

# An Analysis of the Proverbs the Yorubans Live By

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**Keywords:** *Yoruba, Proverb, Health, Personal hygiene*

**ABSTRACT:** In the Yoruba society, proverbs have been and still remain powerful and effective instruments of transmitting ideas, motive, knowledge and social morality from generation to generations. This is because proverbs reflect societal values of the people. Like any other group of people, the Yorubas are interested in the maintenance of personal health and hygiene. Consequently several Yoruba proverbs abound which may be used to ensure good health. This paper examines some of these proverbs and concludes that their proper teaching and usage may be veritable tools for enhancing good health and hygiene.

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## 1. Introduction

Research on the different aspects of Yoruba has upsurge in recent years, but there is no specific research in the literature on the proverbs of Yoruba. This paper is a pioneering attempt at describing the linguistic and sociocultural aspects of proverbs in Yoruba.

## 2. Background

Sociocultural aspects of language have attracted the attention of many scholars from around the world who have studied different languages (e.g., Italian by Capone 2005a,b; 2008; 2009; 2010; 2012; Persian by Allan and Salmani Nodoushan 2015; Capone and Salmani Nodoushan 2014; Salmani Nodoushan 1995; 2006a,b; 2007a,b,c; 2008a,b,c; 2011a,b; 2012a,b; 2013a,b, c; 2014a,b, c; 2012a,b; 2016a,b,c; 2017a,b; Salmani Nodoushan and Allami 2011; Salmani Nodoushan and Khakbaz 2011, 2012; Salmani Nodoushan and Mohiyedin Ghomshei 2014; Salmani Nodoushan and Montazeran 2012; Salmani Nodoushan and Pashapour 2016; English by Blakemore 1987; 1992; 2002; 2008; 2010; 2013). Proverbs constitute one of the sociocultural aspects of language. The use of proverbs in Yoruba is highly controlled by the sociocultural functioning of the Yoruba language.

Proverbs encapsulate the socio-cultural significance of a people. But they do more. They form the bedrock of traditional philosophy, the bedrock of civilization and societal perpetuation. Without philosophy, a word used in this paper as a semantic doubletalk for a collection of a people's wisdom, society would stagnate, organizations would disintegrate, human life would be the fulcrum of automata, and civilization would be an elusive will o' the wisp. Aristotle is quoted as saying, "A proverb is a remnant of the ancient philosophy preserved amid many destructions

on account of its brevity and fitness for use". In Africa, such philosophy is most truly pronounced in the peoples' proverbs. Proverbs express general truth or wisdom. They are metaphorical descriptions of an act or event applied as a general truth. Proverbs are at variance with the English metaphors and similes, since they are always complete sentences.

Akporobaro (2008, pp. 85, 95) describes proverbs as, "often very humorous, delightful to hear, morally instructive, philosophic in outlook and figuratively ornamented". Bolaji, Adebajo and Adekoya (2011, p. 11) observe, "With proverbs, an elder can advise, settle a quarrel, warn, counsel, persuade or encourage...With proverbs, threats are breathed out and love or affection is expressed". Hence, proverbs are easy instruments for teaching and education, especially on morality, and we hasten to add, on personal hygiene and continued maintenance of sound health. After all, a health is wealth. To be sure, proverbs are an intrinsic part of culture.

In the Yoruba society, proverbs have been and still remain powerful and effective instruments of transmitting ideas, motive, knowledge and social morality from generation to generations. This is because proverbs reflect societal values of the people. Like any other group of people, the Yorubas are interested in the maintenance of personal health and hygiene. Consequently several Yoruba proverbs abound which may be used to ensure good health. We are quick to add that Yoruba proverbs are better called *òwe*. The rest of this paper is divided into the following sections. The next section presents the etymology of *òwe* and makes an attempt at some definitions. Next, we briefly explain what we mean by health and hygiene. Then the proverbs which serve as the data for this study are presented with their translation where appropriate<sup>1</sup>. Following that, we analyze the data with reference to hygiene and health. Finally, we conclude and discuss the implications of the study to general health and hygiene in our society.

## 2.1. *Òwe* – Its Etymology

The word *òwe* seemed to be a derivative of the clause, "ò wé e", meaning "something that wraps it [something else]" (Oyekan, 2005, words in square brackets added), through the process of contraction. Observe that the transitive root verb *wé*, requires three arguments, according to the thematic relations observable in its use, a subject that must be an **agent** or the doer of an action, an **instrument** which is the thing used to perform the action of wrapping, and a **theme** or the entity that undergoes or experiences the action of wrapping. The initial ò nominalizer in Yoruba<sup>2</sup> behaves much like derivational suffixes, such as -ist, -er, and -ion in English. To avoid hiatus in Yoruba, the adjacent identical vowel *e* is zapped, but its MT is assimilated by the preceding vowel as the HT of the host vowel is deleted, yielding *òwe* rather than ò (an agent that ...) and *wé* (wraps), *òwé*.<sup>3</sup> Hence, the word *òwe* although different from figures of comparison such as simile<sup>4</sup> and metaphor in English cannot be explained to the total exclusion of comparison. Illustrating this fact, a Yoruba proverb says, *ohun to jo 'hun lafi n wo 'hun, eepo epa jo posi eliri (only two-related things are compared; the peanut shell is comparable to a traditional eliri casket)*.

A number of definitions of proverbs illuminate the argument further. Oyekan (2005, p. 3) observes that: "Reduced to its essence, therefore, *òwe* is a speech form that likens, or compares, one thing or situation to another, highlighting the essential similarities that the two share. In Yoruba usage it is always at least one complete sentence". Oyekan's definition emphasizes the comparative characteristic of proverbs. In such comparison lies the strength of proverbs. When proverbs are used, 'the essential similarities' inherent in similar situations or things are brought to the fore. Proverbs, through this means can instruct, warn or brighten one's hope, as it guides one through the rough parts of life. Stone (2006:xii, xiii) observes that, "Proverbs guide our thoughts and actions,

and warn us of the hidden dangers along life's way", and defines proverbs at, "bits of ancient wisdom". To the Arab, 'a proverb is to speech what salt is to food.' More important though is the fact that proverbs are known for their characteristic freshness, applicability, and continued relevance to every age, including our own

Indeed, it is in proverbs that one sees the beauty of true comparisons in its brilliance. We are in good company with the conclusion of Oyekan quoted earlier. This definition therefore, is the definition we will adopt in this paper for proverbs. The comparative nature of Yoruba proverbs is relied upon in bringing out their potency in contributing to and promoting in good health and hygiene in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Yes, to the Yoruba. proverbs are words of wisdom and cultural heritage which are laced with the beliefs and philosophical bent of the people. Interestingly, Yoruba proverbs are used purposefully, making them easy to use for teaching and application. The diagramme below beautifully illustrates the points. We have called it Proverb<sup>s</sup> Applied Chains:

According to the Applied Proverb Chain the poet selects or the proverb is selected according to context. Bear in mind that the context determines the code to select; the code is manifest in the set of words (proverbs) selected. This in turn is according to the type of contact established or the type of audience contacted; hence the contact also determines the proverb, context, code and word. When all this is done, the proverb gets to its final destination, the target audience. Therefore, in using Yoruba proverbs for education reason, the poet (the addresser, encoder, speaker, sender or actor, Ajibade, (202)) must take care to go through all the processes diagrammed above to be successful.

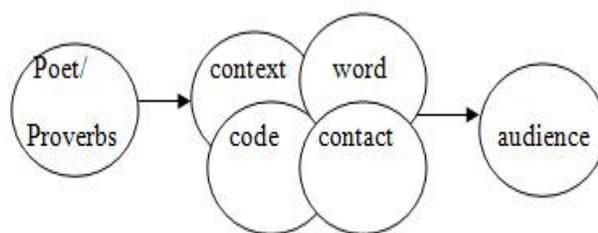


Figure 1: Applied Proverb Chains

## 2.2. Health and Hygiene

Whether they are rich or poor, many people fail to see the link between their habits and their health. They may regard enjoying good health as a matter of chance or as something over which they have little control. Such a fatalistic view holds many back from improving their health and leading a more productive life. In reality, whatever one's financial circumstances, one can maintain good health and Yoruba proverbs are valuable in that regard. Good health is not negotiable. The *Long Man Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2003) offers its 3<sup>rd</sup> definition of health as "when you have no illness or disease". The same dictionary (defines hygiene as "the practice of keeping yourself and the things around you clean in order to prevent diseases". We comment on this latter concept. Around the world, one potent means of combating diseases is through good personal hygiene. This may explain why the Lagos State government has continued to uphold last Saturday of every month as an environmental sanitation day. The practice has reduced drastically, the rate at which diseases spread.

The Yoruba cherish good personal hygiene. In no uncertain condemnatory terms, a Yoruba proverb says, "òhun gbogbo l'obun oni; bi i t'oorun ko" (the unclean lack all but stench). Such dirty ones are derided in society to serve as a warning to any lazy one who may want to tread the part of uncleanness. But our experience in life, especially in this century and the last has taught us that attainment of the state described in the definition above is more fitting to the earliest years of man in the Biblical Garden of Eden, in the days of Adam, prior to his crossing the

prohibitive line of disobedience. Yet relatively good health, mentally, emotionally and physically can be attained with the application of the tenets of Yoruba proverbs. Where necessary in our discussions, we shall appeal to, corroborate or strengthen our points with other proverbs from around the world.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, in this paper, by good health and hygiene, we mean how one can promote good maintain, emotional, physical and physical health, by maintaining a routine of uncompromising personal hygiene, through the application of Yoruba proverbs. But Yoruba proverbs relating to health matters can do more; they can teach other lessons which do not directly bother on health matters but on building up invaluable qualities for an all round life. The paper discusses some of these hidden beauties of Yoruba proverbs.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. The Data for This Study

We present below the main proverbs analyzed in this paper.

- |     |   |  |
|-----|---|--|
| 1.  | Àgbàtì ilè tí í bí báálé ilé nínú   | Unpacked refuse (that) annoys the house owner  |
| 2.  | Abarapá ni ti gbogbo ènìyàn,<br>olókùnrùn ni tara a rè nìkan soso         | Sprightliness is everybody's; indisposition is one person's alone. (People will fraternize with a lively person; nobody fraternizes with a sickly person)                      |
| 3.  | Abéré bó lówó adètè ó dètè;òrò<br>balè ó dèrò                             | A needle drops from a leper's hand and presents an impossible problem; a grievous matter hits the ground and imposes deep contemplation. (Certain problems defy easy solution) |
| 4.  | Afagbada gun keke ara iku lo n<br>ya a                                    | One who rides a bicycle wearing a flowing gown (yoruba traditional male attire) is hurrying to death   |
| 5.  | Agbe ni i je egbin omi<br>agbalagba ni i je iya oran (ti<br>agbe ko wale) | It is the gourd that takes the water sediment; the elderly suffer the consequences of a matter--i.e., someone must bear the consequence of poor hygiene                        |
| 6.  | Ilera loogun oro  | Health is wealth   |
| 7.  | Bomo odun meta ba ko ti ko rin;<br>die lowo iya, die lowo baba ni         | If a 3yrs old child refuses to walk the fault is from both the father and the mother   |
| 8.  | Eeyan ti ko loogun arinya<br>(irinya) ki i je aayan                       | One who does not have the remedy for nausea does not eat the cockroach   |
| 9.  | Eni to ni oyin ko dun Aare re le  | One who says honey is tasteless is seriously ill   |
| 10. | Ilu ki i kere ki o ma ni aatan  | No matter how little a town is; it must have a refuse dump. It is a basic necessity for each town to have a refuse center  |
| 11. | Arun la a wo, a ki i wo iku   | One cures a disease, not death   |
| 12. | Atelewo ko se fi ru ina   | One cannot rake coals with a mere palm   |
| 13. | Ebi ni si ilekun fun iku  | Hunger opens the door for death  |

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 14. A ki i fi ojo kan bo omo to ru yo              | One never makes healthy in a single day, a malnourished child                                   |
| 15. Asoro i wo bi arun idile                       | it is very difficult to cure hereditary diseases  |
| 16. Imototo bori aarun mole boye ti<br>I bori ooru | (Cleanliness neutralizes diseases as harmattan dispels heat (cleanliness is next to Godliness)) |

### 3.2. Purpose and significance of the Study

The study intends to survey some Yoruba health related proverbs in order to see their place in health matters and general wellbeing of the child and members of society. The study will be useful to in health education, civic education and language education. The study will also be of benefits to anyone interested in improving the quality of his life.

### 3.3. Research Questions

The study answers the following research questions:

1. Have Yoruba proverbs any relevance in health matters?
2. What place do Yoruba proverbs occupy in health education, civic education and in living a good life
3. How can these proverbs be applied to the identified areas in (1) and (2) above?

Corpus method of data collection was used. We felt that only when we “data to speak to it”, will we be able to see the richness of Yoruba proverbs and it is only then we will realize that proverbs truly have meaning potentials. As a consequence, 16 Yoruba proverbs connected with health matters, either lexically or semantically were selected. These proverbs were analyzed with respect to their semantic function, commutative properties, and temporal meaning.

The data collected for the study were first translated where possible by the authors. They were then analyzed based on their relevance or lack of it to health matters and general application to living a good life.

## 4. Analysis

As claimed in his paper, Yoruba proverbs have a lot to do with health matters and should be properly harnessed. To this end, we analyze the data presented above one after the other and make some application. Following Irma (2003), with some modification, the proverbs that follow will be analysed on the basis of their semantic function, communicative properties, temporal meaning. For example, to us, semantic functions and semantic implications are synonyms; the same thing applies to communicative properties and application. Therefore, the synonyms are bracketed.

- Àgbàtì ilè tí í bí báálé ilé nínú

*Translation:* Unpacked refuse (that) annoys the house owner

*Temporal Meaning:* unclean environment is abhorred among the Yoruba; it is at variance with the people’s culture and tradition

*Semantic Function (Implication):* This proverb may be used to chide a child who sweeps or is used to sweeping the house without packing the refuse. Significantly, in Yoruba society, it is

frowned at, for the reverence accorded the head of the house, usually the father or husband, or compound head.

*Commutative Properties (Application):* This stresses the need to always keep the surroundings clean at all times. This proverb on matter of cleanliness relates to an Irish proverb “*A person’s health is in his feet*”. The first thing that steps of an unpacked refuse containing sharp fish bones, gravy, food drops, and other things which may cause injury is the foot. Hence, the Yoruba believe that an unkempt environment detracts from the dignity of the household. Besides, the proverb emphasizes the need to complete what one starts; what is worth doing at all is worth doing well.

- Abarapá ni ti gbogbo ènìyàn, olókùnrùn ni tara a rẹ̀ nìkan soso  
*Translation:* Sprightliness is everybody’s; indisposition is one person’s alone.

*Temporal Meaning:* People will fraternize with a lively, healthy person; nobody fraternizes with a sickly person. This does not mean that the Yoruba do not care for the sick members of their society. But, a sickly person (someone who is always ill) may not have associates as does a healthy person; the same principle applies to a. Suppose someone were to become a leper, then he must live alone to avoid infecting others. This is to keep the society clean and healthy.

*Semantic Function (Implication):* The Yoruba cherish good health and will do anything to maintain good health. This explains why personal hygiene and physical cleanliness are highly rated. The proverb also explains why responsible members of the Yoruba community are weary of hard, mind-altering substances and unnecessary risks.

*Commutative Properties (Application):* By all means, good health resulting from sound personal hygiene must be pursued with rigor. A French proverb has it this way, “*He who has not health has nothing*”. A sickly person loses all, freedom, association, joy. A sickly person loses more, no one wants to marry or give his daughter’s hands in marriage to a sickly the one who is always in sick bed. The proverb applies in principle to young ones who love leading a criminal or violent life; who love abusing substances that are inimical to their health. When their acts boomerang, they must suffer the consequences alone. To before warn is to before arm.

- Abéré bó lówó adètè ó dète;òrò balè ó dèrò  
*Translation:* A needle drops from a leper’s hand and presents an impossible problem; a grievous matter hits the ground and imposes deep contemplation.

*Temporal Meaning:* Certain problems defy easy solution. The Yoruba are very observant and creative. A leper has no fingers with which to pick whatever drops from him. To recover what drops, he implores different strategies, including using the two fingerless hands to pick up the dropped items often, with no success.

*Semantic Function (Implication):* The implication of this proverb is that at times, there is no need to become unnecessarily anxious over spilled milk.

*Commutative Properties (Application):* Young ones may at time want to give up on life or commit suicide because of failure, debilitating illness or other sad situations; they may become despondent. This proverb, if properly used can come to the rescue. Success is not attainable in all things; at times, there can be failures. When that happens, ‘take heart; life goes on’ is the message. Besides, the proverb also relate to the English proverb, make hay while the sun shines. When one delays in doing the right thing at the proper time one regrets in a hindsight. A woman

who rejects or men proposal because she is choosy (an evidence of a prideful spirit), will soon be desperate for a husband, any man who may come across her way now. A Japanese proverb appropriately warns, “*Rosy cheeks at daybreak may be bone white by eve*”. That is a case of too little too late. The same principle applies to education or studies, health matters, employment and so on.

- Afagbada gun keke ara iku lo n ya a

*Translation:* one who rides a bicycle wearing a flowing gown (yoruba traditional male attire) is hurrying to death

*Temporal Meaning:* It is unwise to gamble with life by taken unnecessary risks.

*Semantic Function (Implication):* engaging in any activity that is life threatening is foolhardy; The end result is calamity and regrets.

*Communicative Properties (Application):* May be used to teach why it is always good to count the cost of any endeavor, relationship and activity. A French proverb says, “*Reckless youth makes rueful<sup>7</sup> age*”. It is best to use this proverb at the early stage of such situation, not after the deed is done. When used after the action has been taken, the proverb has a negative application.

- Agbe ni i je egbin omi agbalagba ni i je iya oran (ti agbe ko wale)

*Translation:* It is the gourd that takes the water sediment; the elderly suffer the consequences of a matter

*Temporal Meaning:* Among the Yoruba when quarrel ensues between two brothers, the more elderly suffers the blame; considering his age, he is expected to behave more maturely or wisely, an action that would have prevented the quarrel in the first place.

*Semantic Function (Implication):* Cleanliness dispels diseases; but poor hygiene embraces is. What is more, it is far cheaper to maintain a culture of good personal hygiene than to spend money on diseases; the money could be better spent on something more beneficial such as food or other essential items.

*Communicative Properties (Application):* Whatever we sow we reap. It is far better to do good things such as good personal hygiene, good conduct, hard work, and good human relation so as to be happy in the future when we start to see the rewards of such positive actions than to do otherwise and be rueful. The point is when things go wrong in life, education, relationship, employment and so on because of our action, in action or misdeeds, we alone will bear the consequences.

- Ilera loogun oro

*Translation:* Health is wealth

*Temporal Meaning:* If we take good care of our health, we will always remain strong and will be able to have time for beneficial activities.

*Semantic Function (Implication):* If one is ill, one cannot work; if a person does not work, he has no food and becomes a burden to others. Such brings derision and shame. Ill health does not make one enjoy good meal with families and friends. It is good to take care of our health by maintaining good eating habits and good work routine.

*Communicative properties (Application):* The proverb may be used to reason with a young person who has turned himself into a workaholic and never wants to rest up a bit, in the name of

accumulating money. Success does not depend on working oneself to death, every work without play, makes Jack a poor boy. If health fails, how does he enjoy the money? The same proverb may apply to someone who prefers junk food. It may apply to other situations as well. When health fails, other things fall apart. Hence a German proverb says, “*Health is better than wealth.*”

- Bomo odun meta ba ko ti ko rin; die lowo iya, die lowo baba ni

*Translation:* If a 3-year-old child refuses to walk the fault is from both the father and the mother

*Temporal Meaning:* A child of three is expected to start walking but when this fails, the Yoruba believe it may be that the mother got pregnant too early; a woman does not become pregnant without a man.

*Semantic Function(Implication):* If there is no cause, there is no effect. Something gives rise to a situation and the one involved in the problem cannot be free from blame.

*Communicative Properties (Application):* This proverb stresses the need for impartiality in settling a case. In any case involving two people, no one is totally guilty and no one is totally free. A Dutch proverb observes, “*From the father comes honor, from the mother comfort*”. Both parents contribute to the quality of life or the lack of it the child later enjoys or suffers. In the same vein, no one bears all the blame or enjoys all the praise in a matter. But this proverb can also be used to advise students on the need to do their parts in learning, for if their efforts complement the teacher’s, the result is success.

- Eeyan ti ko loogun arinya (irinya) ki i je aayan

*Translation:* One who does not have the remedy for nausea does not eat the cockroach

*Temporal Meaning:* The cockroach is known to be disease carrier, perhaps among some Yoruba tribes or on some serious or rare occasion, the cockroach may serve some medicinal purposes. But then, the one using the medicine must prepare to vomit; it is nauseating.

*Semantic Function (Implication):* One does not embark on a project one does not have necessary resources for. One does not start what one cannot finish. It is always good to count the cost.

*Communicative Properties (Application):* The proverb is useful in helping young people and adult alike to reason. For health matters, some have chosen to be drinking bottled water, and so on, often because others are doing the same thing. It is good to count the cost before starting; otherwise, the very health issue one is running away from may become a serious issue when there is relapse because there is no money to continue living on such expensive things. Others have continued to take in substances, drugs, and such things or adopt a certain lifestyle in imitation of others without counting the cost – considering the benefits and otherwise, only to regret in the end. An Irish proverb cautions, “*Better to be safe than sorry*”. Of course the proverb is best use at the early stage of matters like those mentioned above.

- Eni to ni oyin ko dun Aare re le

*Translation:* One who says honey is tasteless is seriously ill

*Temporal Meaning:* Honey is universally known to be sweet. Even so, on the lips of a seriously ill person, everything, including the sweet honey is bitter or tasteless; there is no appetite for anything.

*Semantic Function(Implication):* When one is in serious emotional trauma, nothing, not even the company of sweet associations, attracts him.

*Communicative Properties (Application):* When a child who bounces around, who is outgoing, vivacious and brilliant suddenly becomes dull, withdrawn and melancholic, to the observant teacher, that is a clear signal of serious problem which may be psychological, emotional and so on. He must quickly come to the child's rescue and save a soul.

- Ilu ki i kere ki o ma ni aatan

*Translation:* No matter how little a town is; it must have a refuse dump

*Temporal Translation:* It is a basic necessity for each town to have a refuse center where all refuse is dumped. Such practice was a hallmark of Yoruba traditional society. The centre serves two purposes, at least, viz, maintenance of cleanliness, maintenance of good community and personal health.

*Semantic Function(Implication):* Cleanliness is next to godliness. A healthy body is a wealthy body; and a wealthy community is a healthy community.

*Communicative Properties (Application):* This proverb can be used to teach a lesson in respect for constituted authority; it is good to respect headship, either at home, in school or in the community. Young ones have no reason for violent actions against authority or be scheming to overthrow or resist those in power. If there is no authority, law and order collapse, society goes into disarray. An Italian proverb explains the value of authority thus, *He that exceeds his commission must answer for it at his own cost*

- Arun la a wo, a ki i wo iku

*Translation:* One cures a disease, not death

*Temporal Translation:* although the Yoruba believe in life after death, they prefer life to death. So, they do all they can to attend to themselves, friends, relatives and family members who may be ill, in order to save him from dying. Should the indisposed eventually becomes disease, they try to comfort themselves and family of the diseased. At times such as this, the proverb is a potent instrument of comfort. So, it prudent to care for oneself when ill than take chances.

*Semantic Function(Implication):* This proverb impresses upon anyone, the need to take care of their health while it is still possible to do so.

*Communicative Properties (Application):* This proverb is saying it is imprudent to delay attending to one's health until one is in a critical condition. A Portuguese proverb observes, "*A dead man does not speak*". Hence the proverb can be used to teach young ones the need to take care of their health promptly: when they feel the nudging pains of headache, when they experience the discomfort of toothache, when they sustain injuries from the exuberance of youthful years, they must not keep the pains to themselves; their parents must be in the no. The proverbs also apply to taking studies seriously and not wait till examination time. A stitch in time saves nine.

- Atelewo ko se fi ru ina

*Translation:* One cannot rake coals with a mere palm

*Temporal Meaning:* Coals burn and scorch; it is foolish to pack such things with bare hands.

*Semantic Function (Implication):* Why engage in risky deeds? Although daring is needed in life to attain certain success; it is not safe to dare.

*Communicative Properties(Application):* At times people take unnecessary risks with their lives. Such risks are taken at times by youths, as a result of curiosity or peer pressure. The proverb can be used to set things straight for them, When one engages in riots or protests, when one engages in criminal acts, when one engages in truancy, when one takes pride in watching pornography, smoking, binging or other nefarious acts, one is in effect raking coals with a mere hands, the price to pay are usually high. A Roman proverb applies, “*Against the daring, daring is unsafe*”

- Ebi ni si ilekun fun iku

*Translation:* Hunger opens the door for death

*Temporal Meaning:* Hunger, malnourishments, have been observed to be the leading cause of death. When there is no food, the body system breaks down; death looms. Even today, this is universal truth.

*Semantic Function (Implication):* It is good to feed well. When we do not eat well, the body lacks the needed nutrients, disease comes in (including kwashiorkor) and death may ensue. No food; no life. Of course, lack of spiritual food will also cause death eventually.

*Communicative Properties(Application):* It is good to feed well. The proverb may be used to help children see the need for food. Some young ones may refuse to eat because they want to remain thin and attractive; others may abuse food. In either case, eating disorders usually ensue<sup>8</sup>. Good eating habits should be encouraged. But a healthy mind is also necessary. What the child feeds his mind on mentally and physically ha impact on his growth and life.

- A ki i fi ojo kan bo omo to ru yo

*Translation:* One never makes healthy in a single day, a malnourished child

*Temporal Meaning:* A malnourished child is fed gently lest he dies.

*Semantic Function (Implication):* Delicate situation must be approached with care lest it deteriorates.

*Communicative Properties (Application):* This provide teaches that we should take time to enjoy our meal when hungry, eating without patience can cost dearly. This proverb may be used to advise student or anyone who, through no fault of his, is in a web. He must tread gently.

- Imototo bori aarun mole boye ti I bori ooru

*Translation:* Cleanliness neutralizes diseases as harmattan dispels heat

*Temporal Meaning:* a clean person keeps illness at a distance. This is more evident in cases of cholera.

*Semantic Function (Implication):* If we want to remain healthy, we must remain clean morally, mentally and physically.

*Communicative Properties (Application):* The proverb is useful in class to emphasis the need for a clean environment at home, office, school and at all times. The Americans say, “*cleanliness is next to godliness.*” The Mexicans say, “*Cleanliness is the luxury of the poor;*” and the Irish say, “*Cleanliness is part of glory.*”

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

It is beautiful, examining some of the health proverbs in Yoruba. We have seen how our consideration answers the three questions raised at the outset. We recommend therefore that educators, health officials and language experts make more research into African proverbs; they may be surprised to see that in them lies the way forward they have been looking for.

### Notes

1. We wish to say that there is no one to one correspondence between the constituents of Yoruba proverbs, the ancient wisdom they encapsulate and English lexical items. Whenever such correspondence, in our wisdom becomes an impediment to the true sense of the wisdom the proverbs are imbued with, we result to sense translation.
2. Notice how it nominalizes the following verbs, ò+ kú (die)= òkú (the dead); ò+bí (bear bring to birth)= òbí (parent),
3. Interestingly, Oyekan (2005) observes that “To say in Yoruba that one thing may be compared with or to another, one says “fi” (noun 1) wé (noun 2),” literally “use (n1) to wrap (n2),” or, more idiomatically, “wrap (n1) around (n2).” The formulation reveals an important Yoruba view of what happens when one likens something to something else: one brings the two items into as close proximity as possible in order to make their qualities observable side by side or in (virtually) the same space; one intertwines them, in other words.
4. Of course, similes and metaphors are among the trademarks of proverbs; but proverbs are larger than these figures of comparisons.
5. The word ‘Applied’ is used in the same sense as the word is used in linguistics (for example, Applied Linguistics).
6. Proverbs from around the world are sourced from Stone (2006) and those from English are taken from Oxford Concise Dictionary of proverbs (Simpson, J & Speak, J Eds.) (2003)
7. Rueful is an adjective meaning, “feeling or showing that you wish you had not done something” (LDCE)
8. Two of such disorders are anorexia nervosa in which a child literally starves himself to death in the name of going on diet! The anorexics have the morbid fear of gaining weight- even if she is already stick thin. Bulimia nervosa is the other. The bulimic never loses weight since she binges and consumes a large amount of food in a short period of time. The bulimic may sneak food and eats it in secrete. (See Awake! April 22, 1999 cover series for details)

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