew. But this time only four of them took their measure before the stew got finished.'...

‘The brothers began to quarrel violently, and then to fight. Very soon the fighting spread throughout Umuama, and so fierce was it that the village was almost wiped out... The remaining six villages seeing what had happened to Umuama went to a seer to know the reason, and he told them that the royal python was sacred to Idemili; it was this deity which had punished Umuama. From that day the six villages decreed that henceforth anyone who killed the python would be regarded as having killed his kinsmen’ (Achebe 1964: 48).

It was the same sacred snake that Oduche, Ezulu’s son puts into the box due to his new religious belief. This is seen as abomination. Hence, Ezidemili sends a messenger to Ezeulu with the following message. ‘Ezidemili wants to know what you are going to do about the abomination which has been committed in your house’ (Achebe 1964: 54-55). It then becomes obvious that certain animals are very totemic in Igbo society.

In discussing the status of animals in Urhobo culture, Nabofa (1980: 220) says “Animals form root of names, they are revered and in some cases, are forbidden for consumption. Totemism a feature of traditional Urbobo religion varies from one polity to the other”. Ohwovoriole (2000: 193) toes the same line of thought as she points out that “Every totem animal is regarded as sacred and is not to be killed, harmed or eaten. They are connected with mysterious stories”.

The thrust of this study though is not majorly on totemic animals rather on animal imagery in some Nigerian proverbs and their functions in the society. Discussion on totemic animals in Nigerian society is very imperative for a proper understanding of this study. Again, a proper understanding of the culture of a particular people and the condition or situation of deploying a particular proverb is very essential before a proper understanding of such proverb could be arrived at.

Animal imagery in proverbs are one of the means through which various Nigerian societies impart morals, wisdom, ethics, knowledge and ideologies to the members of the society. Through animal imageries, the society is also mirrored. The proverbs aid in understanding the Nigerian past and also serve as atlas for the Nigerian future. The proverbs address various issues relating to human life ranging from family, children, marriage, women, hard work and any other thing of importance to human existence. Following Adejumo (1985: 446) an African writer in French while commenting on Malinke proverbs wrote, ‘The short stories, maxims and proverbs, ritual chantings, all the rhythms reflect this wisdom which the groits, to a large extent, are qualified as well as vigilant preservers.’

Related works on proverbs

Many scholars have looked at proverbs as they relate to the different Nigerian societies. Ojoade (1985) probes the issue of African traditional ethical education and national discipline through the use of evidences from African proverbial. The study reveals that proverbs are the unwritten ethical laws of Africans who do not only make use of them but seriously believe them, follow

them and propagate them with demur. It concludes that proverbs constitute a vehicle for teaching discipline.

Emenanjo (2008) in his study uses examples from Igbo proverb to express proverbs as picturesque speech. His study reveals that proverbs are used in re-creating and re-enacting total Igbo worldview or experience in allusive phraseology and powerful images built on morphemes' words, phrases and sentences and all their accompanying sounds and phonological features. The study concludes that it is the use of above mentioned features, among others, that make Igbo proverbs, like proverbs elsewhere, such picturesque artifacts and mentifacts of human language.

Ohwovoriolè's (2008) study is on the animal imagery in selected Urohobo proverbs and their educative functions. The study reveals that proverbs, beyond their literary aspects have always served the purpose of teaching and education. And that more generally, they have served as media of expression of commonly held views and wisdoms. The study concludes that the totemic proverbs make up part of the stock of Urohobo proverbial wisdom. Hence Urohobo people use such proverbs as sources of instruction and as mirror of their philosophy of life.

Addei & Addei (2010) take a look at the portrayal of African women in Akan proverbs, wise sayings and folktales. Their analyses reveal that apart from some proverbs that uphold female subordination, that there are many others that celebrate women such proverbs that celebrate women portray them as industrious, compassionate and key players in the society. The study then concludes that a well-articulated programme to teach the values, attitudes and beliefs about womanhood should be taught to Africans from infancy following Umoren (1995).

Okoli's (2012) study is on the use of Igbo proverbs in conflict resolution. The analysis of the study reveals that proverbs, as a form of figurative communication, are found to possess potentiality of resolving conflicts among individuals in the society.

Okwechime & Ezejideaku (2012) reflect on the concept of African time through some selected Igbo proverbs. Their study reveal that time in Africa, especially among the Igbo of Nigeria is not perceived as something relative; a kind of continuum that is quite asymmetrical with Eurocentric clockwise concepts. That Igbo perception of time as captured in their proverbs reflect what may be regard as the right concept of African time; a time that is not based on slavish adherence to the dictates of the clock.

From the above literatures reviewed, it is obvious that it is obvious that this study is an expansion on Ohwovoriolè's (2008) work. Her study focuses on animal imagery in Urohobo proverbs. The present study focuses on animal imagery in four African cultures, namely Hausa, Akan, Yoruba and Igbo. The present study has a wider coverage than Ohwovoriolè's study.

Animal Imagery in Some Nigerian Proverbs

In this section, I will do a survey of some animal imageries in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba proverbs. The literal meanings and the explanations of each of the proverbs are given as well as the implication of such animal's imagery in the various African societies.

Animal Imagery in Hausa Proverbs

Proverb is known as *kain magana* in Hausa. Just like in many other African societies, animals play vital roles in Hausa everyday life as well as in their folklore. Some of the Hausa proverbs with animal imageries are discussed below:

1. Itwe me so mma minni bi nti na atwe mmienu nam

Literary meaning: It is for 'watch over me while I eat' that two antelopes walk together

Explanation: The imagery of the two antelopes alludes to collaboration and partnership as against unhealthy competition and rivalry.

2. Da kukan kura da bacewar akuya duk daya ne

Literary Meaning: The cry of a hyena and the loss of a goat go hand in hand.

Explanation: In Hausa traditional life, the greatest threat to a goat is hyena. Whenever the cry of hyena is heard, it implies that a goat stands a risk of losing its life. It's assumed that the laughter of a hyena heralds the death or disappearance of a goat.

3. Mai akuya ya yi tafiyar dare, ballé mai kura?

Literary meaning: The owner of a hyena should not be afraid to travel by night, if the owner of a goat travel by night without fear.

Explanation: The relationship between *akuya* 'goat' and *kura* 'hyena' is the fact that hyena preys on goat, especially at night. Therefore, if the owner of *akuya* is able to travel at night without fear, what then should stop the owner of *kura* 'hyena' (which is not at danger) from doing same.

4. Me ya gama kifi da kaska?

Literary meaning: What will bring a fish and a tick together?

Explanation: Fishes cannot survive outside water. In fact, the natural habitat of a fish is water. Alternatively, tick lives on a dry environment. Their habitats are diametrically opposed to each other; therefore, it is expected that they live and operate at different domains.

5. Kunkuru ya so dambe ba shi da yatsha

Literary meaning: The tortoise wishes to have a fist-fight but lacks fingers.

Explanation: Tortoise as an animal has no fingers, hence cannot form his hands into a fist.

6. kowa ya ga shamuwa da kunshinta ya ganta

Literary meaning: Everyone who sees the raven knows it by its red legs

Explanation: Everyone has some peculiarity by which they are known.

7. Ba a yiwa biri burtu

Literary meaning: You don't disguise to a monkey.

Explanation: You don't get the best of a person by going about it the wrong way.

8. Ba a yiwa biri burtu.

Literary meaning: You don't disguise to a monkey.

Explanation: You don't get the best of a person by going about it the wrong way.

9. Fawa biyu tana bata hankalin kuda

Literary meaning: Two pieces of meat confuse the mind of a fly.

Explanation: To hesitate between two things or two courses.

10. Zakara a rataye ya yi koto?

Literary meaning: Can a cock sling by both legs peck at corn?

Explanation: Can I do it in my present situation?

Animal Imageries in Igbo Proverbs

Proverb is called *ilu* in Igbo. Just like other Nigerian society discussed above, most Igbo proverbs contain animal imageries as shown below:

11. Ka a bja ka abja mere awo e pughj odu

Literal meaning: It is procrastination that denied toad the opportunity of growing tail

Explanation: It is the belief of Igbo people that if not for the attitude of procrastination by the toad, it would have grown tale while the other animals grew theirs.

12. Okuko chi umu anaghj arahu n'elu osisi

Literal meaning: A hen rearing chicks does not sleep on a tree.

Explanation: Naturally, a hen that is rearing chicks is always around them. It is always very vigilant and watchful over the chicks. It does not leave the chicks and go far in search of food. Hence, even when the need arises for it to climb, it does not sleep on the tree for the sake of the chicks.

13. Aku fechaa o dara awo

Literal meaning: After flying, the winged termite falls for the toad.

Explanation: The winged termite after its endless nuptial flight falls down for the toad that does not have the ability to fly and becomes food for the toad.

14. Onye nwere nkakwu bechalata ya onu, ka onye nwere awo zopja ya afo

Literal meaning: Let the owner of a shrew cut its mouth short while the owner of toad should reduce its stomach.

Explanation: The long mouth and the protruding stomach occupy spaces that would have been occupied by some other animals. They constitute nuisance to other animals. Therefore if the length of shrew's mouth is reduced and toad's stomach reduced, there will be some more spaces for other animals to occupy. It will make for more comfort for other animals.

15. Ukpama okpoko buuru, ntj chiri ya.

Literal meaning: A grasshopper swooped by hornbill is hard of hearing.

Explanation: This means that people should always pay attention and heed to warnings and instructions; because before a hornbill could swoop, there would have been some audible sound.

16. Nkita nwere ndidi na-eri azu ukpoo

Literal meaning: Dog with patience, eats the *ukpoo* fish

Explanation: Nkita nwere ndidi na-eri azu ukpoo

17. Ehi na-enweghi odudu, chi ya na-achuru ya ijiji

Literal meaning: Cow without tale, its god drives away flies for it.

Explanation: It is God that drives away the flies from the cow with an amputated tail.

18. Oke soro Ngwere maa mmiri okoo Ngwere, O g aghi ako oke

Translation: If the rat allows itself to be drenched in water, in emulation of the Lizard, when the body of the lizard dries, the body of the rat will not dry.

Explanation: It is dangerous to do things just because other people are doing it or because it is fashionable, Destiny is not the same.

19. Onye uchu rie ogwumagala, o ju anu.

Literal meaning: If a gluttonous person eats a chameleon, he/ she rejects meat

Explanation: There is end to covetousness as a result of unexpected experience/s.

20. Oke nwuru n'ime akpa osikapa, ihe gburu ya abughi aguu, kama o bu oke nri.

Literal meaning: The rat that dies inside a bag of rice is not killed by hunger, rather he is killed by over eating.

Explanation: The rat that suffocated inside a bag of rice did not die as a result of starvation but due to gluttony.

Animal Imagery in Yoruba Proverbs

There are many taboos, rituals and myths relating to animals in Yoruba culture. Proverb is called òwé in Yoruba. Some of the Yoruba proverbs with animal imagery are examined below.

21. Kí okùnrin ma tilòkiobinrin pa á kí

Literal meaning: If a man sees a snake and a woman kills the snake, the ultimate is the snake not to escape.

Explanation: This proverb means that it does not matter who carried out a task/an assignment, so far the task/assignment is done; and eventually the goal achieved.

22. A kì í ru ẹran erinlórí kí á maa fẹsẹ wa íhò irè nilè

Literal meaning: You cannot carry an elephant and at the same time be digging a cricket hold.

Explanation: This proverb means that once one has something valuable/precious, the person should completely over-look the trivial things.

23. Àkèrè pète iyẹ iyá olódò ò fún un

Literal meaning: Striped frog wishes to have feathers but mammy water/marine waters prevents it from having it.

Explanation: Nature has endowed each creature with peculiar qualities which they do not have the ability to alter or change. The meaning of this proverb is that some creatures wish they are like some other ones, but they are restricted by nature.

24. Ẹnì tí ò sí nilé ni ewúré rẹ ń bí òbúko.

Literal meaning: The animal (goat) of a person away, usually give birth to he goat.

Explanation: The meaning is that one's absence constrains one to accept whatever he/she is offered/given.

25. Kóòsà ó tó pa iyá àkókó, ọmọ rẹ a tí tó igi í sọ

Literal meaning: Before the god kills the adult woodpecker, its children should have been able to peck the tree.

Explanation: This stands for the need for continuity.

26. Òròmọdiye kò màwòdì, iyá rẹ ló màşá

Literal meaning: The chick does not know the hawk only its mother knows the hawk.

Explanation: There is need to watch and learn from older people as they have acquired some knowledge through age and experience to avoid a disastrous result or end.

27. Gbogbo alangba lo d'anu dele, a ko moeyi t'inu nrun.

Literal meaning: All lizards are lying flat on their stomach; hence, it is difficult to point out which has a stomach ache.

Explanation: Outwardly, everyone may appear the same, but each person has various degrees of challenges that they are battling with, which may not be obvious to other people.

28. Eni bama m'obo akoko se bi lagido.

Literal meaning: To get at a monkey, you must behave like one.

Explanation: There are certain situations that requires an individual to behave in a particular manner, just for the person to achieve his/her aim.

29. Bi Esin ba dani gùlè ã tun gun ni.

Literal meaning: If a horse falls somebody, what we do is to climb it again.

Explanation: When a plan or an opportunity fails, there is need to retry; one should not easily give up. There is need for perseverance in anything.

30. Proverb: Díè díè nimú ẹ̀lédẹ̀ fi ń wọ̀gbà.

Literal meaning: It is little by little that the pig's nose enters the yard.

Explanation: Attend to small matters, to avoid their escalating to bigger issues.

Analysis of Animal Imageries

In example one, the imagery of two antelopes, moving together, one watching over the other as it eats. The imagery of the two antelopes alludes to collaboration and partnership as against unhealthy competition and rivalry. The implication is that when people collaborate, do things together, and supports themselves in the society, it makes for more productivity and healthy relationships. The antelopes stands for communal life pattern that is operative in African societies; where each person is always on the watch out of the welfare of the others. The implication is that when people collaborate, do things together, and supports themselves in the society, it makes for more productivity and healthy relationships.

The imagery of a crying hyena and a missing goat is showcased in example two This proverb aims at countering of people that attempt to give a dog a bad name to harm it. It is not always the case that something that causes harm should be blamed or accused anything evil takes place. The evil could be from a different source. The implication is that issues should be properly verified before apportioning blames or punishment in order not to punish an innocent person. As it is alluded to in the proverb, the mere hearing of the laughter or hearing the cry of a hyena is not enough to conclude that any dead goat at that time is killed by the hyena. Furthermore, it serves as a caution to people that indulge in evil to desist so that they will not be indicted for what they know nothing about due to previous negative actions.

In example three, the imagery of *akuya* goat and *kura* hyena are presented. Hyena is a nocturnal animal whereas goat is not. The implication is that if someone that is less likely to do something is able to do it, he who is at an advantage is not expected to give up on it. The imageries here stand as a big challenge and motivation for people in the society who easily give up on tasks handed over to them or people who always look for flimsy excuses for failure.

Example four gives the imageries of a fish an aquatic animal and a tick a land animal/insect. Again a fish is an animal but a tick could be regarded as an insect. The implication is that there should not be any reason and room for unhealthy rivalry or completion in the society since people's gifts and talents differ. There should be no basis for comparison between two unrelated entities or people or for unhealthy rivalries in the society. These animal imageries serve as checker for individuals in the society who for no justifiable reasons are always in the habit of attacking themselves, fighting and opposing themselves due to positions and other things; when there is no basis for such. People should identify their various areas of callings and strengths and pursue and develop them instead of envying another in their own callings or gifts.

Example five showcases the imagery of a fingerless tortoise attempting to fist-fight. The implication then is that no matter anybody's condition in the society, such a person should not

lose hope on life. No matter one's limitations, the person should continue to persevere. This is summed up in the English adage, "once there is life, there is hope."

In example six, there is the imagery of red-legged raven. This symbolises the fact that each individual in the society is a unique entity and should be accommodated as such.

Example seven contains the image of a monkey. The implication in the society is that there is no room and need for pretense; and trying to gain attention or success through the wrong channel.

Example eight shows the imagery of a fly in the midst of pieces of meat. The imagery of a fly in this proverb symbolizes some members of the society at a state of indecision. Some people in the society always find it difficult to decisions.

In example nine, there is an imagery of a cock that is hindered by a string that is tied on both of its legs. In the society, people should learn to take decisions in haste. It is always good to appraise situations before taking decisions to avoid running into problems. Reckless decisions and actions should be avoided through proper planning and calculations.

The imagery of a monkey, a wild animal and a person attempting to disguise in order to get hold of it is seen in example ten. The implication in the society is that things should be done appropriately in the society; there is no need for cutting of corners. Transparency, uprightness and straightforwardness should be encouraged in the society.

The imagery of a toad as an animal without tale is seen in example eleven. One of the Igbo folktales has it that toad was always in the habit of laziness. He did things at odd times, usually when the other animals are done with theirs. One day, God announced that the animals should come for their tails after carrying out their morning chores. As usual, the other animals woke up early and went to the stream to fetch water and went to meet God for their tails. An Igbo adage has it that '*a naghị amụ aka ekpe na nka*' "left hand is not learnt at old age'. It was after the other animals collected their tails that toad woke up that morning (as was his habit). Before he came back from the stream and went to the venue of meeting with God, God had left, hence, he was unabl to collect his own tale from Him. That is why up till today, toad has no tail. The implication of this animal imagery is that people should desist from the habit of procrastination and laziness and learn to do things at the right time. People should appropriate every available opportunity whenever such opportunity come their way. This is because as the saying goes "Procrastination is the thief of time".

The imagery of a hen protecting its chicks with its feathers is shown in the proverb in example twelve. In Igbo society, children are of greatly treasured; children are not neglected or abandoned. Members of the society are ready to do anything, including taking risks for the wellbeing of their children. The implication of this, is that it is important for people to always take responsibilities in the society. Every member of the society is responsible for something/somebody or is responsible to somebody. When each person in the society carries out his/her duty responsibly, everything will move smoothly, the society will thrive and it will be better for it. On the contrary, *okukọ ajọ agwa na-ebi n'osisi*. 'A hen with bad character lives on

tree'. This is to say that there are still irresponsible people in the society; who are careless about themselves, other people and the things going on in the society.

Example thirteen contains the imageries of winged termite and a wingless toad. The winged termite can fly but toad cannot fly; yet, at the end, the termite becomes food for the toad. The implication is that people should learn to let go of unnecessary striving, quarrelling, rancour, acrimony or greed. Whatever that is meant to be, will surely be not necessarily through quarrels or strife but allowing nature to take its course. People should learn to be patient. It is also used on the negative side against the termite for a lady who is over selective when it comes to marriage.

Example fourteen contains the imageries of a shrew with a long mouth and toad with protruding stomach. That is to say that anyone that has a bad behaving child should restrain/control/reorient the child for the good of the society. Furthermore, every individual should also look inward to deal with any attitude or character that is capable of hampering the peace and progress of the society. The implication is that the sanity of the society is a collective responsibility. If every member of the society curbs their excesses, the society will be more habitable for all. But the attainment of this calls for communal effort.

Here in example fifteen, the imageries of a grasshopper and hornbill are shown. This proverb stands as a caution against inattentiveness. The implication is that one should always be at alert against danger.

Example sixteen shows the imagery of a dog and a bony type of fish. Dogs feed on bones, hence it is only the dog that exercise patient that can identify the bony fish and eat it. The implication in the society then, is that it is only a patient person that will enjoy the goodness of a particular location. No matter how long it takes, a patient person will eventually get to his/ her goal (destination). This is a kind of motivation for people to keep moving on in spite of odds. Anybody that persevere to the end will eventually be for victorious at the end. Patience is great virtue.

Example seventeen shows the imagery of a cow without tale. Cows attract lots of flies that strive to pick up crumbs from them. In the process such cows experience lots of discomfort. The natural provision that the cow uses as defence is the long tail that it wags in its bid to drive away such flies. Some cows lose their tales as a result of accident or birth defect. This Igbo proverb holds that such cows that have lost their natural defence, and cannot be assisted by their human lenders, rely on God for protection from such marauding creatures. The implication then is that even when situations make someone not to reach an expected or desired end; such a person should not give up on himself/herself or even life in general as God knows how to come to the person's aid.

In example eighteen, there is the imagery of a drenched lizard as against a drenched rat. The lizard by nature is structured in manner that what does not have negative effect on it, even when it falls into it while rat does not enjoy such benefit. Hence, if a rat should join the lizard in running into water, lizard's body will eventually dry but the effect of the water on rat will be very disastrous. The implication of the rat and lizard's imagery in the society is that that Playing

to the gallery is very dangerous, as the popular view point may not be the credible one. One may not understand the background of someone else's action, hence, trying to live like the Jones's can produce untold counterproductive dividend. There is no competition in destiny. That which works out for a person may not work out for another. Remember that the design of God for one's destiny or his blue print for one's life may not be the same as that of someone else that one may be competing with. There is no competition in destiny. Such unnecessary and unhealthy competition will most likely put the person's life in jeopardy.

There is an imagery of a chameleon, a sluggish and easily underrated animal. Eating such animal will in no doubt result in some damages. The proverb serves as a caution against covetousness, lust or enticement. For instance, if a young girl is living an immoral life, and along the line gets pregnant or contracts a sexually transmitted disease. If she embarks on an abortion and comes out alive or survives the sexually transmitted disease. The most likely thing is for such a lady to caution herself from living a wayward life.

In example twenty, there is the imagery of a dead rat inside a bag of rice. Rat is one of the animals that causes havoc at homes by tampering with edible items at home. They eat food stuff, hence it will be ridiculous for a rat to die due to hunger while inside a bag of rice. Rather the likely assumption will be that the rat has died out of over feeding. The implication in the society is that people should desist from over indulgence as a result of the availability of life's goodies within ones disposal. People should learn to live in moderation.

In example twenty-one, the imagery of a visible snake seen by both man and woman is portrayed. The implication in the society, is that people should focus on making sure that responsibilities and tasks are carried out; rather than focusing on who carried out the task/responsibility.

In example twenty-two, imageries of an elephant, (a big animal) and a cricket, (a small ant) are show-cased. Elephant is the largest of all the living land animals; whereas a cricket is of small size in comparison with the elephant. Elephant stands for a serious business or task; while cricket represents a less serious, business or task. The implication in the society is that more important things/matters/issues should not be given up at the expense of less/unimportant ones.

In example twenty three, the imagery of a featherless frog is seen. Implying that no matter how one tries, there are limits to what people could go; because if wishes were horses beggars would ride. But wishes are not horses, therefore beggars are not riding.

In example twenty-four, the imageries of a he-goat and a she-goat are seen. Once somebody is absent at the point of decision taking or sharing things, of which such a person ought to be present; whatever decision that is taken at the persons absent is also binding on him or her. The person is not excused due to his/her absence. Again, the female goat stands for people in the society who are at the receiving end due to the carelessness or nonchalant attitude of other people. These people suffer for no faults of theirs. The implication is that every person in the society should play his/her role for the smooth running of the society.

In example twenty-five, there are the imageries of adult wood pecker and the baby wood pecker. The baby wood pecker stands for continuity, nature has all that is needed for human continual existence on earth.

Example twenty-six contains the imageries of the hawk, the chick and the hen. The hen due to experience and age understands that the hawk is not a toy to be played with; rather that it is an animal to be cautious of. The chick as a result of inexperience and age is not aware of this, hence if not protected is prone to fall into danger. People should take their time to observe and to learn because experience is the best teacher and as the Igbo will say, *o buru onye uzo wee sibe ite n'aka ya enwe nkponkpo aya*, 'anybody that began to cook before the other obtains more broken or used items than the others'.

In twenty seven, there is the imagery of various lizards lying on their bellies. The implication is that people in the society undergo different kinds of challenges and problems; though outwardly all may appear to be the same or to be well.

Twenty eight contains the imagery of a monkey being pursued. Monkey is a wild animal which cannot easily be cut without some kind of expertise and trickery. Hence, anybody that wishes to get hold of it alive or dead must apply some tactics. The implication in the society is that people should always condescend low to the levels of the other members of the society for a harmonious existence.

The imagery of a horse whose occupant has fallen is x-rayed in example twenty nine. Horse is used for transportation, especially among royalties. Peradventure, in course of the journey the passenger falls off the horse; it is expected that such a person climbs on the monkey again in order that the journey be continued. Therefore the implication of the horse imagery is that it is not over, until it is over. It is important that people imbibe the virtue of perseverance, in spite of the obstacles or challenges that come their way.

In example thirty, there is the imagery of a pig attempting to enter a yard. Pig is an animal with a wide nose, in order to have access to a narrow passage, it must take its time. It must be very careful in doing that. The implication of this animal imagery is that people should be careful in handling trivial matters, so as not allow them to escalate. Catch the little foxes before they destroy the vineyard. Attend to a small problem before it becomes bigger and more difficult to handle.

All the animal imageries contained in the proverbs employed in this study stand for characters and actions found in Nigerian societies. Through the use of the animal imageries, one or two things will be learnt concerning the society; its people, culture, belief and value systems. Including how the individuals in the society relate amongst themselves. The animals are carefully selected and adapted by different Nigerian societies to mirror what obtains in such cultures.

Conclusion

The imageries of different animals feature in various Nigerian proverbs. Some of the animal imageries in Nigerian proverbs used for analysis in this study include: antelopes, hyena, goat, tortoise, raven, monkey, fly, cock, toad, chicks, termite, shrew, grasshopper, hornbill, cow, rat, horse, lizard, chameleon, snake and elephant.

The animal imageries reflect the actions, activities, utterances, belief systems and values that exist in Nigerian societies. The animals that feature in Nigerian proverbs are animals that are found in the different parts of Nigeria. The animal imageries reflect the socio-cultural norms of the Nigerian people in terms of morals, norms, philosophy and cultural values. They are used to mirror what obtains in Nigerian societies (what abounds in the various societies in Nigeria) teach what is good, what is bad and to know the difference between the two and be able to know which one to follow at all times. Hence, from the animal imageries in the proverbs, much could be learnt about the Nigerian societies.

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