

Urhobo Proverbs and Traditional Judicial Proceedings

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Abstract

Conflicts are natural phenomena which cannot be completely eliminated from any dynamic society. In the past few decades, the world particularly Africa has been marred with wars generated by various acts of violence such as inter-ethnic clashes, ethno-religious conflicts, political unrest, insurgency and terrorism, and so on. The research findings show that the Urhobo nation is not free from the ugly scenario painted above since it is situated in one of the volatile states in the Niger Delta region. In order to maintain peace and harmonious co-existence in a society, the use of proverbs must come to the fore because proverbs are of great significance especially during dispute settlement. They are considered as integral aspect of language and communication so they are often skilfully introduced into utterances made by conflict mediators basically to ensure reconciliation of warring parties. This study, therefore, examines contexts, forms and functionalities of some Urhobo proverbs utilized during traditional judicial proceedings. It drew on both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions in order to obtain conflict-related proverbs and unravelled their forms and potency in conflict resolution and management among the Urhobo people. A total of thirty-one proverbs that are relevant for peace and conflict resolution are collected randomly in various communities in Urhobo land and analysed.

Key Words: *proverbs, conflict, peace, mediators, wisdom-lore.*

Introduction

Language is a medium of expression and communication in every society and it plays several roles in a society including preservation and projecting of our cultural heritage. According to Ojaide (2006: 5), language plays a pivotal role in conflict management and resolution and peace building. It is imperative to understand a people's culture to resolve any conflict involving them. The ability of a mediator to resolve conflict in Africa is based on experience, wisdom lore and in-depth knowledge of culture of the disputants. During the resolution of conflicts, the use of proverbs must come to the fore and as Chukwuma's (2002: 28) asserts proverb carries a prestigious symbol of wisdom and verbal sophistication. The wisdom lore embedded in proverbial expressions is domiciled in the domain of elders which they deploy during conflict resolution. In the opinion of Daramola (2007: 122), it is believed that only the wise is able to use and understand proverbs in conversations and dialogues and that those who are versed in proverbs are usually good orators. Though this study does not focus on the oratory

and proverbs discourse, a traditional judge who doubles as an orator and utilizes proverbs skillfully during conversation may do great exploit in peace and conflict resolution.

Several scholarly works have been carried out on proverbs by some authors including Agbaje (2002), Olaoba (2007), Fashina (2006), Nwachukwu-Agbaje (1990), Oguejiofor (2006), Odebunmi (2008), Hussein (2005), Christensen (1958), Olatunji, (1984), Ojaide, (1996, 2006, 2007), Okpewho (1992), Chukwuma (2002), Yankah (1986, 1989), and Adedimeji (2003), to mention a few. These scholars examined several aspects of proverbs including their themes, functions, gender issues, characteristics, documentation, peace and conflict discourse, however, the utilitarian functions of proverbs in traditional judicial proceedings has not been fully exploited. This study shall be different from previous research works because it will examine forms and functionalities of proverbs used in traditional judicial proceedings among the Urhobo of Nigeria. Moreso, specific contexts and relevant cases as well as proverbs that are suitable for peace and conflict discourse shall be discussed.

Of all the various forms of oral resources, proverbs are the most vital tools used in communication especially among elders in social gatherings. According to Okpewho (1992: 235), proverbs may be considered as the storehouse of the wisdom of the society. This is because most proverbs have a philosophical depth which is the result of a careful and sensitive observation of human conduct and experience. During legal disputes and meetings of elders, proverbs are treated with respect and authority since they have been regarded as truth tested by time, and they are often used for resolving conflicts and other problems between citizens. To Alaturunji (1984: 170) proverbs are considered to be the wisdom lore of the race. And because the proverbs are considered to be traditional, and originate from the observation of natural phenomena and human relations, old people are regarded as a repository of proverbs. On Ojaide's (2007: 115) viewpoint, effective verbal communication is a sign of good leadership. One can mobilize, engage or disengage with facility of proverbial expression. A good speaker is expected to possess oratorical skills and, thus, copiously and effortlessly employ proverbs. With this skill he can smoothly navigate difficult and thorny issues and present in an acceptable manner the views of his or her side.

In affirming Ojaide's view, Yankah (1989: 328) states that through proverb use, one enhances the attention value of discourse or argument, making it more appealing, audible, and memorable. He further maintains that the greater part of proverbial communication is by word of mouth. The extent to which oratory is valued in African societies is well known, and in certain cases it becomes an important feature in prescribing certain social roles. The fictiveness of proverbs in Africa is common knowledge and so proverbs are used ostensibly to garnish or embellish opinion already formed in discourse. Rhetoric and oratory in the form of proverbs, praise-names, axioms, and idiomatic expressions are very strong elements of oral literature (Ojaide, 1995: 12). Ojaide's view above is corroborated by Olafioye (2000: 81) who on his part opines that proverbs and axioms supply the eclectic, poetic tools that make ideas happen or make sense plain. Proverbs come from the womb of tradition, reflecting the intellectual and wisdom of people. To Christensen (1958: 235), collective responsibility and cooperation are outstanding attributes of clan and lineage membership, and numerous proverbs attest this expected pattern of behaviour. In addition to this, the rules of conduct governing inheritance and intra-clan and lineage relationships are also illustrated with proverbs.

From the foregoing, it has become obvious that oral literature plays a significant role dispute settlement; hence, Irele (1990: 56), affirmed that tradition of orality remains predominant, serving as a central paradigm for various kinds of expression and thus provides the

formal and normative background for imaginative expression. Therefore, oral literature represents the basic inter-text of the African imagination which is displayed through the skilful utilization of proverbs during peace and conflict discourse in traditional societies.

Conflict Resolution in Traditional Societies

Conflicts, according to Otite (2007: 1), arise from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals and, or groups in defined social and physical environments. Whenever individuals aspire to achieve certain goals in a society, they are bound to offend others who might have contrary views and this often times result in a conflict. Okadike (2006: 227) on his part perceives conflict as a struggle over values and claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the opponent are to injure or eliminate their rivals. Conflicts should not always be seen as a negative occurrence because some have positive outcome which shall be beneficial to the society. It is at this background that Okadike further advise that conflicts should not be demonised rather it must be confronted with efficient procedures for cooperative problem solving which is the primary focus of this study.

Several research works carried out in the field of peace and conflict resolution revealed that conflict, being a natural phenomenon, can occur within or between families, communities, ethnic groups, organisations or nations. It could start at the individual level with the possibility of its extension to the society at large (Idowu, 2005: 13). In most traditional African societies, conflictual situations are often handled carefully and promptly too to prevent loss of lives and property. My field research shows that conflicts in Urhoboland often emanate from greed, misunderstanding, breaking of laid down rules, kingship tussles, lethal verbal abuse or assault, land ownership or a shift in land boundaries, political imbalance, among others. Whatever the cause of any of the conflicts might be, the need to resolve them as they occur cannot be compromised because no society can develop in a society where there is war and rancour; the dynamism and socio-economic development of a society lie in the existence of peace and harmonious co-existence of its people.

Among the Urhobo, legal matters are resolved in line with traditional judicial procedures found in most other African communities. For instance, whenever there is a conflict between two or more parties, the aggrieved or litigants take their case to the court for adjudication. Apart from presenting their own versions of the story before the traditional judges and the audience, both parties may also present witnesses in order to clarify and settle the thorny issues amicably. According to Holleman, *et al* (1974), the cause of a conflict emerges naturally in a realistic setting as the complainant unfolds his story before members of the audience or court assessors who are often chiefs, headmen or the traditional ruler. There is also room for questions and opinions from all and sundry in most cases.

The underlying desire of traditional judges or conflict mediators is to promote reconciliation of warring parties instead of passing judgement based on the dispute which they have brought to court for hearing. During the proceedings, mediators rely heavily on the customs and tradition of the people in the dispensation of justice. In consonance with the above, Redden (1968) posits that customary law cannot be separated from the customary process of resolving disputes, which stressed conciliation as much as, if not more than, adjudication. When this system becomes regulated by the governmental authorities- as it has invariably become- and lawyers are involved in the process of customary proceedings will become more adjudicative than reconciliatory. In affirming Redden's assertion, Ong (1999: 35) states that in every society, norms of conduct have grown up, some of which are obligatory and, therefore, may be said to have the force of law, hence the concept of customary law. The law itself in oral cultures is

enshrined in formulaic sayings, proverbs, which are not mere jurisprudential decorations, but they themselves constitute the law. A judge in an oral culture is often called on to articulate sets of relevant proverbs out of which he can produce equitable decisions in the cases under formal litigation before him (Ong, 1978: 5). The interface between language and (oral) literature, therefore, is noticeable and appreciated mostly during peace and conflict discourse as the formal is an integral part of the latter.

During judicial proceedings different forms of Urhobo proverbs come into play. Proverbs are vital aspect of our oral traditions and their functions cannot be overemphasized especially in the discourse on peace and conflict resolution. In every community, peace is a phenomenon that people hold with high esteem and it has to be negotiated but not bought with money. Therefore, in this paper some forms of Urhobo proverbs that are often utilized during traditional judicial proceedings shall be critically examined.

Methodology

The texts (proverbs) to be analysed in this study were collected in the field through both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The non-directive style where the respondents are allowed to speak freely on a question asked by the researcher was also adopted during the exercise. The respondents represent the following Urhobo Kingdoms: Okparabe, Eghwu, Ughwerun, Orogun, Udu, Olomu, Ughelli, Agbarho, Agbon and Ughievwen. The interviews for this research were carried out at different time of the day and night and the respondents cut across different ages and sex. During the course of my fieldwork, it was observed that proverbs play vital role in judicial proceedings as we shall examine later in this work.

Besides the oral interviews, materials for this research were also obtained from secondary sources such as journals, theses, dissertations, textbooks, and other relevant materials. These are analysed critically in relation to the oral data collected in the field and to attain the objectives of the research. The oral data obtained in the field were transcribed and translated from Urhobo language to English for the benefit of other researchers and readers who lack mutual intelligibility with the indigenous language of the research area. A total of thirty-one proverbs randomly collected in the field are carefully analysed.

Oral Data Discussion and Analysis

In most traditional communities, proverbs are oral resources that are predominantly embedded in utterances of elders. This assertion informed Agbaje's (2002: 238) view that elders constitute the repository of the traditional intelligence, logic and verbal or oral wit. As he further stated, skills in public mediation are also expected of elders and so an upright elder and mediator is accorded with the dual qualities of wisdom and eloquence. Therefore, in this study our focus shall be on different forms and functionalities of Urhobo proverbs utilized in diverse conflictual contexts during traditional judicial proceedings.

Context 1: The Need to Shun Violence and Protect one's Integrity.

Proverbs could be used to illustrate the above situation where, for instance, a young man who does not know the boundaries of his family land trespasses into that of their neighbours. If the case is presented before elders, the mediator could caution the accused against perpetuating an act that is capable of creating a tragic situation. The proverb below can illustrate this:

*Ohwo r'owha r'uyovwi ko'rhie nu,
ode se ohwo r'eton 'yovwi r'oyen,
ore'ton yovwi ro ye na, k'odje.*

If a man with a shaven head invites another with
hair on his head to a play on a heap of sand,
the latter often takes to his heels.

The proverb implies that when a worthless man invites another who has integrity to a dirty deal, the latter often turns down such invitation because he does not want his name dragged into the mud. In essence, a man who is worthless or does not value his life is the one that would cause a great conflict in a community or between two communities. The man without hair can easily rub off sand from his head, but the one with hair cannot, since the hair shall retain some sand. This implies that the man without hair is evil while the other is a man of integrity. With this proverb, people with integrity are advised to shun anything that could dent their reputation in a society.

Context 2: The Need to Control one's Pent-up Emotions

This context could be illustrated with a case where certain people are trying to create a problem in a gathering; they are there to truncate an effort to resolving a conflictual situation before a group of elders. An elder who is conscious of their attitude can caution them through a proverbial expression:

*Edi rorohwevwe r'obuwevwi kpe emu r'eye chere obada,
Am'irhibo r'onye k'obuenor.*

If one thinks of the hunger he experiences at home and
goes out to cook a meal that is meant for sacrifice,
he shall prepare watery soup.

In every normal situation, people would reject the watery food which the cook prepared because he thought that if the food is watery it would be enough to go round. The idea portrays in the proverb above is that of transfer of aggression which is capable of wrecking great havoc in a community. Once a proverb such as this is made, the stubborn child to whom the proverb was directed would become conscious of his actions and remain law abiding.

Context 3: Upholding Justice and Equity in one's Society

Here, a certain man who tells the truth in a community might be disliked by some people because they do not want peace and justice in the community. Even though such a man later observes that some people do not like him for upholding what is right, he might still decides to continue with his good work. The following proverb could be used to allude to such situation:

Edo r'eki hwurhe r'eki re.
The noise at the market square does not kill
a tree that grew in the market.

This wise-saying is used to encourage people to continue their good deeds in a particular community. It depicts that in spite of sharp criticism or verbal attacks on a person, he does not relent in his effort to work towards the betterment of his society. Closely related to this proverb in terms of idea is the one below.

Arhue r'orere phiyo, ofio'ta-a.

Let's transform a community does not lead to a conflict.

This proverb is used to encourage mediators who might be accused of being unjust in their judgement to continue in their good work and ignore distractions. In the essence, the

proverb means that there is nothing bad in transforming a society even though there might be some enemies of progress who never see anything good in that.

Context 4: The Need for Timely Reconciliation of Conflicts

A suitable case here is that between two middle-aged people who are involved in a serious dispute and both parties threaten each other's life. The case may be taken to their family elders (for settlement) who acknowledge the timely resolution of the conflict using the proverbs thus;

Ohwo ghwru she'ri-i, aguono she re-e.

If a man did not get lost as farther as people had envisaged,
there is no need for his search party to go farther.

A dispute that has not degenerated into violence requires a speedy resolution and this is illustrated using the aforementioned proverb. This proverb is appropriate when the conflict mediators realized the need to reconcile both parties to a dispute as soon as possible before things get out of hands. It shows that the dispute has not yet escalated to the extent that it could claim lives. The actual cause of the conflict is obvious. The disputants become conscious of the problem at hand and the need to resolve it amicably.

Context 5: The Need to Show Forgiveness

In this context, a child may offend his elder kinsman and the latter decides to deal with him mercilessly. If the case is presented before some elders for mediation, one of them who seek forgiveness might express his/her opinion with the proverb:

*Avwo'bovo vwo hwomo,
ye, avwo'bovo vwo se rehor.*

One should use one hand to spank a child and
use the other to draw him closer to oneself.

The above proverb is used during traditional legal proceedings to illustrate the need to temper justice with mercy. It means that where an offender would be given a corporal punishment it should not aim at making him regret throughout his life time but realize his or her offence. It is true that the child has offended you but why should you go after his life? You are not in good terms with him but you should also agree to reconcile with him; draw him to your side.

Context 6: The Need to Forgive and Forget

This could be illustrated with a case where two youths are at loggerhead over a certain issue and the offended appears highly infuriated. If the matter is presented before a traditional chief who mediates over conflicts on behalf of the king, he may make proverbial utterance:

*Ame to'rhe phroke-e;
ode to'rhe, to'rhe tasa, kofor.*

Water does not remain hot over night;
it will only get hot for a while and become cool.

This proverb is used to admonish aggrieved parties to a conflict to calm down their temper since a highly pent-up emotional person is capable of executing an act that he might

regret in future. Besides, no matter how difficult a dispute may be on earth, it must have a solution.

Context 7: Caution Against wrong Verdict over a clear Case

A relevant case here could be that between two intimate friends who fought over a piece of land and the case is brought to their town hall for hearing. Both parties might have presented their versions of the story and after cross-examination, the truth of the conflict becomes known to everyone present in the court. In such a situation, one of the judges may address the court with the proverbial utterance:

Amr'emu keke, ada guon'urhukpe-e.

One does not see something clearly and also asks for a lamp to search for.

The proverbial expression above is directed to mediators who intend to sway judgement in favour of a disputant that erred. Whenever this proverb is mentioned during any legal proceedings, the traditional judges become aware of the consequence of passing a wrong verdict especially where adducing evidences have clearly shown the party that errs. If the main cause of the dispute has been investigated and unravelled there should be no need of withdrawing into an inner room for further deliberation before they decide the case.

Context 8: Pacifying an Aggrieved Litigant to Pardon his Offender

This context presents a situation where a complainant feels that what an offender has done to him had never been heard off and so he shall not forgive him. However, an elder and mediator may pacify the offended party through a relevant proverb:

Era re ero mre re-e, k'oye oghene ma'ro-o.

Whatever eyes did not experience was not created by God.

With this proverb, disputants especially the offended party is advised to forgive the offender because no matter how serious the offence might be, it must have happened in the past which was also resolved. In essence, the offence is not the first of its kind since there is nothing new on earth; God created situation.

Context 9: To Shun Violence and Embrace Peace

A relevant case in this context could be that involving some youths who engaged in a fight but fortunately no life was lost. If the case is taken to their traditional court for hearing, the mediator may make some proverbs to sue for peace after hearing both versions of the case, thus:

*Ughwu ro re hwe'meghene,
ode vwo vwi'rhowo ,k'aghogho*

The death that ought to have killed a youth
if it makes him to break his leg, this calls for jubilation.

The above proverb depicts that a dispute that would have resulted in the death of someone, calls for celebration if it only leads to a fight without loss of life and property.

Context 10: The Need to Investigate the Actual Cause of Conflicts

Here, if a man fights a married woman and he is charged to court, the family members of the accused may want the conflict resolved without investigating the actual cause of the fight but an elder who wants the cause of the problem unravelled may opposed this and proverbialize;

Ehwoa rhuru ikpon-o.

Eti ye gha!

No one treats an injury without removing the thorn therein first.
That is forbidden!

This is another Urhobo proverb that is similar to the one mentioned above. It shows that the real cause of a conflict has to be identified otherwise the matter would remain unresolved. The Urhobo people perceive reconciliation as out of place without first and foremost investigating the actual cause of the conflict. They believe that it is after the problem has been identified that the solution shall be provided.

Context 11: To Condemn Inhumanity to man

A case that is relevant to the above context is that of a harmless and friendly madman who was killed by a certain villager and the family of the deceased decides to seek redress in court. The traditional judge who perceives that the lunatic was innocently and gruesomely murdered may condemn the act in its entirety supporting his stand with a relevant proverb:

Ohworo hw'eghwughwe, eku 'yohwere.

Whoever kills a chameleon does so out of oppression.

The chameleon is an animal that is harmless; it never destroys things. So if a man takes a stick and hits it, that is oppression and wickedness of the highest order. Literarily, the proverb decries oppression and inhumanity to man especially those who are gentle and harmless in a community.

Context 12: Acceptance of Faults and Sue for Forgiveness

A case under this could be that of a salesman who did not know when a customer took some money and (handset) phones in his store. The employer who is highly pent-up has threatened to get him arrested if he fails to pay for everything after a given deadline. The accused (seller), with some of his family members who meet the employer to get the matter resolved may engage in a dialogue that informed the use of proverb by the mediator:

Omuomo onyi 'gere omo she.

It is a person who carries a baby that falls it.

This proverb is used when a child damaged something that was placed in his custody. When an offender cannot withstand the consequence of the offence he committed, especially if it involves a huge amount of money, his spokesman during the settlement would make the above proverb, pleading with the aggrieved on behalf of the offender to forgive the latter. This proverb is also related to the one below in terms of subject.

Context 13: To Temper Justice with Mercy

The above context could be illustrated with the case of a child who damaged property worth millions of naira and the case is presented before traditional judges for mediation. An elder could plead with the aggrieved person for mercy on behalf of the offender which may attract the proverb:

*Erawevwe r'orio phien rigede brufi,
ophien r'oye te vwo siegede-e.*

The rat that ate up the leather of a drum,
its skin was not enough to mend it.

This proverb is used to plead on behalf of an offender for a serious crime committed. Once the offended hears this proverb, his pent-up emotion to deal mercilessly with the offender would be reduced and within a short while, he shall have sympathy on him and allow peace to reign.

Context 14: A Plea for Mercy and Avoid Retaliation in Future.

Here, a man who lost his beloved wife might be told by the deceased family to build a house for the dead wife before her burial rites. If a case such as this is brought before elders in the late woman's community, the spokesman of the widower may decide to address the court before the community elders take their decision. In this context, he may use a proverb to plead for mercy thus;

Ohwo ro vwi'oshare, oye ji vwi'aye.
Whoever that gave birth to a man,
also gave birth to a woman.

This is another proverbial expression used to sue for mercy in order to avoid retaliation in future. It means that nobody knows tomorrow and so whatever one does to his or her fellow man today awaits him in the nearest future. This proverb thus is appropriate where there is a disagreement between two families of which damages would be paid.

Context 15: The Need to Examine the Circumstances Surrounding
a Crime Committed

A stranger who visited a community for the first time may observe the presence of several mystical animals (iguanas) and out of hunger kills some for food. If he is charged to a traditional court in the community to explain his abominable act, the stranger and offender may justify his act using the proverbial utterance;

Oro'riemu, orero vwo ton,
Oro'jegha, ogharo'vwo ton.

Whoever that eats any food, eats it to survive;
and he that forbids, does so to survive.

This depicts the need to examine the circumstances surrounding a crime committed by anybody before passing judgement on him. This is necessary because it shall go a long way to preventing judicial murder- a wrong judgement that may lead to the death of a litigant especially an innocent person.

Context 16: A Call for Equity and Justice in the Distribution of Resources

Here, two co-wives may fight over what their husband gave them to share and if the case is presented before some elders who volunteered to reconcile them, one of the mediators may introduce a relevant proverb into his speech to express the possible cause of the conflict between both parties:

Ariemu gha re-e, ovwo fiota.
Food was not equitably distributed; hence,
there was a disagreement.

This proverb illustrates the need to uphold equity and justice especially in distribution of resources. This Urhobo proverb shows that dispute must often occur where there is

marginalization of a group or individuals in a dynamic society. However, where there is even distribution of available resources, there is bound to be peace and harmonious co-existence in the community.

Context 17: To Caution Litigants about the Consequence of Lawsuits

This could be illustrated with a situation where a certain woman resolved to spend all her resources to pursue a case to a logical conclusion. If she lost at both her family and the town levels and still wants to take the case to another level, a close friend of hers might dissuade her from taking the case further, using the proverb;

Edjor gboro 'hwo.

Lawsuits wreck a man.

This proverb is often used by mediators during dispute settlement to caution litigants who are ready to spend their hard earned money on disputes even though they know that the case would not be in their favour.

Context 18: Persuasive Reconciliation of Disputes

Here, a young man's delay to get married has become a major concern to his parents. If this results in a serious conflict between him and his mother and they are both summoned by elders of their family to get them reconciled, an elder could caution the young man with the proverbial expression;

Orhare noyiduaye-e, kevwe y'okedue?

If a bachelor refused to have sex with a woman (and raise his family), is it a goat that he would have sex with?

Parents especially mothers express deep concern when their children have attained a marriageable age yet they make no effort to get married and raise children. Though the above proverb appears harsh and derogatory in tone, it is used to persuade young men to be conscious of early marriage.

Context 19: The Need to Avoid an Ugly Situation or Face its Consequences

In this context, an attempt could be made to reconcile two warring parties with one of the disputants appearing stubborn by making utterances that could escalate the conflict under settlement. If he has been advised to give peace a chance and live in harmony with his neighbours but he fails to heed to the advice, a mediator at this point may warn him;

Adje omo ibia 'koide edje-e,

ta 'kpe omre 'berigbunu vwo rhurha ye.

No one stops a child from growing protruded teeth,
provided he has lips spread enough to cover them.

Parents often caution their children and wards against fermenting trouble within and outside their communities. Since no reasonable parent would entertain bad comments or reports against their children, they use the aforementioned proverbial expression to caution them. Any law-abiding child who hears this proverb from an elder, retraces his steps and follows the right path of peace. However, if the child proves to be stubborn, he bears the consequence of his misfortunes alone.

Context 20: A Call for Gradual Mediation of Conflicts

A case under this context could be that of a tenant who burnt a house but during a meeting to get the matter settled, the landlord insisted that he should build him a new house; a

request the tenant cannot afford. One of the elders at the meeting may call for understanding and gradual resolution of the conflict by uttering the proverb:

Urhe gare vwo ri-i, ode je ohor'evwo-o.

No matter how hard a tree is, it must have some bark.

When a dispute appears difficult to resolve, mediators make proverbs encouraging the disputants and the audience to remain calm, and also reassuring them of their determination to resolve the conflictual situation. The proverb below is also connected to the one given earlier.

Ememerha 'rhue re okpota.

A serious dispute requires a gradual settlement.

This proverb becomes necessary when mediators see the need to adjourn the proceedings because of the severity of the offence. The adjournment of a case will give room for further investigation of the dispute before the judges. Besides, serious conflicts become mild with time.

Context 21: A Call for Total Reconciliation of Litigants

In this context, two siblings may be at loggerhead for some time until their father decides to reconcile them. If they are summoned before the head of their entire family and the issue is amicably resolved, the conflict mediator may proverbialize after the delivery of judgement;

Eherobo vwe uvue-e.

A man's palm has no hidden room.

This proverb is used after judgement has been made in law court by the traditional judges. It is used to further admonish or reconcile parties to a dispute to forget about their past and live in peace and harmony. Like a man's palm, there is no room for hidden matters (grudges), especially after settlement of their differences. It expresses the same idea with the one below.

Ekmeta kufia, evu oyi'kpora

We should dispose of grievances; but they are retained within our belly.

This proverb is employed to express the need to forget any wrong done to someone and also to forgive the offender wholeheartedly.

Context 22: To Subdue a Stubborn Litigant

Where a child feels aggrieved of an offence done to him and he plots to retaliate at all cost, such matter could be brought before some elders who are willing to resolve the conflictual situation. But after the judgment has been delivered, one of the disputants who is not satisfied with the judgment may threaten to go ahead and carry out a mischievous plan. An elder at this time may caution him using the proverb;

Ushawo grono'hwo r'ovworo-o.

An Okra plant does not grow taller than its owner (the farmer).

The aforementioned proverb depicts the fact that a man can never be greater than his family no matter how highly placed he might be in the society. He must listen to the voice of his people especially the elders and whenever he faces some difficulties in life, his family has the final say to put an end to it.

Context 23: To Control one's Anger and Embrace Peace

This is applicable, for instance, where there is a friction between husband and wife and the latter has been told to leave her matrimonial home. The matter may be taken to a family head

for hearing and possibly settlement, and one of the mediators pleads with the man to remain calm using the proverbial expression:

Mome, vwobo ghwo r'evu kpo'tor.

My child, use your hand to rub your belly downwards.

This proverb is used to plead with an aggrieved party to a conflict to control his hot temper and embrace peace. It is an undisputable fact that the resultant effects of most conflicts are unpalatable to warring parties and the society at large. Also, having a link with the above proverb is the one below which is appropriate for sounding a serious warning to stubborn people in a society.

Omo djidji kpa da re.

A foolish child does not stroll out.

This Urhobo proverb corroborates the fact that it is a tragedy to have a fool as a child. This is because he would not quickly perceive a situation that requires caution. The above proverb is appropriate to caution a child who proves to be unyielding in an ugly situation while the one below is used to advise him about the need to apply wisdom in all his endeavours in order to avoid conflict.

Ubrotanya vuo'muvwie, ko'reyo phi'ososo.

Half a word is what is uttered to a kinsman and he takes it as a complete one.

This proverb has a correlation with the English idiom that states, 'a word is enough for the wise.' In essence, having been given some pieces of advice, disputants are expected to be cautious about their relationships with neighbours. Whenever a wise disputant hears the above Urhobo proverb, he remains calm and ponders over the words of the conflict mediator.

Context 24: The Need to Abide by Elders' Decisions over Sensitive Matters

In this case, there may be a land dispute between two families which was caused by two young men claiming to know their boundaries. If the dispute degenerates into a physical combat until elders of both families decide to step into the matter to avoid bloodshed, one of the elders could utilize a proverb during the conflict mediation:

Omotete vwor'ebe kpahe uchukra-a.

A child does not weed a farm and uses the weeds to demarcate land boundaries.

This proverbial expression portrays the Urhobo worldview that youths cannot tell elders the exact boundaries of a piece of land in a community. In the literary sense, youths are not mandated to handle serious matters in their various communities. Though they handle minor cases in their little way, crucial issues are handed over to the elders. In Urhoboland, elders are highly respected as in other African traditional societies. According to George Oyibocha, one of the respondents interviewed during the fieldwork, elders are the custodians of the laws governing their land. During conflict resolution and other matters that relate to the laws, customs and traditions of their land, they are often called upon.

Context 25: The Need to Sustain Peace and Harmony within a Family

Here two siblings may have misunderstanding and both of them are not ready to reconcile their differences. If their father who is very worried about this development decides to summon

both of them to appear before their family elders who have indicated interest in the dispute settlement, an elder may call for caution in handling the issue at hand making the proverb:

Avwe agbotor kpi 'rhe awma r'uwewwi.

Let's use our chin to fold up in-house wrapper.

If a mediator wants the dispute resolved within the family, he expresses this proverb. With this utterance, the disputants are fully aware of the embarrassment they shall face in the society if the issue gets to members of the public, especially an abominable offence such as adultery. Whenever a proverb such as this is made, the matter has to be laid to rest while the aggrieved party would be advised to forgive the accused for peace to reign. This would only happen after the actual cause of the conflict has been identified.

Context 26: Attempt to Unravel the Root a Recurring Conflict

In this context, a woman may suddenly become aggressive to her husband and at any slight provocation she might threaten to quit her marriage. If the man summons her before her family elders and an uncle to the woman insists on knowing the real cause of the conflict between the couple, the use of a proverbial utterance would come to play. A relevant proverb at this point could be:

Evu r'ekpe eti 'yada mre ikerekpe.

In the soil lies clay soil.

During dispute settlement, it is imperative to hear from both parties involved in a case either at the family or community level. Thereafter, witnesses to the dispute are called upon if there is any. This will be followed by cross-examination of the disputants before the elders shall reach their judgement.

Context 27: To Express the Consequence of a person's Unruly Behaviour

In this context, a woman may decide to go any length to revenge her co-wife for killing her only goat. Even though a judgment has been delivered in her favour but she still insists on using other means within her power to seek vengeance. The consequence of her deviant behaviour may be communicated to her using the proverb:

Odiphri vwo 'vie, k'evu r'aso.

Odiphri would cry at night.

The consequence of unruly behaviour calls for the above proverb. Odiphri is a proverbial man in an Urhobo folktale who refused to heed to any advice given to him but when he faced a challenge he couldn't handle, he cried out. An English equivalent of this proverb is the idiom that "it's too late to cry when the head is cut off".

Context 28: To Admonish Warring Neighbours to be Tolerance

In this context, two bosom friends may suddenly turn enemies with one alleging that the other goes about revealing her secrets to the public which threatens her marriage. In such a situation, an elder and mediator who wants the conflict de-escalated may summon both of them and during the settlement, he may weave proverbs into his utterances. An illuminating form of proverb in this case is;

Ohwo re 'shevwerhe ke're, onye'muobor kpaha.

The sleeper next to one on a bed is the person
that one can rest one's hand on while asleep.

Conflict within neighbourhood is not encouraged in Urhoboland but once it occurs, the parties involved should be ready to embrace peace. The above proverb shows that two friends or

neighbours are bound to have a friction. So also are indigenes of two neighbouring communities that have been in good terms in the past.

Context 29: The need to De-escalate Conflict and not Aggravating it

A suitable case for the above context could be that of a man who is charged to court of law for allegedly instigating warring parties instead of promoting peace. If he instigates one of the disputants against the other under the guise of reconciling them, the relevant proverb below may be used to illustrate this:

Ekpe erhare fu'rhie, ada vwe ipetoro vwo nyorobo-o.

One does not intend to go and extinguish fire outbreak
at the same time hold a gallon of fuel.

It is a common practice in Urhoboland that whenever there is a conflict between two or more parties, the third party should act as a mediator. Such a person who called himself 'a peacemaker' must not take side with any of the disputants. He must adopt any possible means to de-escalate the situation and bring it under control instead of aggravating it. It is in allusion to this that elders often make the above proverb. Petrol is highly inflammable so it should not be taken to a scene of fire outbreak. However, a person who claims to be a fire fighter shall worsen the situation if he gets closer with a gallon of petrol. In the literary sense, a conflict manager should not engage in any act that could aggravate the conflict he intends to de-escalate.

Context 30: To Ignore the Gravity of an Offence and Embrace Peace

In the above context, a man may threaten to kill his friend for sleeping with his new wife. If the case is presented before a group of elders, one of them may react using the proverbial utterance:

*Ede n'ugregren r'orodeko,
akasa mr'ukpokpo vwo ghwie-e.*

If one considers the length of a snake,
there shall be no stick to crush it.

This proverb shows that if the gravity of the offence a person committed is so great, one can hardly state the severity of the penalties to be meted out to him. In essence, the gravity of an offence committed by a man should not be used to mete punishment on him. If one does that, the offender would go scot-free.

Context 31: A Call for Thorough Investigation of an Ugly Incident

A relevant case here could be that of a woman who complains that her husband often threatens to behead her. If the family of the woman decides to take the matter to their king for necessary action, the *otota* (spokesman) of the king may like to get to the root of the matter. The following proverb may utilize to express his stand:

*Ehwora rhurhu ikpon re.
Eti y'egha!*

No one treats an injury without removing the thorn
therein first. That is forbidden!

This is another Urhobo proverb that is similar to the one mentioned above. It shows that the real cause of the conflict has to be identified otherwise the matter shall remain unresolved. The Urhobo see reconciliation as futile without first and foremost investigating the actual cause of the conflict. They believe that it is after the cause of a problem has been identified that the solution shall be provided.

Aye gheghe dje vwabo mue ivie re-e.

A woman does not run and support her breasts
with her palms for nothing.

The above proverb expresses the need to investigate a dispute in order to know its actual cause. Whenever this proverb is used during traditional judicial proceedings by one of the judges, everyone present in the court knows the mediators shall be thorough or meticulous in examining every bits of information at their disposal in order to arrive at a good judgement. In addition, if a mediator is very much aware of the fact that there is no smoke without fire then something must be responsible for the unusual scene created. With this proverb, the actual cause of the matter before the elders/mediators would be investigated and resolved.

Conclusion

The study critically examined various forms and functionalities of Urhobo proverbs utilized in different contexts during traditional judicial proceedings. Through the relevant cases cited in the work, the significance of proverbs in peace and conflict discourse is brought to the fore. The research shows that whenever conflicts arise in a traditional Urhobo society as could be observed in other African societies, older men who have in-depth knowledge of the disputant settlement are usually called upon to act as facilitators, mediators or peace envoys. However, where the case requires the opinions of women owing to its sensitivity, elderly women (the *egwheya*) have to be involved.

From the study, it is obvious that proverbs cannot be separated from deliberations of elders because they weave a handful of these oral resources into their utterances depending on the form of disputes at hand. In essence, the nature and forms of conflict to be tackled attract the forms and functionalities of proverbs to be utilized during conciliation or conflict resolution. Some of these proverbs are employed to admonish or caution warring parties, pass judgement, seek cooperation, equity and justice, promote peace, unity and harmonious co-existence, and among others.

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