

A Sociolinguistic and Literary Analysis of the Proverb in *Likpakpaln* ‘Konkomba’

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*This paper is a descriptive study on *lilantaŋal/liyaataŋal* ‘the proverb’ in *Likpakpaln*. The methods employed included both participant and non-participant observations and the semi-structured interview. Also, a secondary material (a list of some proverbs in *Likpakpaln*) published by the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT) in 1985 was consulted. The data ascertained through these procedures were filtered through informal conversations and by native speaker introspection. The paper discusses the conceptual meaning, functions, contexts of use and the artistry of the *Likpakpaln* ‘Konkomba’ proverb. In addition, a brief morpho-semantic analysis of the term, *lilantaŋal* is done in order to enhance the understanding of the concept. Firstly, the study establishes that the proverb as an oramedia tool in *Likpakpaln* permeates as many discourse platforms as exist among the *Bikpakpaam* (Konkomba people). Also, the paper observes that the use of proverbs as well as their interpretations among *Bikpakpaam* is highly context-dependent. This is so because the proverb a speaker chooses and the interpretation that a hearer assigns to the proverb both hinge on contextual variables such as the subject matter, the place and the time of communication. Closely linked to the foregoing idea is also the discovery that one’s capacity to appropriately interpret proverbs is tied to one’s level of maturity in the culture of the people. Furthermore, the study holds that the most widely attested function of proverbs among *Bikpakpaam* is the*

conveyance of pieces of advice to members of the community. This is, nonetheless, not to contradict the fact that the functions of proverbs still remain numerous among the people. For instance, Bikpakpaam also use proverbs in traditional adjudication, libua bul 'divination' and in clinching arguments generally. Finally, the paper demonstrates that the proverbial lore in Likpakpaln is rich in artistry, citing metaphor, anthropomorphism and paradox, inter alia, as some of the dominant literary motifs of the genre.

Introduction

The proverb continues to remain an enigmatic concept to be distinctively and independently explained (Yankah, 2012). The difficulty in couching an absolute definition for the proverb is largely due to its close connections with other categories and techniques of oral literature such as the riddle, the parable, poetry, the anecdote, the allusion, parallelism and the idiom among others. In spite of the problematic nature of defining the proverb, some folklorists have still proffered some definitions of the subject.

One of the simplest ways that the proverb has been defined is that it is a short, but witty statement which conveys a basic truth deduced from close observation of life, Owomoyela (1979: 16). For instance, the *Likpakpaln* expression, *Ayil yaka ŋan ka a tu nkpapem ugmawinbu, me dund* 'If you are ill-fated, even when you carry shear butter on a moon-lit night, it still gets melted' is proverbial. Under normal circumstance, shear butter can only melt under intense heat as from scorching sun or fire. Therefore, in the folk history of *Bikpakpaam*, night time was the safest period to transport shear butter from one place to another. This means that it is a most

weird occurrence for shear butter to get melted at night, during moon-light. The core meaning of this statement is that when you are ill-fated, misfortunes will still prevail against you even when you find yourself in conditions where those misfortunes are supposed to be impossible. In essence, the above statement is a proverb more because its meaning carries a general truth that is established from a careful observation of human life.

In the view of some folkloric scholars, the proverb is about the most popular element of oral tradition. In a related sense, Finnegan (1970: 399) argues that proverbs seem to have a universal occurrence in African cultures. A similar hint is given in Sersah (1998: ii) when he says that the proverb is one of the features of language in every culture. The popularity of proverbs in cultures can also be attributed to their immense value in traditional societal life. These values include, but not limited to rhetoric, didactic, ethical, religious and aesthetic. Agyekum (2005: 10), for example, shows that in the Akan parlance, 'the proverb is the most precious stone of speech'. In the same way, Dzobo (1997) in a study of Ewe proverbs argue that proverbs enshrine the general principles used to direct personal and societal behaviour. Even more forceful on the usefulness of proverbs is the point of Nketia (1955) that it is because of the important function of proverbs that they continue to be a living tradition in Ghana.

The study of proverbs has been undertaken on an extensive scale with respect to many Ghanaian languages and cultures. This can be seen from references cited and the list of proverbial works in 'Appendix A' here attached. However, to best of the author's knowledge, there appears not to have been any such scholarly study of *Likpakpaln* proverbs. This paper is significantly borne out of the motivation to contribute toward filling the wide literature gap on *Likpakpaln* proverbs.

In this bid, the study provides a descriptivist's account on the proverb, as a folkloric tradition among *Bikpakpaam*. It addresses some relevant sociolinguistic issues such as the conceptualization of proverbs, their contexts of use and functions in *Kikpokpan* 'Konkombaland'. The paper also proceeds to add a literary dimension, by examining the artistic devices that feature in the proverbial genre of *Likpakpaln*. This blend has been a matter of conscious efforts to ensuring that the study does not only offer ethnographic data and insights on some aspects of the socio-cultural milieu of *Bikpakpaam*, but also give an idea of the literary technique of the proverb in *Likpakpaln*.

Methodologically, data elicitation for this study involved the use of both participant and non-participant observations and the semi-structured interview. The field work took place in four communities (*Bichabob Do*, *Sangutiib Do*, *Moneitiib Do* and *Kuchatiib Do*) at Kpassa, the district capital of the Nkwanta North District in Northern Volta. In all, about two hundred (200) proverbs were recorded, in some cases by tape and in others by writing them in a note book. The data is mainly primary, with only a very minimal consultation of an only secondary source material (GILLBT, 1985), which merely lists a number of proverbs in the *Likpakpaln*. The data collected was processed through transcription, interlinear glossing, translation into English and interpretation. Phenomena were analysed from a predominantly informant perspective. Application of intuitions of the author as a native speaker of *Likpakpaln* was, therefore, kept at the barest level.

Bikpakpaam (the Konkomba people)

Bikpakpaam is the native term for the people that have, most of the time, been referred to as the 'Konkombas'. Etymologically,

the word, 'Konkomba' is out of a further corruption of the form, 'Kpakpamba'. This is because 'Kpakpamba' itself is a Dagomba imitation of the original word, 'Bikpakpaam'. In short, this account is to say that the Dagombas have been one of the earliest neighbours of *Bikpakpaam* in Ghana. In an attempt by the Dagomba to pronounce 'Bikpakpaam', the word got adulterated to 'Kpakpamba'. With time, the Dagomba version, 'Kpakpamba' is further metamorphosed into 'Konkomba' by other users of the word. Traces of this claim can be found in Tait (1961) and Barker (1986). *Ukpakpanja* and *Ukpakpanpii* are the singular terms for a man and a woman of the tribe respectively.

Population figures of *Bikpakpaam* are significant. In current terms, the population size of *Bikpakpaam* in Ghana alone is estimated to be six hundred and forty one thousand (641,000), Ethnologue (2013). Also, as of 1996, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada [GH] indicated that *Bikpakpaam* constituted 1.6% of the entire Ghanaian population. In addition to the numbers in Ghana, there are also some fifty thousand, one hundred (50, 100) *Bikpakpaam* in Northern Togo, Schwarz (2009: 182).

Bikpakpaam are found in the stretch that was formerly the British and the French mandated territories of Northern Togoland and mainly about the banks of the Oti River and on the Oti Plain north and west of the Bassari and the Kotokoli hills. Saboba in Northern Ghana is considered the major town of *Bikpakpaam* in Ghana. In this area, *Bikpakpaam* are spread over the Oti Plain, an area up to 50km wide and 175km from north to south (Barker, 1986 and Tait, 1961). In recent district demarcations of Northern Ghana, *Bikpakpaam* can be found in the Saboba-Chereponi Districts, Zabzugu-Tatale Districts, Yendi District, Kpandai District, Nanumba North and South Districts and Gonja East District etc.

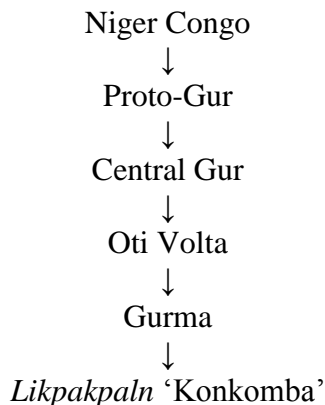
In addition to the above areas, *Bikpakpaam* are also found in great numbers in parts of Northern Volta such as Nkwanta North, Nkwanta South, Krachi East and Krachi West Districts. In the Brong Ahafo Region, they are also in Kintampo North and South as well as in the Atebubu Amantin District. Others are also located at Agbogbloshie and Olebu-Ablekumah in the Accra Metropolis (Bisilki, 2011 and Immigration, GSS, 2010 and Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada [GH],1996). At Agbogbloshie, *Bikpakpaam* run a very popular yam market, named 'Konkomba Yam Market'.

Bikpakpaam have been identified as one of the aboriginal ethnic groups of Northern Ghana. Though the exact origin of *Bikpakpaam* into Ghana is not known, historical records hold that as far back as the early 1400s and 1500s, *Bikpakpaam* were already a dominant group in some parts of Northern Ghana (Maasole, 2006; Martinson, 1995 and Rattray, 1932). Originally, *Bikpakpaam* were egalitarian in their political organization as they did not set up centralized political authorities. Nonetheless, since 1981 till date, *Bikpakpaam* now painstakingly enskin and enstool their own chiefs to steer the affairs of the people. *Bikpakpaam* communities have continued to be largely agrarian to date. This is to say that subsistence agriculture remains the mainstay of a majority of *Bikpakpaam*, even though the number that defects from agriculture into other occupations and professions is also on the increase. In a descending order, Christianity, the African Traditional Religion and Islam are the evident religions among *Bikpakpaam*.

Likpaplɔn (the Konkomba language)

The language often referred to as Konkomba is denoted as *Likpaplɔn* by its native speakers. In a broader spectrum, *Likpaplɔn* is a genetic of the Niger-Congo phylum (Bendor-Samuel

& Hartel, 1989). However, in a more precise and narrower description, *Likpakpaln* is a member of the Gurma wing of the Oti Volta branch of the Central Gur languages associated with the northern half of Ghana. Based on the analysis of Naden (1988), one can formulate a representation of the genetic line of *Likpakpaln* as diagrammed below:



As mostly the case with the Central Gur languages, *Likpakpaln* is said to be spoken mainly in Northern Ghana. Saboba is regarded as the most well-known indigenous centre of the language. Nonetheless, *Likpakpaln* speakers are scattered across many parts of Ghana and even in Northern Togo.

Dakubu (1988:7) notes, generally, about the Gur languages of Ghana that there is an unsatisfactory state of knowledge about these languages. Similarly, Cahill (2007:5) bemoans the fact that the Gur family of African languages has received only a little attention; not being as thoroughly described as some other African languages. This, Cahill attributes to the fact that Gur speakers are often geographically located in the interior parts of Africa and are

relatively more plagued with poverty and unfavourable living conditions.

Tilting the discussion to *Likpakpaln*, one would agree to the view that, as numerous speakers as has *Likpakpaln* (statistical figures on speaker population is indicated in section 2.0 above), documentation on either the language or its people still remains grossly sparse. The state of *Likpakpaln* being linguistically under described is, crisply, corroborated in the observation of Schwarz (2009) that linguistic documentation of *Likpakpaln* is far from extensive. The issue of utterly limited scholarly literature on *Likpakpaln*, as a language, spans all areas language studies- from the grammatical to the non-grammatical units of linguistics. The dialectal variants of *Likpakpaln* are so numerous. Such a situation does not make an exhaustive list the variant forms of the language possible here. These dialects are mostly named after the clans that speak them. The table below shows some of the dialects and their corresponding clans.

Some Likpakpaln dialects and their respective clans

No.	Dialect	Clan
1	<i>Likpajool</i>	<i>Kpajootiib</i>
2	<i>Liηaliil</i>	<i>Biηaliib</i>
3.	<i>Linajuul</i>	<i>Binajub</i>
4.	<i>Lichabol</i>	<i>Bichabob</i>
5	<i>Likutul</i>	<i>Kutultiib</i>
6	<i>Lichagbaln</i>	<i>Chagbantiib</i>
7	<i>Likpanliil</i>	<i>Bikpanliib</i>
8	<i>Linankpɛl</i>	<i>Nankpandotiib</i>
9	<i>Lipɔsaal</i>	<i>Pɔsaatiib</i>

10	<i>Likpambul</i>	<i>Kpambultiib</i>
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It appears the earliest work of an academic nature to be devoted to *Likpakpaln* is Steel & Weed (1966). This was later followed by some bible translations into the language in the 1970s. Apart from these, there have been only a few other works on *Likpakpaln*, which most of the time only tended to contain short describing remarks about the language. Of such works can be mentioned Abbot & Steel (1973) and Langdon (1997).

Currently, *Likpakpaln* is neither used as a communicative medium in the national media nor taught in the formal school system. *Likpakpaln* speakers are most of the time non-reciprocally bilingual or multilingual in any of the following languages : English, Twi, Dagbani, Gonja and Hausa.

The state of research and literature on *Likpakpaln* proverbs

Proverbs, an important verbal art genre has received a great deal of studies in relation to many societies and cultures across the globe. Within the Ghanaian sphere, both Opoku (1997:xxi) and Awedoba (2000:29) acknowledge that as early as 1879, J. G. Christaller had done an anthology of Akan proverbs, putting together a collection of three thousand, six hundred (3,600) proverbs in Akan, an achievement Awedoba describes as an incomparable feat. Even more intriguing to learn of is the revelation by Opoku that Christaller's work on Akan proverbs was yet preceded by an earlier one by Sir Richard Burton, published in 1865. As reported by Opoku, this piece, titled 'Wit and Wisdom from West Africa' featured two hundred and sixty five (265) proverbs drawn from the Akan folklore. As much attention as can be said to have been lent

Ghanaian proverbs, same does not hold for *Likpakpaln* proverbs. As far as the present author knows, the only reading material on *Likpakpaln* proverbs is GILLBT's *ɲiyaatanak Aabɔ r* 'Matters of Proverbs', which was published in 1985 under the auspices of GILLBT, Tamale.

However, as is the case with this supposed only material on *Likpakpaln* proverbs, it is a work that is not of the status that would make it academic in outlook. It contains a catalog, though not a compendium, of *Likpakpaln* proverbs and their meanings or interpretations. Beyond that, the book does not offer any further analyses or insight on the subject. Justifiably so, this material was only intended as a reading aid for mother-tongue-literacy in *Bikpakpaam* communities. Perhaps, this reason explains why it did not even include translations of the proverbial expressions in *Likpakpaln* into English or any other language(s). It appears that the circulation of this literacy material was also only limited to the local communities of *Bikpakpaam*. As such, the local communities are likely the only domain to lay hands on it presently.

Defining the proverb from Bikpakpaam perspective

A dozen proverbial folklorists have often admitted that formulating an all-embracing definition for the proverb continues to remain a force to reckon with in the field. Yankah (2012:196) in his study of proverbs in the context of Akan rhetorics, for instance, has this to say about defining the proverb: "The broad spectrum of verbal and behavioural phenomena evoked by the word 'proverb' and its near equivalents in other cultures makes a cross-cultural definition of the genre difficult." Relating this to the proverb context in Africa, Yankah intimates that the broad denotations of the concept of proverb in Africa makes the effort to arrive at a concise

definition of the proverb even more difficult. The widely attested difficulty in providing any precise definition on the proverbial lore is, as has usually been alluded to, concretised in the classic of Taylor (1931), which underscores the point that the task of defining a proverb is too difficult an undertaking to repay.

Regardless of this difficulty, some scholars on the subject still have some definitions to offer. Mieder (1990), for example, tries to define a proverb as a short, generally known sentence of the folk that has imbedded in it wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is transmitted from generation to generation. From Mieder's point of view of the proverb, one can gather, among other things, that the proverb is an asset of the folk, expresses cherished values and that it is, constantly, bequeathed as new generations emerge to replace preceding generations. In much the same way, the proverb is conceived as a simple, but concrete saying which is popularly known and repeated that expresses a truth contingent on common sense or practical human experience (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proverb).

In a bid to provide a helpful conceptual description of what the proverb is among *Bikpakpaam*, one can say that it is one of the constant heritage resources of tradition just as religious beliefs, marriage rites, occupation, folk music and cultural dances that are handed down from one generation to another. One can posit that the proverb is one of the lasting cultural heritages of *Bikpakpaam* society that stand the best chance of perpetuity. This claim is convincing on the basis that the proverb is infused into the everyday language of members of the speech community, implying, therefore, that as long as the language of the people lives, there are bound to be remnants of their proverbs surviving along. Expressing this observation in an alternative way is to say that the proverb, as an

oramedia resource among *Bikpakpaam* is transmitted through the linguistic expressions of the folk. For this reason, it is agreeable to make a polemic that so long as generations of the culture continue to exist and use their indigenous language, which is naturally imbued with their proverbs, the likelihood of proverbs getting extinct among the people is not much.

The question of the proverb being an inherent part of the speech forms of a community and that it is a linguistic resource that survives on the very existence of the people receives affirmation in Opoku (1997) as he maintains that in the Akan society, every member who grows up in a village becomes a living carrier of proverbs. He further points out that proverbs are interwoven in local languages. Unlike proverbs, the other components of the heritage package in *Kikpokpan* such as religious beliefs, folk music, cultural dances, occupation and marriage rites face the peril of being completely faced out or replaced by foreign parallels in the foreseeable future. This is due to debilitating Western influences on these heritage practices of *Bikpakpaam*, as with many other African cultures, through the recipe of increasing Christianization.

The fact that proverbs are inbuilt into the people's general verbal behaviour allows for spontaneity in their use, a situation which again gives proverbs a better advantage of continuity over the other nodes of oral literature. The other categories of oral literature such as the folktale, the riddle and the dirge require either deliberate performance sessions or specific occasions for their rendition. The point of the natural flow of proverbs in speech is seen in Yankah (2012) when he points up that it is an arduous task recording proverbs from their natural context, owing to their unpredictability and discourse-dependent character.

Cross-dialectally, the proverb is termed as: *liyaataŋal*, *lilantaŋal*, *liyaŋal* or *libyaaŋal* among *Bikpakpaam*. The preceding terminologies are literally translated as ‘proverb’. Nonetheless, in a plural sense of the word, the options *ŋiyataŋak* or *n-yataŋak* are used with the referential meaning, ‘proverbs’. Probably, an important point to make here is that *ŋiyataŋak* is more associated with discourse in dialectal variants such as *Lichabol* (including all the members of its sub-cluster), *Linankpl*, *Ligbeln* etc. whereas *n-yataŋak* is most often used by speakers of variants such as *Linajul* (found at Abunyanya and Sibi in the Nkwanta North), *Lisangul*, *Likuchel* and *Limaln* (dialect of the clan that wields cheftain at Kpassa in the Nkwanta North). All of the afore-mentioned dialects of *Likpakpaln* can be found in the Nkwanta North District in the Volta Region while some can, concurrently, also be traced to the Saboba District in the Northern Region. It must also be emphasized that the somewhat differing labels given to the concept of proverbs in *Likpakpaln* does not amount to any semantic or denotative contrast in the notion of what the proverb is. In this study, the forms *lilantaŋal* ‘proverb’ and *ŋiyataŋak* ‘proverbs’ are the options resorted to for singular and plural references respectively.

Linguistically, the various tags used to refer to the proverb in *Likpakpaln*, in exception of *lilantaŋal* do not seem to have any obvious inherent semantic interpretation. *Lilantaŋal* can be identified as a compound term, which is further analyzable into *lilàn* and *tàŋàl*. In the structure of *lilantaŋal*, *lilàn* is proposed as a modifier to *tàŋàl*, which assumes headship in the compound.

Llilàn, by native speaker intuition, is a form out of *nlàm* ‘wisdom’ (in a general sense). The conversion of **-m** in *nlàm* to **-n** in *lilantaŋal* can be said to have been phonologically conditioned as **/n/** could have resulted from a contiguous assimilation of the alveolar place of articulation feature of **/t/** which is an adjacent segment in *lilantaŋal*.

That is, /**m**/, a bilabial nasal in *nlam* becomes an alveolar nasal, /**n**/ in *lilantaŋal*.

Apart from this, it is worth noting that **n-** in *nlam*, by mutation is replaced with a singular marking prefixal particle, **li-** to give *lilantaŋala* singular reference. Such analogies can be found in the forms below:

i. <i>Li-lan-yimbil</i>	→	<i>nlan-yimbil</i>
PREF-wisdom-name		wisdom- name
‘a name of wisdom’		‘names of wisdom’
ii. <i>li-lan-mkl</i>	→	<i>nlam-mkm</i>
PREF-wisdom-teaching		wisdom-teachings
‘a teaching of wisdom’		‘teachings of wisdom’
iii. <i>li-lan-yil</i>	→	<i>nlan-yil</i>
PREF-wisdom-head		wisdom-heads
‘a head of wisdom’		‘heads of wisdom’

Tàŋàl, on its part, seems to have an underlying form in *ŋàŋ*, which means ‘to measure’ or ‘to compare.’ Logically, therefore, the term *lilantaŋal* would, in a way, mean ‘to compare’ or ‘to measure’ wisdom.

For *Bikpaapkaam*, a proverb or a proverbial expression is a type of indirect statement that is aimed at communicating a message to a listener in a given communicative context. In a closely knitted thought, *Bikpakpaam* also view a proverb as a kind of spoken expression that is muffled by way of not using the normal plain language as would ease the understanding and digestion by an audience the message therein contained.

It is argued that among *Bikpakpaam*, the ability to derive or unearth an intended meaning from an expression that is proverbial is so much tied to the intelligence level of a target decoder. Deductively, therefore, the game of proverb performance in

Kipokpan ‘Konkombaland’ is the exercise of the culturally mature and wise. It can be said further that the high-level-thinking-driven nature of the proverb among *Bikpakpaam* probably furnishes justification for why the proverb is rarely employed in discourse with young children. This only becomes the case if the proverb is meant for a kind of self-reflection or self affirmation of a point by the adult participant in such an interaction. Dzobo (1997) and Bannerman (1974) both confirm the relevance of maturity and experience in the use of proverbs.

The proverb is, however, not to be taken as synonymous with the idiom, a paradox or litotes. The proverb is particularly close to the idiom for the use of figurative language and the expression of meaning not in the literal sense of the word or words strung together. Nonetheless, once decoded, the meaning of an idiom is usually taken as it is, without any necessary further stretch of imagination. An idiom may not also be intended to teach any moral or convey any general truth about life, except to merely pass on a piece of information as it may be. On the other hand, any instance of a proverb may involve the preceding trio conditions that are not necessities of the idiom.

Comparing the paradox with the proverb, one sees a kind of meronymic relationship between the two, in that the paradox is only one of the features that are identified in proverbial utterances. Besides, it is not every proverb that has, inherent in it, a paradox. For example, the *Likpakpaln* proverb, *A na ya bi likpu cheln, saa lan bikpusaa* ‘When your mother is in a funeral house, you cannot miss the funeral meals’ has no element of paradox in it. This proverb simply means that when your close relation holds sway in a place, you cannot be out of favour in such a place. Perhaps, a resounding point to also add about the proverb is that its interpretation is much of a discourse pragmatic nature that involves imagination and

juxtaposition. This is as a result of the fact that the intended meaning and/or understanding of a proverb statement is only contextually conditioned. The interpretation requires an imagination of the scenario expressed in the proverb and drawing comparisons with the present communicative context.

There is also something of an ironic nature about proverb performance in the *Bikpakpaam* milieu, in that a proverbial expression holds a message that is meant for the consumption of the audience by the speaker. However, the message is released 'reluctantly' as if to frustrate the audience who is/are now called into the responsibility of having to crack a hard kernel shrouding the information intended for him/her or them.

The context of proverb usage in Kikpokpan

Among *Bikpakpaam*, the contexts of proverb usage span across all socio-cultural platforms and the proverb can be played by any member knowledgeable in the art, irrespective of age, gender or any other social parameter. Also, in *Kikpokpan*, the rendition of proverbs remains a purely oral activity. This is unlike in other cultures where proverbs are also performed on the drum, the horn or even expressed in artifacts (Okpewo, 1992 & Yankah, 1989). Among the Fante of Ghana, for example, proverbs are sometimes depicted on military flags.

It must, however, be pointed out also that in the event of a conversation between *uninkpel* 'an elder' and a youth where the youth appears to be able to draw on proverbs more than the *uninkpel* in the communicative process, there is a kind of face-saving act that can be adopted. This comes in the form of a technique of etiquette sometimes resorted to by a sensitive youth in such a dyadic situation. This subtle etiquette is for the youth to begin to ascribe authorship

of the proverbs employed in his utterances to the elders in a way that incorporates the elder listening. This is done by introducing each proverbial statement with : *Nim bi bininkpiib ti ke...* ‘ You the elders say.../It is you the elders who say...’. Perhaps, equally important is the point to make that even the absence of any such technique does not warrant any umbrage on the part of the elder, as far as the youth or the younger person does not over cite the proverbs or display any foul play.

Importantly also, in *Kikpokpan*, a person can earn popularity for being so noted for proverb use. In the case of a young person, especially a child who exhibits such a trait, the oxymorous label, *uninkpebu* ‘adult-child’ may become a sobriquet for him. Such a title is, more often than not, passed as a jest on the young one concerned.

The contextual scenario about proverb usage among the *Bikpakpaam* can be likened to how they also use their appellations. As noted by Bisilki (2011), *Bikpakpaam* render their *mmobil/ndumbil/ɲidumbil* ‘appellations’ in their daily interactions. This is also further connected to what Mensah (2005) says about the use of the Akan *abodin/mmrane* ‘Akan appellations or praise names’. As put by him, the Akans use their praise names in their daily interactions with humans, spirit beings and nature. A hint on the affinity between proverbs and praise names as artistic media is further revealed in the observation of Finnegan (1970) that the proverbs and the praise names of the Jabo of Liberia are almost siamese twins in character. What this account illuminates or seeks to illuminate about proverb use among *Bikpakpaam* is that so long as there is a message to communicate, employing a proverb is not out of place anywhere, provided the proverb chosen is contextually apt.

In spite of the fact that the use of proverbs permeates all manner of verbal interactions in *Bikpakpaam* chiefdoms, it is worth acknowledging that some communicative situations make the use of proverbs come in more handy, more beneficial and more efficacious than others. One of such contexts is the occasion of an advisory interaction between interlocutors. Apart from the fact that proverbs, by their embellishing potency lend foregrounding to the points or line of thought espoused by the adviser, there is something more to figure out about why proverbs do play more on the occasion of offering a piece of advice. A survey on the subject among *Bikpakpaam* points to the fact that proverbs whip up sobriety, making the message shared in such a mood important all the more.

Also, another significant context in which proverb usage is well witnessed is during *libua bul* 'divination' sessions. Divination constitutes a corner stone of societal life in *Kipokpan*. Traditionally, *libua bul* is the crux of funeral rites among *Bikpakpaam*. It is an established fact that in any typical *Bikpakpaam* funeral, any other aspect or event of the funeral process can be forgone, except the divination session of the process. No wonder, the name of the grand final funeral rite is known as *ubua*, which is also the name for a soothsayer or diviner.

The philosophy underpinning the centrality of *libua bul* in *Kipokpan* is that for the people, every death has a spiritual cause which must be verified from the deceased person and the ancestors in general through *ubua* 'soothsayer/diviner' who is invited to publicly commune with the dead and openly professed the spiritual basis for the demise of the departed soul. At the same time, it is staunchly believed that, until the divination of the cause of the death of a deceased, the soul is unable to join and to rest in the land of the ancestors. Besides, *libua bul* at funerals is also, as observed, the best

avenue where the people receive guidance, caution, assurances etc. from their ancestors.

The context of *libua bul* appears to be the avenue in the culture which records the highest use of proverbs. In itself, the language of divination is heavily laden with proverbial expression. This may be accounted for by the fact that much of the soothsayer's communication thrives on impersonation and indirection, for which the proverb is a catalyst. Impersonation comes in, especially at funeral divinations where the soothsayer impersonates the voice of the deceased who is believed to be speaking directly to the people gathered through the soothsayer. More so, proverb dominance in divinatory language finds anchorage in the reason that, as it is the sacred, sensitive secret of the awful and unknown world that the soothsayer is revealing to the public, some natural discreetness must be exercised. In other words, secret tit bits of the awful world of the ancestors cannot be let out in so plain terms. Hence, the technique of indirection is employed through proverbs. The notion of information management has a basis in a philosophy of *Bikpakpaam*, expressed in their proverb which goes : *Bi jin dɔ r, ama ba len dɔ r* 'They eat all of the food in a plate, but they do not say/tell everything.' The interpretation of this proverbial piece is that one can eat all the food served him or her, but unlike food, it is not everything that one should say or divulge. In other words, this proverb serves as a caution or a guide to members of the *Bikpakpaam* community on the prudence in managing information.

Furthermore, a point that one can raise in explaining why divinatory utterances are, usually, highly pregnant with proverbs and truisms, generally, is that such utterances are words of the ancestors, only being conduited through the soothsayer/diviner. Ancestors or the elders are, arguably, the custodians of proverbs in many African cultural dispensations, including *Kikpokpan*. That is

why an appropriate way to play a proverb is to begin by acknowledging its authorship to the progenitors of the society. Awedoba (2000:34), in a painstaking study of the proverb in the Kasena society of Upper-Eastern Ghana remarks, categorically, that a true proverb is always credited to the ancestors as a collective category and that the proverb belongs to antiquity.

Additionally, a time of adjudication or arbitration is yet another platform which provides a fecund ground for the display of the proverb lore in *Kikpokpan*. Nevertheless, the 'why' of this situation is not far-fetched. First of all, the custodianship of proverbs is vested in the elders or ancestors. Any living *uninkpel* 'elder', in a way, is ideally a repository of proverbs, whom the younger ones can approach for the interpretation of a proverb(s) when the need arises.

This, however, does not rule out the de facto situation where some younger people tend to be more prolific than some other elderly figures on the proverb subject. In any prototypical *Bikpakpaam* community, any matter(s) of real importance within the polity, including settlement of misunderstandings ensuing among members are taken to *uninkpel do* 'clan elder's/clan head's house' or *ubr do* 'chief's palace'. Of course, *ubr do* is of a higher capacity and authority than *uninkpel do* since issues that fail to receive conclusions at the former can be referred to the latter for further deliberation or arbitration. The point to make here is that any meaningful adjudication or arbitration forum in *Kikpokpan* typifies a congregation of the elders. If the elders are deemed the category that has sole ownership of proverbs, it then comes, naturally, that one witness a profusion of this artistic form at their gatherings. Besides, a case in point is that wisdom is a canonical ingredient of any adjudication or arbitration bid. For this reason, proverbs, by

their embodiment of wisdom, become a reliable and an instrumental device in such a venture.

Functions of the proverb

The usefulness of the proverb, as has been said time without number, cannot be exaggerated. For instance, Appiah et al. (2007), in the foremost remark in their preface opine that ‘proverbs are a treasure beyond price.’ Scholars or researchers on the subject of proverbs seem to see the relevance of proverbs in almost every facet of societal life. However, acclamation for their communicative effectiveness, unarguably, is the most overriding. Yankah (2012), for example, provides an in-depth elucidation of how the proverb is, significantly, employed in the Akan judicial rhetoric.

Others have attested to the aesthetic and, for that matter, the entertaining potential of proverbs. As put by Owomoyela (1979), some proverbs are employed, mainly, to provoke laughter. Indeed, some proverbs, by their inherent humorous nature, can yield tickling effects in the audience. A typical example is the *Likpakpaln* proverb: *A yaa mr ke achal achakpaln gbei, lima baan gban nka u ban di su si* ‘A wife who laments over her husband’s huge penis cannot avoid it being used on her.’ A similar one is the Kasena proverb, *Ba ba yage kukula yiga ne ye bad aa gwooni ka veiņa* ‘You do not elect a short man to lead the way and then complain about his pace’ Awedoba (2000 : 48). Another of this kind is yet the Akan proverb which says: ‘A mother of twins cannot be dared with a huge penis’. Naturally, proverbs of this nature can produce some comic relief, even under a tense situation.

In providing illumination on the relevance of the proverb in relation to *Bikpakpaam*, a crucial thing to note is that there are both manifest and latent functions of the genre among the people, of

which the manifest receive consideration here. Proverbs serve as a very powerful didactic or advisory instrument in *Kikpokpan*. For the people, the thrust of the use of the proverb is in terms of offering advice to members of the community, especially the youth. This, probably, gives a strong reason for why a good number of proverbs in the *Bikpakpaam* repertoire appear to centre on providing guidance about the labyrinth of the difference circumstances in life. The advisory mandate of the proverb finds some authoritative backing in the view that counsellors and judges also do use proverbs to comment obliquely on conduct, often with implied advice or rebuke Finnegan (1970:408). This is as exemplified in the following *Likpakpaln* proverbs:

- i. *Unaabu kalaa uyingbe* ‘A calf does not make mockery of a crooked horned cow’. The literal interpretation of this proverb is that since a calf is yet to develop horns, it cannot tell how its future horns will look like. There is the possibility of the calf growing to sprout crooked or ugly horns or not even develop any horns at all. Therefore, it is dangerous for it to make mockery of any adult cow that is unfortunate to have grown crooked horns. In a deeper sense, this proverb is an advisory piece to members of the community, especially the youth not to satirize or criticize people who have failed in stages or endeavours that they (the youth or other members) of society will soon be stepping into. A parallel of this the Akan proverb, *Tenten nyinii a, nsere akwatia* ‘When the tall is not yet grown, he must not tease the short person’ Agyekum (2005 :10).
- ii. *Baa lakr uwaa pu ki pi mmoon* ‘We do not pass over a snake to pick a stalk of grass’. In an ordinary sense, it is risky for one to stretch over a snake in trying to reach for a stalk of grass since one can get harmed by the snake in the process. The inner lesson

encapsulated in this proverb is that it is naive and perilous to try to access what you desire through your enemy. As much as possible, one must completely avoid an enemy or any adversary in an effort to reach any desired goal or destination.

iii. *Litabngeln s ni inampien* ‘Having a broken cudgel is better than being bare-handed’. Superficially, the idea here is that, in times of defence or a fight, it is better for one to have a maimed cudgel in hand than for one to be without any weapon in hand. The core lesson, then, is that it is only better for you to have something, however small or inferior it is, than for you not to possess it at all. In other words, this proverb teaches that one should be appreciative or content with what s/he has.

Artistry/literary techniques in the Likpakpaln proverb

Proverbs are richest, in terms of artistry. The logical reason for this seems to be that proverbs share commonalities with almost all the other verbal art forms, thereby merging the style and artistry of all these other genres. This, as earlier indicated, is also the reason why coining an absolutely distinctive definition for the proverb continues to remain a mirage of some sort for folklorist. Discussed below are some notable elements of artistry observed in *Likpakpaln* proverbs.

Metaphor

Research and knowledge dissemination on metaphor has been a flourishing enterprise in academia, Sakamoto (1983:197). Ullmann (1962), Richards (1965) and Sakamoto (1983) all give diverse and stimulating perspectives on the metaphor. However, this paper considers the metaphor as an implicit comparison between

things that are usually unlike, Boachie and Johnson (2011). In this sense, an expression that is metaphorical may also appear to exhibit the art of representation where something is used to represent or stand for another.

In *Kikpokpan*, the entirety of the proverbial landscape in itself is set in metaphor. This is because in the use of proverbs, situations or experiences which may be outdated or literally delinked from the present are made to, directly, represent or stand in place of current experiences or situations. Most often than not, a proverb will, literally, depict a distant scenario or truth, used to imply a current issue or phenomenon. The following proverbs illustrate this metaphorical tendency.

- i. *Uku u fk ya, bi gman u ngenen me*
 Snake DEM long ART 3PL eat PRS 3SG
 piece piece DM
 ‘A snake that is long is eaten bit by bit’

The above proverb, in its entirety, is metaphorically used in that the act of eating a long snake is made to, directly, compare with any other involving challenge, which in real life, will require a step-by-step solution. The moral in this proverb is that one cannot do everything at the same time, calling for the exercise of patience in undertakings that cannot be completed at a go. Besides, the internal items of the proverb: ‘snake’, ‘long’ and ‘eat’, metaphorically, map to ‘a task/challenge’, ‘something involving or demanding’ and ‘solving or overcoming tasks’ respectively. Awedoba (2000 :44) comments on the conspicuous metaphorical associations that exist in Kasena proverbs.

Paradox

The paradox is another dominant device in *Likpakpaln* proverbial world. Usually, many proverbs, on first impression, present an absurdity or a kind of oddity to the hearer or audience, if related literally to its immediate context. A proverb only becomes sensible when a hearer is able to decipher its intended message. This couples with the fact that it is ubiquitous to see proverbs in the *Likpakpaln* repertoire being inherently paradoxical as in:

ii. *Ukoja aj nsan libuln, ama libuln mu mfikr ukoja amnful.*

Cock friend BE wind CONJ wind FOC
expose PRS cock anus

‘The cock’s friend is the wind, but it is the wind that exposes the cock’s anus.’

The lesson carried by this proverb is that, in life, it is friends or people close to you who can cause you the worst disgrace, embarrassment or betrayal. The sense ingrained in this proverb is, certainly, absurd if taken superficially. Thus, it does not sound normal that it is rather one’s friends or relations who would subject one to betrayal or disgrace. A similar proverbial form is the Ewe version, *Amejuzla zikpui gme wonna* ‘A traitor always sits under your chair’ Dzobo (1997 : 18).

Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism refers to the treating of animals or even inanimate entities as if they were human (Mireku-Gyimah, 2012: 24). In other words, anthropomorphism sets in when such entities as mentioned are personified. Numerous proverbs in *Likpakpaln* have anthropomorphic characters as can be observed below:

iii. *Naachin ti ke ngban char s ni
ngban kpa.*

Hyena/wolf say PRS DM skin ADJ COMP CNN
skin ADJ

‘The hyena/wolf says that to sustain skin injury is better than for you to get your skin (totally removed and) pegged (getting skinned).’

iv. *Ba sur uṅoo ka naachin bi.*

3PL NEG advise PRS goat DM. wolf BE.

‘They do not advise the goat when the hyena is there/present.’

In iii, the proverb statement is attributed to the hyena, as though the hyena lived with humans and could verbally formulate such a living maxim to guide human conduct. In iv, the goat and the wolf are personified as if they were humans and could be given pieces of advice.

Idiomatcity of the Proverb

To say that proverbs are idiomatic means that they are an embodiment of figurative language. “The figurative quality of proverbs is especially striking...” is how Finnegan (1970:390), categorically, puts it. The lexical constituents of a proverb utterance

are hardly taken in their denotative senses. Beyond the words of a proverb lies its core or desired meaning. The following proverbs give a vivid illustration of the figurativeness of proverb expressions.

v. *Kijambik kibaa aan ŋma pii litakpal.*
Finger one NEG can pick pebble/stone
'One finger cannot pick a pebble.'

vi. *Unii u ban u tk bisaa na aalan*
bi unee ni la.
Person REL want PRS 3SG snatch IMPERF food DM
plan BE throat in FOC
'It is in the mind that a person who wants to snatch food from others harbours his plan'.

The meanings of v and vi do not lie in their expression meanings of using one finger to pick a stone and snatching of food respectively. The meaning of v, which holds that what one person cannot accomplish alone, two or more people can do, is not in the conceptual meaning of the proverb. So also, vi, which means that when you plot or scheme to do something, you do not have to reveal it is not interpreted in its conventional sense.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is another motif that seems to play, regularly, in proverbial constructions. Many of the phenomena or literal themes expressed in proverbs can only be exaggerations, far from reality. This is typified in the *Likpakpaln* proverbs below:

vii. *A ya kal chu uku aneen, a joo.*
2PL PART ADV hold PST snake neck 2PL keep IMPERF.

‘If you have already grabbed the neck of a snake, you have to hold it firmly’

viii. *Gmalgmal akum ka wɔ.*
Mass death NEG pain PRS.
‘Dying along with a multitude others is not painful.’

In vii, the conventional theme of the expression is that once you get hold of the neck of a snake, the best option is to continue to hold it firmly so that it is not able to bite you. This does not sound very realistic as humans in the ordinary sense, cannot easily exercise that level of gallantry with a deadly reptile like the snake. Nonetheless, the pendent moral from this proverb is that once you commit yourself to a task or any situation that later turns to be so daring, a prudent option is to muster courage and remain tenacious. Also, viii appears to be making the point that one will not bother, if one is to die along with others, which is not necessarily practical. If uncovered, the guiding moral of this proverb is that a problem that concerns many should not be taken as a burden by only one of those involved. The frequent occurrence of hyperbole in proverbs is well accentuation by Finnegan (1970: 398).

Conclusion

Thus, this paper has provided a sociolinguistic and literary analysis on *Likpakpaln* proverbs. It has investigated the creative potential of the proverb in *Likpakpaln*, taking into consideration the definition of the proverb, its contexts of use, functions and artistic devices from the *Bikpakpaam* perspective. Some of the specific arguments of the study are that proverbs occur in any situation of

verbal interaction and also serve as a channel for letting out pieces of advice. It also adds that, artistically, metaphor, paradox, anthropomorphism, the idiom and hyperbole are some of the dominant literary motifs of the proverbial genre in Likpakpaln, just as has been the case in many other languages in Africa and beyond.

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APPENDIX A : List of Works on Ghanaian Proverbs

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