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**INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF PROVERBS IN  
NIGERIA: DOES DIGITAL MATTER?**

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INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF PROVERBS IN NIGERIA:  
DOES DIGITAL MATTER?

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

to the faculty of the

DIVISION OF MASS COMMUNICATION

of

THE LESLEY H. AND WILLIAM L. COLLINS COLLEGE OF  
PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

Christopher Omamuromu Amojó

Date Submitted: 4/1/2020

Date Approved: 4/21/2020

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF PROVERBS IN NIGERIA: DOES DIGITAL MATTER?**

Christopher Omamuru Amajo

A distinctive element of any culture is its language and one of the fundamental components of that language that contains the customs of that culture is proverbs. Proverbs are short sayings that are packed with wisdom that conveys the beliefs of a people. If any culture is to survive, its language invariably linked with its proverbs will have to endure eternally, it has to be transmitted from one generation to the next. This work studies the intergenerational transmission of proverbs in Nigeria asking if digital technology matters in that transmission line taking into cognizance its advancement. The research question, how are proverbs transmitted intergenerationally in Nigeria, is aimed at testing the hypothesis that among the older generation (50 years and above) the transmission is more of an oral, in-person contact tradition while in the younger generation (15-30 years) the transmission is more with digital technology. The study is conducted through semi-structured interviews comprising of 38 participants randomly selected. Using thematic analysis, the data was analyzed bringing out significant themes that could be used for further research. The data interpretation affirmed the hypothesis that proverb transmission (learning and teaching) among the older generations was more of an oral tradition while among the younger generation, it affirmed the hypothesis that they transmitted more using digital technology but nullified the hypothesis that they learnt more from digital technology since the study showed that the younger generation learnt from the combination of the oral tradition and digital technology.

**DEDICATION**

To my Mother

Mrs. Helen Modupe Amojó

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my God for all His blessings in my life, my admission and completion of this program are all testimonies of his compassionate love for me. I am thankful to my mum and siblings for their unconditional love. I remain grateful to my community, the Congregation of the Mission - Province of Nigeria, my Provincial Superior, Very Rev. Fr. Cyril Mbata, CM, the Eastern Province of the United States who provided the scholarship. My eternal gratitude goes to my mentor, Prof. Mark Juszczark and Prof. Candice Roberts for their invaluable input in this work. I thank also Professors Basilio Monteiro, Minna Horowitz and William Cipolla for making this program an unforgettable journey. I thank Rev. Fr. John Adikwu, CM, for his unique friendship. I remain grateful also to the following for making my time in New York a memorable one: the Nigerian Vincentian confreres working at Bellevue diocese, the confreres and staff of Murray House at St. John's University, Rev. Fr. Cletus Anyanwu, Rev. Fr. Ernest Makata, Mr. & Mrs. Eddie Efekoha, Mr. & Mrs. Tony Udenze, Mr. & Mrs. Uche Nweke and Mrs. Christiana Inuwere. I thank my friends, benefactors and benefactresses for their love and support. I thank all my class and course mates for making the learning experience a unique one.

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## INTRODUCTION

The beauty of every culture is its uniqueness, and one of the ways through which a culture expresses its uniqueness is through their language. Proverbs form an important part of that language. “Nothing defines a culture as distinctly as its language, and the element of language that best encapsulates a society's values and beliefs is its proverbs” (Martin, 2019). Proverbs, in the Nigerian or African setting, are wise short sayings drawn from the wisdom of experience and mostly used as a guiding path to appreciate the richness of the cultural heritage of the people as well as serve as a guide towards living in accordance with the norms of the community. This work studies how proverbs are transmitted from one generation to another in Nigeria today.

The study examined how older generations learnt proverbs. It also examined how the younger generation learnt proverbs. How did the senior citizen, the elder, the grandparent receive the wise sayings in the forms of proverbs from their own ancestors? How does the same senior citizen, the elder, the grandparent transmit the wisdom, the richness, the usage, the story behind these particular proverbs to the younger generation (the teenager, the young adult, the grandchild or other children) in the community? How do the younger generation learn proverbs? We live in a fast-changing society with phenomenal advancement in science and technology. Has that in any way affected the way proverbs are transmitted intergenerationally? Does the older generation make use of these various digital inventions that range from the television to the smart phone or are proverbs still being transmitted on the level of the one-on-one, face-to-face encounter? What about the younger generations? How are they learning and transmitting proverbs? Does digital matter for them as well in the transmission process? For the sake of clarity and with particular reference to this academic work,

we state from the onset that by digital we mean any mode of transmission outside of the one-on-one, face-to-face encounter.

The research question is summarized thus:

1. How are proverbs transmitted intergenerationally in Nigeria? How did the older generations learn proverbs? How are they transmitting it? How are the younger generation learning proverbs? How are they transmitting it?

My hypothesis is:

that age groups differ in how they transmit proverbs both within and between generations. Specifically, I believe that older generations (individuals living in Nigeria between the ages of 50-70) will display a higher incidence of proverb transmission through direct, in-person discussion and contact, whether with the same age group or with younger age groups. Conversely, I believe that younger generations (individuals living in Nigeria between the ages of 15-30) will display a higher incidence of proverb transmission through digital media.

To prove or disprove my hypothesis, I conducted an ethnographic exploratory study in the field. It consists of semi-structured interviews conducted in person in Nigeria with 38 persons. 24 persons in the younger generation group, 14 persons in the older generation group. The aim was to identify three trends: what proverbs they transmitted, to whom they transmitted them most often and how they transmitted them. After conducting the interviews, the data was collected and analyzed to prove or disprove the

hypothesis. The result of the analysis formed the basis for our observations, conclusions and recommendations.

The work is divided into 5 chapters. Chapter 1 explores the concepts of Proverbs by beginning with the definitions of culture and intergenerational transmission. This is followed by the definitions, functions and importance of proverbs. The chapter then concludes with a look at Proverbs in the African and the Nigerian setting. Chapter 2 gives a literature review on studies conducted about proverbs in Nigeria. Chapter 3 deals with methodology, highlighting first the gaps in previous studies done on proverbs and then explaining in detail the methodology employed in the study. Chapter 4 gives an overview of the results and analysis of the work. Chapter 5 gives the conclusions in the sense of data interpretation and recommendations on further research that could be made on proverbs and its transmission.

### **Significance of study**

It is of utmost importance that there is a continuity in the transmission of what makes a people and their story. The cultural values of a people form the life of the people and invariably affects the society. Proverbs being a part of the language conveys the identity, the rich cultural heritage, the norms and the values of the people which are all of paramount importance in their lives. Proverbs contain sayings that are apt for every occasion and situations in life and serve as a guiding principle on which the norms of the society are built.

The question of the transmission of proverbs is important because it is invariably linked to the existence of the people. If proverbs are not being transmitted, part of the cultural

identity is at risk of extinction because language is intrinsically linked to culture. If the older generation are not transmitting, if the younger generation are not learning or transmitting, the probability that when the younger generation transit to the older generation category, they won't have the rich cultural heritage and repository of proverbs which are important in the everyday life of the people, is very high. A teenager or young adult who does not learn proverbs today becomes a senior citizen who cannot function effectively in a traditionally cultural Nigerian society where she/he is expected to demonstrate a skillful knowledge and application of proverbs. The idea of losing proverbs and it not being transmitted in the Nigerian setting should not be questioned at all because it is important to the life of the people. It is important to know how it is being transmitted and if digital does play a role in its transmission.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **About Proverbs**

Proverbs as short sayings that are meant to instruct or teach values of a people have being in existence for as long time. They are part and parcel of the culture of a people. Culture as defined by Henry Pratt Fairchild (1957) in his Dictionary of Sociology and Related Sciences is:

A collective name for all behaviour patterns socially acquired and transmitted by means of symbols; hence a name for all the distinctive achievements of human groups, including not only such items as language, tool-making, industry, art, science, law, government, morals and religion, but also the material instruments or artefacts in which cultural achievements are embodied and by which intellectual cultural features are given practical effect, such as buildings, tools, machines, communication devices, art objects, etc.

Proverbs falls under the category of language, and as seen from the definition above, are an important tool in the acquisition of social patterns of a society and also important for the transmission of the cultural values of the people from one generation to the other. Cultural values here represents “socially sanctioned value that is typical of a given culture, interiorized by members of a society and it helps them make choices, directs them to their goals and means for achieving them, and it also strengthens the action in the same sociocultural domain in which it is rooted” (Dyczewski, 2016). And in order to ensure that these cultural values endure eternally, the aspect of transmitting it from one generation to the other becomes important.

Intergenerational transmission of values has become a very important and sensitive issue in modern day society. This is so because transmission of values is very important for the continuity of a society. Cultural transmission is important for the continuity of a society as it facilitates the communication between members of different generations and it permits the maintenance of culture-specific knowledge and beliefs over generations (Schönplflug, 2001; Trommsdorff, 2009). The aim of the transmission is to make sure that the culture of the people is not forgotten and that it continues to be part of their identity.

One of the ways of transmitting that cultural values is through the language of the people. Language is a very important identity tool of a people; through it they communicate with one another and pass down knowledge from one generation to the next. This is why proverbs are very important because they form a part of that language. In Africa, West Africa, Nigeria, they continue to be a very important part of the people: “Proverbs seem to occur almost everywhere in Africa, in apparent contrast with other areas of the world... and West Africa have also provided many extensive collections” (Finnegan, 1970). So what are proverbs?

### **Proverbs: definition, examples, functions, importance**

Etymologically from the Latin *pro* (from) and *verbum* (word) meaning ‘put forth word’, proverb according to the Collins online dictionary (2019) is “a short, memorable, and often highly condensed saying embodying, especially with bold imagery, some commonplace fact or experience.” Proverbs are “traditional, pithy, often formulaic and/or figurative, fairly stable and generally recognizable units.... characteristically used to form a complete utterance, make a complete conversational contribution and/or

to perform a speech act in a speech event (Norrick, 2015). Proverbs are expressions that convey the acceptable norm of a people, applied to various situations of life, thus making them a valuable tool in the transmission of cultural values. Filled with imagery and sound metaphors, proverbs are treasures of a people expressed in a way that stimulates the imagination and require profound reflection in the direction of what is an acceptable norm in a particular culture or society and sometimes transcend even that to become a standard norm to a larger audience. Proverbs are so rich that they form a storage of knowledge, a pool of linguistic and thematic resources from which speakers and writers in rhetoric, politics, economics, jurisprudence, philosophy, history, religion, technology, etc., draw inspiration (Jegede, 2011). They are an integral part of the interpersonal communication of everyday life and they strengthen human interaction in a socio-cultural way. They enshrine much of the cultural heritage of a people, their traditions, their history, their wisdom and their ethics (Dagnew & Wodajo, 2014).

From the above definitions and explanations about proverbs, we can deduce the following as characteristics of proverbs:

1. They are figurative: Proverbs have a literal and deeper meaning.
2. They are pithy and terse: Proverbs communicate a lot of information in a few words.
3. They are brief and to the point: A proverb is a single statement that is infused in speech.
4. They have other styles especially pertaining to imagery and mnemonics: the choice and arrangement of words in proverbs is carefully considered.

Some examples of proverbs with their literal translation and meaning are shown below:

Table 1 shows some proverbs, their literal translation and meaning.

<b>Proverb</b>	<b>Literal Translation</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Origin</b>
Oro kpoghurhe r'ikokodia kpoghu'yovwi roye	He who shakes a coconut tree shakes his own head.	He who plots the downfall/evil against an upright person plots evil against himself.	Urhobo (Southern Nigeria)
Díè díè nimú èlédèè fi ñ wògbà.	Little by little is how the pig's nose enters the yard.	Attend to a small problem before it becomes uncontrollable.	Yoruba (Western Nigeria)
Anaghi ekpuchi anwuru oku.	One does not cover smoke.	Nothing is hiding under the sun.	Igbo (Eastern Nigeria)
Idan dei a chini ba a seyer ba, kaza ta fi doki.	If it is a matter of eating and not of selling, then the hen is better than a horse.	Everything is unique and has its own peculiar uses.	Hausa (Northern Nigeria)
Eyi gbogbo ne ge kwu ugwu nobi a	It is while the sun is yet to set that you catch the black hen	Make hays while the sun shines	Idoma (Middle Belt Nigeria)
Itie usoro ama awawak, iwuo ase akponge utere.	When there are multiple festivals or parties, the vulture gets a headache.	When there are a lot of things one wants to have or do, he gets confused.	Annang (Southern Nigeria)

Proverbs are by nature short, yet they carry a lot of meaning that needs a reflective mind to decode unless interpreted. They are used to get into and explain matter better. They suggest meaning by use of indirection, invention and imagination (Finnegan,1976). They are a rich source of literature that offers rich content when analyzed. A proverb is “...a saying in a more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and salt and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it.” Here we denote the essential characteristics of proverbs: shortness, terseness, fixity and poetic quality in style and sense. In proverbs many abstract terms are represented by concrete

symbols like animals or plants that has certain characteristics and meaning. Decoding of a proverb takes a reflective mind hence in its usage, its user must ensure that it is appropriate and suitable for the occasion that it is being used for (Hymes, 1974; Bashir & Idris-Amali, 2012).

### **Proverbs in Africa**

In an African culture that is very traditional or steeped in tradition, proverbs assume a more special place in the life of the people and their culture. The proverb has been described as the most important expression of human wisdom and knowledge of the peoples of Africa (Knappert 1989). They are so treasured and valued because their usage expresses the history, the story and the wisdom of the ancients that have been transmitted down through the ages. In this sense, Egbkewogbe states that African proverbs are “a distillation of the wisdom of people” (Ayeni, 2011). The African culture uses images and symbols in their speech pattern and proverbs becomes a means by which the beauty of this wisdom is concretized. “In many African cultures a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly clearly in proverbs (Finnegan, 1970). Nketia (1958) puts the importance of proverbs succinctly when he says what applies not only to Ghana, but to most part of Africa where proverbs remain a very important part of the cultural life:

The value of the proverb to us in modern Ghana does not lie only in what it reveals of the thoughts of the past. For the poet today or indeed for the speaker who is some sort of an artist in the use of words, the proverb is a model of compressed or forceful language. In addition to drawing on it for its words of

wisdom, therefore, he takes interest in its verbal techniques— its selection of words, its use of comparison as a method of statement, and so on. Familiarity with its techniques enables him to create, as it were, his own proverbs. This enables him to avoid hackneyed expressions and give a certain amount of freshness to his speech.”

Proverbs in Africa are of very significant importance. “Without proverbs, the language would be but a skeleton without flesh, a body without soul” and “speech sounds good when it is interspersed with proverbs, food tastes good when it is cooked with butter” (Berhanu, 1986; Finnegan, 1970; Jeylan, 2009). This graphic description sums up the importance of proverbs on the African continent. In Africa, proverbs are present or used in all occasions when language is used for communication. This is also the case in Nigeria.

### **Proverbs in Nigeria**

With a population of two hundred million and counting, Nigeria is the largest black nation on earth and the most populous country on the African continent. With over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups, she boasts of a diverse group of people rich in culture in all its ramifications including in language and in proverbs. Proverbs is part and parcel of the Nigerian life and down through the centuries, the cultural values and beliefs of the nation have been couched in several cultural avenues including proverbs which plays a very important role since it is part of the language. As many as there are ethnic groups, so many are also the proverbs of the various ethnic groups, but they fall into the same category of the functions of proverbs that we have enumerated above. Nigerian proverbs are as numerous and different as Nigerian languages are

overwhelmingly numerous. The 2019 edition of *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (an annual reference publication in print and online that provides statistics and other information on the living languages of the world) gave the number of individual languages in Nigeria as 525. This shows the vast number of proverbs that are present in the Nigerian society.

Proverbs are very important in Nigeria so much so that a great literary icon in Nigeria, Chinua Achebe (1958), described proverbs as “the oil with which words are eaten.” Indeed, in Africa, especially in the Nigerian context, expressions are not considered rich and intelligent except when they are duly laced with proverbs, which are many in our diversified cultures. “This informs why a traditional African would constantly punctuate his speech with appropriate proverbs and aphorisms to drive his point home” (Lawal 1992, p. 42).

Proverbs in Nigeria are used on different occasion to address different circumstances of everyday life. From advice to conflict resolution, from vocational discernment to vocal reprimanding, proverbs continue to be an essential tool in the transmission of culture and the values that are prevalent in Nigeria. The various usage of proverbs in the Nigerian culture underlines the importance of them in the life of the people and how proverbs has been embedded into their Nigerian DNA so much so that it becomes an indispensable tool in the cultural transmission of what is good or what is bad, how to do things or how not to do things, and just how to live rightly in the eyes of the society, and know what is acceptable or not.

Like every typical traditional society in Africa, proverbs are mostly used by the older generations (older generation in this case falls into the category of fifty years and above) in Nigeria. It is believed that they have had enough experience in life and are very versatile in the knowledge of proverbs and the right application of it in everyday life as a sort of guiding principle. Okojie (2004) notes this when he said that “proverbs epitomize a people’s language showing not just wit, humor, wisdom but the life experience and, hence, it is the major medium of expression of the aged and wise.” The elders in turn transmit this ancient wisdom in words to the younger generations through oral tradition. Some of these proverbs from the oral tradition have been published in books, but it is believed (given the size of the population, the various ethnic groups and many languages that exists in Nigeria) that a greater majority of them till today are not in written form but are intergenerationally passed down from one generation to the next through oral tradition in the form of one-on-one, face-to-face encounter.

This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, and we cannot dispute the fact that there has been gigantic and phenomenal advancement in science and technology. The television, the phone and so many other inventions are being digitally revolutionized every day. We live in a digital world, growing at a very fast rate where, so much so, that the things of yesterday seem to be history according to Floridi (2004) and this includes transmission and communication. The way we communicate with one another has greatly changed. It is important to know if this digital transformation has also impacted in the transmission of proverbs in Nigeria. It is important to ask and investigate if proverbs are still being transmitted on a one-on-on or face-to-face level or if transmission of proverbs has also gone digital.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

After an extensive search on the subject of intergenerational transmission of proverbs in Nigeria or Africa produced no substantive results or previous works, this study adopted a literature review that examined intergenerational transmission of proverbs from the point of it as an oral expression of a particular people, as a language that is being threatened with extinction or not and as a message that was being conveyed in a way that turned it into a commercial activity as well. The first work by Akinmade looked at the reasons for the decline of proverbs use among the Ondos in the south western part of Nigeria while the second work by Obadan looked at proverbs from the point of its survival as a language, an oral expression of a people and ask if it is going into extinction and what could be done. The third work by Argungun compared message of proverbs and how they are transmitted by the Hausa and the Swahili people.

The connection made here with the study is that intergenerational transmission of proverbs has something to do with the usage of proverbs as an expression of a culture because if it is not being transmitted, it will be gradually going into extinction.

#### **Previous works on Proverbs**

Akinmade's work on the decline of proverbs as a creative oral expression (2012) acknowledged the important and significant role that proverbs play in the life of black Africans and Nigeria as well. He looked at the use of Proverbs in the Nigerian culture and sought to understand them. The existence of the tape recorder and other electronic media, he posits, also made the preservation of proverbs possible. He stated that there

was a problem with the growth of proverbs in terms of diffusion among the younger people and attributed three reasons that may be responsible for that. First, is the fact that while the older folks make effort to preserve and use proverbs, the younger generations see them as relics of colonialism hence their apathy towards using them. Second is proverbs application - even the younger ones who know the proverbs don't know how to apply it to make their point and thirdly certain African societies have restrictions on who can use. Hence, a youth may be interested in proverbs, but the societal restrictions may debar him from employing them as a means of communication especially with elders. He cited the Yoruba culture where the younger one has to seek permission from an elder before using a proverb.

These questions motivated his study. The study sought to answer the question if proverbs were gradually going into extinction with particular reference to the Ondo people in the south western part of Nigeria, determine the importance of proverbs, the factors accounting for the decline of proverbs (if any) and what could be done to strengthen its usage again. It was a question indirectly of whether the transmission of proverbs was on the decline, the reasons for such decline in regard to its importance, its usage and its teaching and ways to resolve the issue. For him it could not just be because proverbs are old since new ones were being coined daily.

The methodology used was the usage Proverb Usage Questionnaire (PUQ). Two hundred people, spanning educational status from high school to universities, ages from twenty-five to sixty, and diverse occupations from farmers, teachers, management personnel to accounting officers, all participated in the study by filling the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two major sections. Section one

requests demographic information of the respondents while the second section sought information on the significance of proverbs in Ondo culture, specific use of proverbs, factors that facilitate and hinder the usage of this creative art and suggestions for promoting the use of proverbs. The questionnaire was validated by two experts in Oral Literature and found appropriate for use. The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- What is the perception of Ondo community on the importance of proverbs?
- To what extent are proverbs used for daily living?
- Is the use of proverbs on the decline during the last five years (or in recent times)?
- What can be done to promote the use of proverbs?

The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages and other descriptive methods.

The findings while supporting the fact that proverbs remained a very important and integral part of Ondo culture noted that educators (teachers) who are supposed to encourage the younger generation learn, cherish and transmit the culture of the community through the use of proverbs barely used proverbs or encourage the younger ones to do. This led to the decline of the appreciation and use of proverbs. In addition he posited that western education seemed to nurture a negative attitude towards proverbs usage.

Based on these findings, he suggested the following strategies for encouraging the learning and transmission of proverbs among the young people on Ondo community:

educators including proverbs in the Yoruba Literature Curriculum; use of radio and television program to encourage proverbs learning and transmission, parents and elders in society should encourage the youths to use proverbs through deliberate training and during cultural festivals, organize inter school competitions on the use of proverbs, include proverbs in the Yoruba literature curriculum in schools and finally parents and elders should use proverbs for communicating and interacting with youths in society. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that parents should compulsorily speak their local languages to their children. It is through this way, he posits, that the richness and values of proverbs will be preserved for onwards transmission to all future generations.

Obandan's work on language endangerment (2015) discusses the possibility of the Igbo language being on the path of extinction due to the decrease in the usage of its components. Language she asserts is not just a vessel of communication but forms a significant part of the culture of the people as it is an agent through which the culture gains its social context and significance. The loss of any language is therefore a loss of humanity, hence the importance to ensure the continuity of a language through the process of intergenerational transfer. The loss of language she says begins with the loss of an important feature of that language, and she cites proverbs as a mass of cultural wealth and ancestral knowledge. In the African culture, proverbs are one of the most important features of a language. In the words of Chinua Achebe, "Among the Igbo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten". This underlines the importance of proverbs in the Igbo culture and they indeed have an abundance of it.

The then led to the research study which looks at the intergenerational decline in the knowledge and use of proverbs in Ogwashi dialect (a dialect of Igbo language) spoken in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta state, Nigeria. The study was carried out with the purpose of drawing people's attention to the worrying trend and its resultant effect of losing such aspect of the language. The choice of theoretical framework for the study was the Language endangerment and vitality framework used for assessing the status and vitality of languages in danger. This framework has six major evaluative factors of language vitality. They are: Intergenerational Language Transmission (whether a language with all its features is being transmitted from one generation to the next), Absolute Number of Speakers (determining the number of people who spoke the language), Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population, Shifts in Domains of Language Use (Where, with whom, and the range of topics for which a language is used), Response to New Domains and Media and Availability of Materials for Language Education and Literacy.

For the gathering of accurate data, the direct observation method was adopted. A research group of eighteen persons attended the mandatory end of the year meetings of all the clans that made up the Ogwashi people (one for the youths, one for the elders). The age category of the elders is forty-five and above while the age of the youth was not specified but probably from twenty-five to forty), and with the aid of a digital recorder chronicled all the proceedings of the meetings. The data were then collated and with the help of an elder, all the proverbs and the way they were used were extracted and analyzed.

The findings of the analysis showed that while the elders used the proverbs at a percentage ranging from 80-100 percent, the percentage use of the youth was 20 percent. While the meeting of the elders was conducted solely in the Ogwashi dialect, the youth meeting was done with a mixture of English and Ogwashi. While the elders used the proverbs in a perfect way, the youth had a problem of applying the proverbs correctly and there was a lot of repetition. The framework used to ascertain the vitality of an aspect of the Ogwashi language, in this case proverbs, with the two evaluative factors specifically are: The Intergenerational Language Transmission and the Shifts in Domains of Language Use.

The deductions of the findings were that the language was endangered because of the following factors: decline in intergenerational transmission of proverbs and other features of language from one generation to the other, decline in the usage of the Ogwashi language in major communicative events, loss of certain cultural institutions (e.g. age group) in our modern societies and migration. The study ends with the recommendation that the attention of the local communities should be drawn to this trend and the importance of teaching and transmitting to children aspects like proverbs which are very important rudiments of the language.

Argungu's work on variations in transmission of message of proverbs between Hausa and Swahili cultures affirms from the start that the principal mode of transmitting proverbs in Africa was through oral tradition. This, for him, is unconnected with the low literacy rates of majority of speakers, and, possibly, familiarity with and 'simplicity' of oral speech. This tradition of oral transmission, however, he notes, differs from one society and culture to another. Despite this oral channel of

transmission, some African cultures use specific techniques for effective delivery of the message in a unique written form. This necessitated the study on the comparison between how the Hausawa (Hausa-speaking) and Waswahili (Swahili-speaking) people transmit proverb messages.

The Hausa people make up the largest ethnic group in the African continent. The Hausa are mainly in western Africa, and they are found in Nigeria and Niger, where they number about 70 million people. The Hausa people also found in the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Togo, Chad, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gambia, Gabon, and Senegal. The Hausa language is the most popular language in sub-Saharan Africa. The language is also widely used by ethnic groups such as the Tuareg, Fulani, Gur, Kanuri, Arabs, Shuwa, and other Afro-Asiatic communities (Worldatlas, 2019). The Swahili people (Wa-Swahili) primarily live along the coastal plain of Kenya and Tanzania. Kiswahili, the language spoken by these people, has been adopted by millions of other non-Swahili communities in East and Central Africa, as well amongst the Islander communities of the Indian Ocean. However, the true Swahili-speaking peoples inhabiting the coastal strip of Kenya and Tanzania could be as few as 1.5 million (Essays, UK. 2018).

In Hausa culture, oral transmission is still prevalent because majority within the Hausa society belong to the category of those who can neither read nor write. In addition, the Hausa orthography is not standardized enough to put the proverbs into writing especially their dialect versions. In attempts to standardize them, some of their linguistic flavor is lost. Those who have written them down have done so flagrantly violating the rules of orthography, thus making quoted proverbs difficult to read or

understand. Thus oral transmission remains the major method for transmission of proverbs.

In the Swahili culture, the author notes, the Waswahili appear to be the only people in the world that have moved the proverb in general and the African proverb in particular from its traditional status of being an oral means of sustaining interpersonal relationships to making it a ready tool for advertising goods while still retaining its primary role of sanctioning public morality or gauging individual behavior. They do this by displaying the Swahili woman's colorful traditional dress called the *Kanga* which has on it an inscribed proverb that helps to advertise it. The *Kanga* (or *Khanga*) is a two-piece cloth predominantly worn by the Waswahili Muslim women, but which is generally adopted by other (non-Muslim) women in Eastern Africa. To the Mswahili woman, the value and relevance of the *Kanga* lies in the type of proverb it carries since it provides her with a voice of her own in her daily social interactions with family members and others. Apart from using the proverb's message for commercial or advertisement reasons, the *Kanga*-inscribed proverb has additional sociolinguistic dimensions. No doubt, the social significance of the proverb via the *Kanga*, as described above, is a practice without parallel in Africa. Its distinguishing feature is in its written words, in contrast to the oral method of transmitting proverb,

In conclusion, the author notes that while the predominantly mode of transmitting proverbs is the oral tradition, the Swahili people, in addition to the oral method, have introduced the use of written proverb as a means of advertising goods, in this case, in particular, the method of writing proverbs on the *Kanga*, which is a Swahili woman's

dress, in order to promote its sale. This is indeed a unique practice that underlines a unique mode of transmission of proverbs.

### **Gaps in study**

A critical analysis of the above works showed that while they dwelt on the subject of proverbs, none showed if digital mattered in the intergenerational transmission of proverbs in Nigeria. Akinmade looked at proverbs usage in Ondo, southwest of Nigeria from the point of decline in its usage, Obandan's work focused on the intergenerational crisis of proverbs not being known by the younger generation in Ogwashi, Delta state of Nigeria and the consequence of which could be language extinction while Argungun's article looked at the different ways that the Hausa people of Nigeria and the Swahili people of East Africa transmit messages on proverbs focusing on how the Swahili people turned proverbs into messages on cloths as a way of advertisement . Indeed, an extensive search on the internet as far as time could permit was done and there was no place where there was a study on if digital technology mattered or not in the intergenerational transmission of proverbs. Given the importance of these two main areas, viz, digital technology and proverbs as regards transmission, it is obvious that there is a lacuna in the academic world on this issue, showing the importance of this study. The study in order to fill this lacuna and show if digital matters or not in the transmission of proverbs employs the methodology that will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methodology**

In order, therefore, to ascertain if digital technology has an impact on how proverbs are transmitted in Nigeria, data was collected through the conduction of semi-structured interview from particular groups in Nigeria. This data collection was done via the process of ethnography. Defining ethnography, Leininger (1985) said it is “the systematic process of observing, detailing, describing, documenting, and analyzing the lifeways or particular patterns of a culture (or subculture) in order to grasp the lifeways or patterns of the people in their familiar environment.” In other words, it is “learning from the people” (Cameron, 1990). Learning from the people as seen in the definitions above include observation, talking with or interviewing the people, living with them etc. It is all about collection and analysis of data, and in this study, the data collected came from two particular age groups.

The particular groups in this study are two. The first group is the older generation comprising of individuals living in Nigeria between the ages of 50-70. The age range for the older generation is arrived at based on data from the World Health Organization which places the average life expectancy around 54.5 years in Nigeria with men living an average of 53.7 years and women living an average of 55.4 years (World Population review, 2019). The second group is the younger generation comprising of individuals living in Nigeria between the ages of 15-30. Teenagers, adolescents and young adults generally fit into this category. The collection of the data consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted in person in Nigeria with 38 individuals to identify three trends: what proverbs they transmit, to whom they transmit them most often and how they transmit them.

Semi-structured interviews are probably one of the most commonly used qualitative methods (Kitchin and Tate, 2000). It is a verbal interchange where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions. Although the interviewer prepares a list of predetermined questions, semi-structured interviews unfold in a conversational manner offering participants the chance to explore issues they feel are important (Longhurst, 2003).

### **What is a proverb?**

For the purpose of this study, the definition of what is a proverb as distinct from any other saying or expression was judged based on the characteristics of proverbs given in the earlier section of this work. Those characteristics remind us that proverbs are:

1. Figurative: Proverbs have a literal and deeper meaning.
2. Pithy and terse: Proverbs communicate a lot of information in a few words.
3. Brief and to the point: A proverb is a single statement that is infused in speech.
4. They have other styles especially pertaining to imagery and mnemonics: the choice and arrangement of words in proverbs is carefully considered.

In other words, the yardstick or the criteria for accepting what the respondents said are proverbs were judged based on the characteristics listed above and determined if they fit into the definition of proverbs or not. While there is no fixed canon for proverbs, these characteristics efficiently described what proverbs are and what they should contain so this served as a guide for the study.

### **Finding the participants**

The thirty-eight participants (24 from the younger generation and 14 from the older generation) for the semi-structured interview were selected randomly in Lagos State of Nigeria. Lagos is Nigeria's economic capital base. With an estimated population of 21 million people drawn from all the nooks and crannies of Nigeria representing the more than 250 tribes in Nigeria, and having both urban and rural settings, Lagos state is the ideal place to get a good picture of the average Nigeria. From the highbrow urban setting of Lekki, Ikeja and Ikoyi to the rural setting of Shibir, Badagry and Ikorodu, Lagos has a population comprising of the literate and illiterate population of Nigeria. People were randomly selected from various spots or areas where people mostly gather either for educational, recreational, social or religious purposes. These spots included schools, newspaper stands, motor parks, churches, mosques, playgrounds, markets, etc. the researcher approached the people in all these places and explained his study to them with the aim of getting them to agree to semi-structured interview.

### **Duration of interview**

Given that the aim of the study is very precise and specific in its aim to identify three trends, namely, what proverbs are transmitted, to whom they are transmitted and how often and how they are transmitted, the researcher anticipated that each interview would take about 10 to 15 minutes. A semi-structured interview gives room for the participant to freely express him/herself, so there was flexibility as regards the duration, though the researcher tried not to keep the participants for too long.

## **Questions asked**

The study had predetermined questions, but the conversation was still open-ended in order to foster an atmosphere where as much information on proverb transmission could be gotten keeping in mind that we were looking specifically for three trends, namely, what proverbs they transmitted, to whom they transmitted them and how they transmitted them. The interviewee was informed before the interview started that there would be notes taken in the form of audio recording and permission was sought with the assurances that the records were confidential except if the individual gives the permission for their details to be published. Details in this case refer to the names of the interviewee as the other details such as sex and age will be given to establish which category the individual fitted into. Taking these notes, in a sense, is a form of data analysis (ibid). All the interviewee gave permission for the recording of the interview and for their data to be published in the line with the reasons that were given, that is, solely for academic purposes. The interviews were transcribed immediately after they were conducted.

The predetermined questions were classified into two: profile questions and the thesis questions. The profile questions were meant to establish the identity of the interviewee and classify them as either belonging to the younger generation category or the older generation category. The profile questions included:

1. Please tell me your name, your sex and your age?
2. Are you a Nigerian?
3. What is your educational status? (for older generation) or

4. What class are you? (for younger generations)

The thesis questions were:

1. Can you please give me two examples of proverbs that you know?
2. Can you please tell me how you came to know these proverbs?
3. How do you teach these proverbs to others?

Being a semi-structured interview that was conducted in an open-ended way, other questions flowed from the predetermined questions. These questions were meant to identify three trends, namely, what proverbs they transmitted, to whom they transmitted them and how they transmitted them.

### **Data Analysis**

After the collection of the data through semi-structured interview, the analysis of the data was done. In any credible qualitative research, data analysis is a very important and central aspect. For this study, the method employed for analyzing the data was thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The purpose of thematic analysis is the identification of important patterns/themes in the data that was used to address the research question. An advantage of thematic analysis is that it is a method rather than a methodology (Braun & Clarke 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). This means that, unlike many

qualitative methodologies, it is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective.

The following steps were taken in analysis the data using thematic analysis: familiarization with the data and identification of various themes/patterns. This now led to the interpretation of the data that served as the basis for our conclusion and recommendations for areas of further research.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Data Analysis

#### Results of Interviews

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. The interviews took place from 14<sup>th</sup> December 2019 to 19<sup>th</sup> January 2020. Thirty-eight interviews were conducted in all, thirty-three in Lagos state, the commercial nerve center of Nigeria with a representation of all the states in Nigeria and five in Delta State, southern Nigeria. A total of thirty-eight persons were interviewed, 21 males and 17 females. Eight people, comprising five females and three males, declined participation in the interview citing non-interest, non-readiness as reasons, while some, from their demeanor, were shy about the exercise. Our initial categorization was those termed young were of the age category 15 – 30 years while those of the old category were 50 – 70 years, but the reality on ground altered, though minimally, the metrics. So, the young were now categorized as those in the age bracket of 15 – 45 while those in the old category were in the age bracket 46 years and above. With that we had 24 persons categorized as young with the striking participation of an eleven-year-old boy who insisted on being interviewed, and 14 persons categorized as old.

The first striking thing was that people were a bit taken aback by the theme or the subject of the interview, some were eager to share the proverbs they knew while others were not sure if they knew proverbs at all or whether they could express it in their language or not, and how they came to learn proverbs. As indicated above some declined to participate in the interview because they felt they were not ready and for them they did not want to give a bad impression of themselves.

Among the young people, 75% learnt proverbs through oral and digital means. In responding to the questions, the respondents in this group identified hearing proverbs from their parents and elderly ones. Their learning of proverbs came from the constant use of the proverbs by their parents and elders to teach, admonish or guide them in an informal educational setting. In other words, they learnt proverbs orally, through a person to person contact, either from their parents, relatives, at community gatherings, or by association etc. They also learnt proverbs through the digital means of communication citing examples of social media while using the internet, phone applications that contained proverbs, watching movies and regular television programs. 12.5% reported that they learnt proverbs through the digital means only. While the remaining 12.5% responded that they learnt proverbs only through the oral means from either their parents, relatives, elders, friends or at community gatherings.

In the area of transmitting to others, the young people gave the following responses: 4% of the respondents used both the oral and the digital means of communication for transmission. They spoke to their friends about the proverbs they had learnt orally, and they also used the digital means especially the social media platforms of Facebook and WhatsApp to transmit the proverbs they had learnt. 17% responded that they transmitted proverbs using only the oral means by interaction with their friends and peers. 50% affirmed that they transmitted proverbs through the digital means only. Digital here for them was using the social media platforms of Facebook and WhatsApp. 30% responded that they had not transmitted proverbs at all citing lack of interest in doing so, or in the case of 11-year-old Somtochukwu, had not really gotten to the level of interaction with others to the point of transmitting what he learnt. One respondent,

however, said after the interview that he was going to start pasting proverbs on WhatsApp and Facebook as a way of transmission.

Among the elderly population, 71% said they learnt proverbs through oral means either from their parents, elders, at community gatherings etc. while 29% learnt through oral and digital means (digital here includes internet and the television). In the area of transmission 57% transmitted using only the oral means of person to person transmission while 36% transmitted using oral and digital means. 1 respondent admitted not transmitting at all.

### **Dominant Themes**

During the course of these analysis, the following themes were prominent:

#### **1. Mode of learning**

In responding to how they came to learn proverbs, especially from their parents and elders, the young people acknowledged that the transmission of proverbs was also a mechanism of learning for them. These oral means included their parents and elders talking them to and using proverbs as a sort of an addendum to better clarify whatever they were saying whether it was advice they were giving (“be patient in life, you would get what you aspire for”), whether it was an admonition (“... because I was stubborn, my parents used to tell me very often”), whether it was an explanation of a certain occurrence or event, whether it was a way to explain better stories (“he then uses proverbs to explain the meaning of the stories to us”) they had heard them narrate or just something they picked up when they were at community gatherings and proverbs were being used to spice up whatever was being said, or whether it was in the academic

environment when they were studying literature or grammar. It sort of ties into the exchange theory that speaks about learning as a sort of give and take. The parents or the elders used the proverbs as a sort of explanatory guide hoping that they young ones will learnt some wisdom from it and in exchange they would become better members of their community by allowing the proverbs they had heard, along with its explanation, to become a guiding principle on how they live and relate with the world and all those around them or in the case of the learning in school, all still geared towards a holistic development of the individual. As I had anticipated and eventually confirmed, the proverbs the younger ones learnt orally was from those older than them, and even in the case of the adults as we would see, it was the same - that those who are younger learn proverbs from those who are older because it is a given that they are speaking from their wealth of experience in life having lived to a certain age or gathered some experience of life.

On the digital means of learning, the young people identified the following as their sources of learning: smartphones, the internet, social media platforms on the internet, movies and regular television programs. As in most part of the world, the smart phones and the world of the internet and the various social media platforms has become the new world for all young people (and some older folks as well). The Nigerian young people are also not left out in this newfound love of the phone, the internet and all that comes with it. Apart from learning proverbs orally from their parents, elders and the community as we enumerated above, they also through the use of their phones and the world of technology in other digital means like the television (which includes the movies and regular television programs) came to learn about proverbs.

## **2. Mode of transmission**

In responding to how they transmit proverbs, the young people identified, in various degrees, the digital means of transmission. These include the use of their smartphones especially the social media platforms of Facebook and WhatsApp. Apart from others who also identified as sharing whatever proverbs they had learnt, what also caught my attention as a researcher is what I would like to term selective transmission in the transmission process of the young ones. Some of them (respondent 4 &6) chose to transmit the proverbs that they were drawn to or that struck a chord inside them. They identified those proverbs they were drawn to and those were still the ones they also chose to transmit. 50% of them identified usage of the smartphones especially the social media platforms of Facebook and WhatsApp as their mode of transmitting proverbs to others especially their friends and in some cases their junior ones. None said they transmitted to their elderly ones or shared with them what they learnt, and I found that to be a shame because knowledge is not necessarily restricted to a particular age group. This becomes even more significant because two of the respondents identified applications on their phones that was a kind of repository for proverbs, and this could have been an avenue for them to help the elderly ones, especially those who are literate, to be conversant with the workings of the digital age and even learn something new as well. The researcher is technically a young person and has indeed come across so many new proverbs that he never heard of before.

Another striking thing was that while some of the young ones said they had not transmitted the proverbs they had learnt, they came to realize that by pasting those proverbs on their social media platforms, and having friends comment on them, was a way of transmission or teaching others as well. Was that the case of not really paying

attention or ignorance of what it means to transmit? The transmission also came in the daily conversations they had with their friends, and as one respondent affirmed ‘I only associate with my age-mates.’ It is easier for the young people to relate with their own kin and thus learn and transmit their knowledge of proverbs among themselves. Some of the younger ones who have gotten married and with kids also affirmed that they transmit these proverbs to their children as it was done to them, for example, using it to give advice to the children. Some who had never transmitted saw the interview as a wakeup call and a challenge to become transmitters themselves and they promised to do just that.

### **3. Same proverbs, different style of expression**

Another occurrence that was very striking in the research was the example of the same proverb by different respondents using different styles of expression/words or phrasing it in a different way. The proverb in question, ‘what an elderly person sees sitting down, the young person cannot see standing up,’ has a deep meaning that underlines the wisdom that comes with age, it means age is a mark of wisdom and an older person is likely to look before leaping while the young person will act hastily without first focusing on the repercussions which may be disastrous. Below are the various ways that our respondents (numbers 6, 10, 12, 14, 26, 29, 32 & 38) expressed this proverb:

**Respondent 6:** “what a child sees on a tree, an elder will see on his own without climbing anything.”

**Respondent 10:** “What an elder sees while sitting down, a young person even if he climbs the highest tree would not be able to see it.”

**Respondent 12:** “what an old man sees sitting down, a young man can’t see it even if he climbs the highest mountain.”

**Respondent 14:** “If you sit down and look beyond your eye, you won't see it but if an elder sits somewhere, he will see it without even standing up.”

**Respondent 26:** “What's an adult can see sitting down, a child cannot see standing.”

**Respondent 29:** “what an elder see sitting, a young child even if he climbs up, stands up, will not see it.”

**Respondent 32:** “what an elderly man sees while sitting, a younger person will not see it even if he climbs a tall tree.”

**Respondent 38:** “what an adult see sitting down, a young person even if he climbs the Iroko tree cannot see it.”

This occurrence of same proverbs expressed in different ways cuts across the young and old spectrum in the research. What could be the reason for that one may wonder? Communication is a process that involves the sender and the receiver and in between that communication process there is the process of decoding. Coming from various backgrounds and culture, even if from the same country, implies viewing the world differently to some extent. As observed from the answers, some respondents used the phrase, ‘climbing a tree’ some were specific about the tree, viz, ‘iroko tree’ while some just used an expression that signified climbing higher something physical. All these are just part of the characteristics inherent in oral communication and transmission of oral traditions because of the cultural biases that accompany them along the communication line. It resonates with the story of six blind men who were told to describe an elephant. They all touched different parts of the elephant and in their description of the animal expressed what they felt the elephant looked like from what

they had touched or from their own perspective (Saxe, 2016). Of course they were all right to some extent, but they were also all wrong to an extent because they didn't see the animal from a holistic point. In this case, the meaning of the proverb is very well understood not minding the different phrasing of words that we experienced. So many scholars have had this problem when it came to documenting in a scholarly way many of the oral traditions and history of the African people, small wonder, Wright (1982) acknowledges some of the limitations that comes along with the transmission of knowledge when it comes to oral tradition. In all it is safe to say that the various cultural and educational background played some part in the expression of this proverb though the meaning is well understood.

#### **4. Proverbs with British origin**

Nigeria, as a country, was colonized by the British empire, and as such had a lot of its way of life influenced by the British culture especially education that was brought and spread by the missionaries. Part of the education was the teaching of English grammar and literature and that included English proverbs. There was, therefore, no surprise that some of the respondents actually gave examples of proverbs that had British origins. Some of the respondents also acknowledged that they learnt some of the proverbs in school while studying English language, though one respondent identified Igbo grammar as her source of proverbs learning in school. Some of those examples of proverbs that had British/foreign roots included: 'a stitch in time saves nine,' 'once bitten, twice shy' (though there is a strong debate whether this is an idiom or a proverb, but in the context of this research we categorize it as a proverb answer given by a respondent), 'no man is an island,' 'a bird in hand is worth two in the bush.' These

proverbs were part of the many that were taught in school as part of English grammar, found in the pages of 'First Aid in English,' a book that was extensively used in the teaching of English language in Nigeria in the early 80s and 90s. the question that could have been asked if this answer of proverbs in British origin came up because the interview was done in Lagos does not arise because, as we noted, the book, 'First Aid in English,' was actually used in almost every part of Nigeria.

### **5. Proverbs in vernacular, in English**

The Nigeria nation is composed of more than 250 ethnic groups with more than 500 spoken languages (Blench & Dendo, 2003) with English adopted as the national language by the British colonialists. English is the main language used in schools, but it is a given that every culture will preserve its own language and identity as well. The study however revealed a worrisome trend: the fading of the various languages that make up the Nigerian nation especially in the area of transmission of proverbs and speaking the language generally. Many of the older respondents expressed their worries of this trend which some of them viewed as a failure on their part, for not being able to teach their language to their children and the younger generation. Some blamed the society that emphasized English to the detriment of the various ethnic languages. Infact two of the older respondents were unable to give examples of proverbs in their languages and had to use English. Among the young respondents, 85% gave their examples of proverbs in English because they were taught in English or some were not able to recall the language the Nigerian language that was used to teach them hence, they resorted to English. 61% of the older respondents gave their proverb examples in the various Nigerian languages. From the data, we are able to deduce that the majority of the older category learnt and transmitted proverbs using the various Nigerian

languages while a majority of the younger respondents learnt proverbs both from English and the other Nigerian languages but transmitted more in English because they were unable to speak fluently or not speak at all any of the Nigerian languages.

This is a very important data in our study because it shows the declining usage of the various Nigerian languages. This has its own resultant/consequential effect/impact on the continuous usage of proverbs and its transmission, and on culture generally. It is very likely that some or even a majority of those proverbs that have their origin and history in the Nigerian/African experience may be lost if the language itself is on the road to extinction. Transmission involves a language, and if the local languages are fading away, those proverbs steeped in the history and experience of the Local people will also fade away. That is how cultures also die if care is not taken to preserve the language and those customs, like proverbs, attached to it.

In my opinion, this issue of the danger of the Nigerian languages going into extinction is not unconnected with those respondents who were not able to give examples of proverbs especially in their languages though they were older respondents. As one of them rightly observed, he was unable to learn much about proverbs because his parents, though literate, were not rich in the customs and traditions of their people and as such did not teach him much about the proverbs. He, in turn, acknowledged that he is guilty of the same thing now, as he did not teach any of his own children proverbs or the beauty of it except the ones they learnt on the pages of the school books which have those British origins we talked about. This example illustrates the danger of the language being on the road to extinction when nothing is done in terms of transmission using the Nigerian languages.

## **6. 'Inanimate animate transmission'**

The interview with respondent number four brought a very unique angle into the issue of transmission. The young female respondent identified learning proverbs, not through the oral means or the digital means as such but through the inanimate object of the television that became animate. Yes, television is grouped under digital means in this research but the example of respondent four gives a unique angle to the whole research. Watching television one day, she saw the proverb on the television screen and was attracted by the proverb, she then screenshotted the proverb, and took time to analyze the meaning of what she had seen. At that point the television assumed the role of a teacher, of an instructor, of her parents, of her elders – it was in her words as if there was a hand extended out from the television giving her the proverb as a source of knowledge. An inanimate object took on 'life' to some extent and became a source of teaching. She did not stop there but also used that same screenshotted proverb as a tool for teaching others and got a positive reaction from all those who saw it. The striking thing is the way the inanimate object assumes life in the transmission chain, and the resultant response of the young lady.

## **7. Proverb applications on phones**

Some of the younger respondents in the interview identified various phone applications that served as a source of learning proverbs. This is indeed a welcome relief because of the fearful phenomenon of losing languages and cultures that was identified in one of the themes of this research. These applications serve as a sort of repository, warehouse, storage, platform for transmission of African proverbs and sayings. It is also significant to note though that storing or warehousing these proverbs in various phone applications is one thing, teaching them along with their various historical

backgrounds in another thing. It is, however, a good development that continues to offer hope. Some of these applications include ‘African Proverbs with meaning’, ‘Best African Proverbs’ and so many more applications found on the internet.

### **8. Selective learning and transmission**

Another trend that was noticed among the young respondents was some kind of selective learning and transmission. In their responses, a majority of them spoke about being attracted to a proverb apart from the ones they learnt orally. It turns out that some of them actually transmitted those proverbs that struck them, that they were attracted to, that spoke to them. It was a case of selective learning and transmission.

In all, the various responses from all the respondents had an underlying theme that was expressed in various ways: the beauty and importance of proverbs in everyday life serving as a source of inspiration, advice, encouragement, admonition and a pathway to rightful living. These confirmed what we had actually said about proverbs in the first part of the work. As one of the proverbs that was cited rightly said, “we stand on the shoulders of the ancients,” those shoulders lead us on the path of wisdom and knowledge and right living in our society.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Data Interpretation

At the beginning of the research, the research question was summarized thus: how are proverbs transmitted intergenerationally in Nigeria? How did the older generations learn proverbs? How are they transmitting it? How are the younger generation learning proverbs? How are they transmitting it? The hypothesis was that age groups differ in how they transmit proverbs both within and between generations. Specifically, the hypothesis was that older generations (individuals living in Nigeria between the ages of 50-70 which was later reviewed to 46 years and above) will display a higher incidence of proverb transmission through direct, in-person discussion and contact, whether with the same age group or with younger age groups while the younger generations (individuals living in Nigeria between the ages of 15-30 which was later reviewed to 15 – 45 years) would display a higher incidence of proverb transmission through digital media.

The results from the data analysis confirms our first hypothesis that the older generation will display a higher incidence of proverb transmission through direct, in-person discussion and contact. 57% of the older respondents confirmed that they transmitted proverbs using only the oral, in-person, face to face contact. The percentage while it is above the half mark is not as big as was expected. This may not be unconnected with the fact that the older population age in this research began from the age 46, taking into cognizance the average mortality rate of a Nigerian, put at 54. 46 is still a relatively young age by world health standard and so it was not surprising that some of the ‘older’ respondents were able to transmit proverbs using the oral as well as the digital forms of transmission. For the purpose of this research, the digital mode of transmission,

from the answers of the respondents, are using the social media platforms of Facebook and WhatsApp to transmit to others the proverbs they know. Majority of the respondents 60 years and above identified only the oral means as their means of transmission. This shows a trend among those older respondents who use less of the smart phones in their daily lives.

71% of the older respondents identified learning proverbs solely through the oral means either from their parents, elders, or at community gatherings etc. This again is a confirmation of our hypothesis, that majority of the older generation would learn proverbs more from the oral, in-person, face to face contact. 29% of the older respondents identified learning proverbs through oral and digital means. The digital means in this case includes television and the internet, again with specifics of the social media platforms of Facebook and WhatsApp.

Among the young people, 75% learnt proverbs through oral and digital means. In responding to the questions, the respondents in this group identified hearing proverbs from their parents and elderly ones. Their learning of proverbs came from the constant use of the proverbs by their parents and elders to teach, admonish or guide them in an informal educational setting. In other words, they learnt proverbs orally, through a person to person contact, either from their parents, relatives, at community gatherings, or by association etc. They also learnt proverbs through the digital means of communication citing examples of social media while using the internet, phone applications that contained proverbs, watching movies and regular television programs. 12.5% reported that they learnt proverbs through the digital means only. While the

remaining 12.5% responded that they learnt proverbs only through the oral means from either their parents, relatives, elders, friends or at community gatherings.

In the area of transmitting to others, the young people gave the following responses: 4% of the respondents used both the oral and the digital means of communication for transmission. They spoke to their friends about the proverbs they had learnt orally, and they also used the digital means especially the social media platforms of Facebook and WhatsApp to transmit the proverbs they had learnt. 17% responded that they transmitted proverbs using only the oral means by interaction with their friends and peers. 50% affirmed that they transmitted proverbs through the digital means only. Digital here for them was using the social media platforms of Facebook and WhatsApp. 30% responded that they had not transmitted proverbs at all citing lack of interest in doing so, or in the case of 11-year-old Somtochukwu, had not really gotten to the level of interaction with others to the point of transmitting what he learnt. One respondent, however, said after the interview that he was going to start pasting proverbs on WhatsApp and Facebook as a way of transmission.

The data from the research concerning the young population again confirms our hypothesis that they would display a higher incidence of proverb transmission through digital media. 50% of the respondents affirmed to transmitting proverbs using the digital means only. This again is not as big as we imagined but it does confirm the hypothesis though. While digital for the older population meant both internet and television, the younger generation inclined more towards the internet through the social media platforms on their phones with the exception of respondent number six whose inanimate object in the form of the television became an 'animate' object through which

she learnt proverbs. While noting that 17% transmitted using only the oral means of interaction with their peers and friends, what is more troubling is the fact that 30% did not transmit at all the proverbs they had learnt citing lack of interest in doing so. While we may understand the fact that 11-year-old Somtochukwu may be excused because of his age, the others, in my opinion are showing a worrisome trend. This aligns with the theme that came up concerning the preservation of culture. The consequences of the younger generation showing an indifference or unwillingness in transmitting the proverbs they have learnt may have adverse effects for that particular culture and society. If the older ones pass the torch of cultural treasures that includes proverbs and the younger ones are unwilling to maintain that particular cultural tradition, it is not a good sign for that culture in general.

The flip side of the question on learning proverbs though nullified our hypothesis. It was only 12.5% of our young respondents who identified digital means as their only source of learning proverbs. It was the same number, 12.5% of our respondents that also identified oral means as their only source of learning proverbs. Though they use these digital means very often, their knowledge of proverbs did not come only from it. Their source of knowledge was a combination of the two with a whopping 75% identifying both oral and digital media/tradition as their sources of learning proverbs. They took what they learnt from their parents and elders and the community and combined it with what they were able to learn themselves from the internet. It is like a sort of vindicating the saying, 'two heads is better than one.' In this case, it is two sources of knowledge are better than one. The oral tradition brings the richness of tradition, the digital brings a modern touch to it.

From the African culture background though, this is not a strange occurrence as the African system of imparting knowledge especially when it comes to the culture and way of life of the people are transmitted from one generation to another principally through the oral, face to face, person to person transmission from one generation to the other or even intergenerationally, whether it is the parents or grandparents teaching their children or grandchildren, whether it is elders who have gathered the children around the village square using the natural light of the moon as light and teaching them about the norms of our society, whether it is the parents or grandparents doing it in their living rooms in the urban communities or whether they are gathered in the village square under the moon, teachings about life, admonitions about mistakes and better comportments styles, cultural values, are taught and transmitted using richness of proverbs.

In summary then, the hypothesis on the older generations was confirmed in both instances. They displayed a higher incidence of oral tradition in the learning and transmission of proverbs. As regards the younger generation, our hypothesis was nullified in the level of learning proverbs because our data showed that they learnt proverbs more from the combination of oral tradition and digital media. On the flip side, the hypothesis was confirmed on the level of transmission as data showed that they displayed a higher level of proverb transmission using the digital means.

As stated at the beginning of this work, proverbs forms an integral and important part of the Nigerian society. Through proverbs, ancient wisdom is transmitted from one generation to the other. This ancient wisdom goes a long way to help maintain the sanctity of our society and helps us to maintain the tradition and norms of our people

for the good of the society. Communication, teaching, transmitting these proverbs from one generation to the other is very important, it cannot be over emphasized. As at today, our data shows that among the older transmission, this transmission continues mostly along the oral tradition lane with some embracing technology and are able to transmit and learn using the modern digital technology in our means. The data shows too that the younger generation are learning both orally and digitally as well, but what the data shows more is that one is not more important than the other, as both continue to be important sources of learning. It is important to embrace new technologies in order to reach as many people as possible especially the younger ones who either are not attracted to the oral traditions or have no opportunity of learning through it. It is also important, however, not to deemphasize the importance of oral tradition in the name of modernity when it comes to transmission of proverbs. Two heads, they say, is better than one, every rich source of learning should be encouraged and propagated.

### **Limitations of the study**

#### **1. Time**

The interviews were conducted in a month, and I feel that if there was more time, it would have given us the opportunity to interview more people and get more answers. This does not nullify the results that we have but it is desirable to have had more time.

#### **2. More States**

The fact that two states were the point of interviews also has its limitations on the research. Granted the fact that Lagos is a mini-Nigeria that has both urban and rural areas, both educated and uneducated population, it is still not enough to accommodate the views of the country. It is desirable to have had more opportunity to go to at least

13 of the 36 states in Nigeria. That would have been cumbersome and almost impossible though given the time frame which again confirms the limitations of time mentioned above.

### **3. Level of education**

From the data gathered during the research, it is evident that we were fortunate to have interviewed more educated people than uneducated people. Educated in this sense refers to attending a formal education system, but in the African tradition, informal school constitutes a very important aspect as well. So the question is: would the results have been different if we had more ‘uneducated’ people among the respondents?

### **4. People who refused to participate**

Every human person is unique and have their own experiences and configurations. Some of the people who refused to participate in the interview could have added new and different dimensions to the whole issue as seen in the example of respondent number four who brought in a whole new angle to inanimate objects. The fact that we had some rejections was, in my opinion, some limitations on our study, and made me ask, probably for some future research, how people can be made to feel comfortable during an interview for academic purposes, and if there are other ways of collecting data.

### **Future Research**

Taking into cognizance the importance of this topic, more work needs to be done in order to have more insight that will be beneficial to communications studies and other

aspect of learning. Some suggested areas where future research could be done are summarized thus:

1. A comparison of the mode of transmission of proverbs among rural and urban areas in Nigeria.
2. The role of formal and informal education in the transmission of proverbs in Nigeria.
3. Role of phone applications in the transmission and learning of proverbs in Nigeria.
4. The life or death of culture – the role of proverbs and its transmission.

## APPENDIX

Examples of Proverbs given by the various respondents in the interview

Respondent 1: a. Whatever you plant, is what you reap.

b. Help yourself before somebody help you.

Respondent 2: a. Be conscious of whatever you do in the presence of a young one because the child will not forget.

b. The human person does not see beyond.

Respondent 3: a. A fly that does not hear advice will follow the corpse to the grave.

Respondent 4: a. He who will swallow *odala* (fruit) seed must consider the size of his anus.

Respondent 5: a. When it is time for something, it will surely happen.

b. What you have been pre-informed of, should not take you unaware.

Respondent 6: a. What a child sees on a tree, an elder will see on his own without climbing anything.

b. We climb on the shoulders of those who came before us.

Respondent 7: a. He who is with God has no fear.

Respondent 8: a. Letting the past be.

Respondent 9: a. So you don't think the stone is the greatest, God uses an egg to crack the coconut.

Respondent 10: a. What an elder sees while sitting down, a young person even if he climbs the highest tree, would not be able to see it.

Respondent 11: a. A stitch in time saves nine.

b. Make hay while the sun shines.

Respondent 12: a. What goes around comes around.

b. What an old man sees sitting down, a young man can't see it even

if he climbs the highest mountain.

Respondent 13: a. God's time is the best.

Respondent 14: a. If you sit down and look beyond your eye, you won't see it but if an elder sits somewhere, he will see it without even standing up.

Respondent 15: a. When something happens to you, that is when you learn the lesson.

Respondent 16: a. It is when you wake up that you start your own in life.

Respondent 17: a. A stitch in time saves nine.

b. Once bitten twice shy.

Respondent 18: a. If someone uses a car to get to a destination, even if someone uses foot, the person will still get to the same destination.

Respondent 19: a. Respondent couldn't recall an example.

Respondent 20: a. No man is an island.

b. A rat inside the house is responsible for bringing other rats outside inside the house.

Respondent 21: a. If fufu can kill somebody it is still the same fufu that the person will eat at the burial.

Respondent 22: a. A bird in hand is worth two in the bush.

Respondent 23: a. Whatever might be affecting somebody is within or is close to that person.

Respondent 24: a. A white cock that doesn't know he's old will bring shame to himself.

b. Pepper may be small, but it is an abomination to the eyes.

c. The needle is very small, but it is not something that you can swallow.

- Respondent 25: a. The insects that eats the leaves is inside the leaves.
- b. A stitch in time saves nine.
  - c. A child who uses the left hand to point to her father's house is like a bastard.
- Respondent 26: a. What's an adult can see sitting down, a child cannot see standing.
- Respondent 27: a. Okro is not taller than the person who planted it.
- Respondent 28: a. If you are patient, when you put the stone on the fire it would be Soft.
- Respondent 29: a. What an elder see sitting, a young child even if he climbs up stands up will not see it.
- b. a child who does not allow his mother to sleep with not sleep as well.
- Respondent 30: a. Tomorrow is pregnant.
- Respondent 31: a. A stitch in time saves nine.
- b. You cannot eat your cake and have it.
- Respondent 32: a. What an elderly man sees while sitting, a younger person will not see it even if he climbs a tall tree.
- b. When a finger rubs oil it spreads to the other fingers.
- Respondent 33: a. If something is coming and you know what is coming is bad, you avoid it.
- b. No matter how highly-placed a child is, the child should still respect the elder.
- Respondent 34: a. What a child thinks he cannot find solutions to, he will find when he goes closer to an elder.
- Respondent 35: a. If the dog respects the lion, the lion should also respect the dog.

Respondent 36: a. Once bitten, twice shy.

Respondent 37: a. Respondent couldn't recall an example.

Respondent 38: a. What an adult see sitting down, a young person even if he climbs  
the Iroko tree cannot see it.

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