

**A SURVEY OF THE LITERARY GENRE OF ANNANG SOCIAL PROVERBS  
(UFIED)**

**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Proverbs (ufied) is one of the systems of communication that are passed from one generation to another and are derived from society's experience and thoughts over a long period of years. Over the years, its understanding and usage has been taken to be the sole rights of the elders in traditional societies. This paper discusses the writing styles that are found in Annang social proverbs (ufied) and to show that they are an embodiment of knowledge and virtue, extant and relevant in contemporary Nigerian society. These findings are contributions to a better understanding of proverbs as a tool for national development. The historical phenomenology was used in the study. Data collection was from primary and secondary sources. Consequently, the study recommended that government at the local, state and national levels should ensure that adequate security measures are put in place to curb crimes and insurgencies in the society. Also, traditional rulers, priests, votaries of Annang traditional religion should help promote and educate their subjects and others on the need to preserve Annang folklore as a language of social communication. Finally, the print and television media is an educative medium and as such should be made to feed from a reservoir of a well established and documented Annang literature.*

**Keywords:** Genre, Literary, Proverbs, Survey

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**INTRODUCTION**

Traditional system of communication refers to modes of meaning exchange that are rooted in a people's culture, and which began from the era of pre-literate and pre-modern times (Ukonu and Wogu, 2008). According to Edeogu and Nnaji (2012, p.92) who note that "it is a means by which indigenous people communicate with one another and which survive to the present, despite the passage of time and the smothering influence of the modernity". "Proverbs (*ufied*) were drawn from the wide gamut of Annang cultural experience such as: attitudes, values, emotions, perceptions, natural elements, thoughts and feelings" (Umanah, 2014, p.114). Therefore, proverbs which are short wise sayings could also be found in its elaborate form. They were preserved by elders, women and children in the traditional society which is still very relevant in the Nigerian contemporary society.

The problem of correct interpretation of proverbs has been identified on the one hand, as well as the right usage in situations and conditions experienced by people as another. Most authors have dealt with proverbs generally but have not gone to the extent of looking at the writing styles found in proverbs which forms the point of departure for this study as the gap in literature. The study employed the historical phenomenology method by which the primary source of data was drawn from constructive oral interviews by the purposive sampling method. The secondary source of data included published books, seminar papers, magazines, and government publications. The work would be a vital tool to students, teachers, and other members of the society in understanding how the old has been unable to be wiped out but rather being more relevant in the present day Nigerian society. The work is structured thus: introduction, brief historical background of the people of Annang, proverbs as a literary genre, social proverbs, importance of Annang proverbs, recommendations and conclusion.

### **Brief Historical Background of the People of Annang**

Annang land forms a significant cultural presence in South Southern Nigeria. It is one of the indigenous ethnic groups of this geo-political zone found in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The 2006 National Population Census estimates their population at 1.1million (NPC, 2006). The Annang ethnic group is divided into eight grass root political entities called Local Government Areas. They are: Abak, Essien Udim, Etim Ekpo, Ika, Ikot Ekpene, Obot Akara, Oruk Anam and Ukanafun Local Government Areas (Essien, 2005). According to Ekanem (2006) & Enang (1982) situated within the Cross River basin, between latitudes 4<sup>o</sup>.25<sup>1</sup> and 7<sup>o</sup> North and

longitudes 7<sup>0</sup>.15<sup>1</sup> and 9<sup>0</sup>.30<sup>1</sup> East, Annang is bounded on the North and West by the Igbo while the Ibibio make up its Eastern and Southern neighbours.

However, “for some the Annang people have always lived where they are living now from the beginning of time” (Ekanem, 2006, p.26). Others contend that they migrated from somewhere to their present homeland (Essien, 1990; Udodata, 1993). In fact, Ukpung, Akpan & Akan (2001, p.12) notes that “they migrated with their Ibibio brothers from Southern Sudan to Southern Cameroon and later to Ibom village in Arochukwu”. Hence Noah (1980, p.5) is of the opinion that “from Arochukwu, they further migrated to the different sub-culture areas of Annang which they have found themselves today”.

Annang is ethnically homogenous and as one travels across Annang land, one is shaded by canopies of palm oil, palm wine and coconut trees in a sea of green lofty tropical vegetation (Udodata, 2006). Thus, their economic system was principally based on agricultural subsistence and exchange economy.

They have great tradition in music and are renowned in arts and sculpture. As a people, they are very religious, generous, determined and honest, simple and sincere. Annang social unit consists of the *Ufok* (family), *Irib Ete* (household/ patrilineal relatives), *Ekpuk* (groups of patrilineal relatives tracing their genealogy to a common ancestor or fore-father), *Awio* (village), *Imaan* (clan) (Ekanem, 2006 & Meek, 1937).

Like other Africans, religion cuts through the whole life of Annang people. Thus, the people believe in a Supreme Deity called *Awasi*, *Nnem* (intermediary deities and spirits), Ancestors, *Aruru* (invisible and unidentifiable force) (Parrinder, 1969; Enang, 1982; Idowu, 1973; Enang, 1975). Therefore, social and religious concern is seen in a single oneness in Annang community.

## **PROVERBS AS A LITERARY GENRE**

Like the poem, proverb is short, dense and besides, the order of word follows a fixed pattern for most proverbs in Annang. There exists therefore, a striking affinity between the proverbs and poetry, the more so because, in addition to the density in form and fixity in pattern, imagery and figurative expressions are also abundant in the proverbs (Noah, 1991). Hence, *ufied* in Annang is used as a generic name for all types of aphoristic expressions.

### **Alliteration**

Alliteration as the poetic device of beginning two or more words in a line of verse with the same sound occurs in the poetry of many nations. To buttress this fact, Okoye (2012) states that alliteration is the repetition of similar initial consonant sounds in sequences of nearby words in a line or lines of poetry. Further, alliteration is the use of two or more words beginning with the same consonant in one or adjoining lines (Ansorge, Lucas, Mecoy & Tower, 1942; Crystal, 1997; Crystal, 2008; Trask, 1993; Robins, 1971; Saeed, 2007). There are 21 consonant letters in the written alphabet namely: B, C, D, F, G, H, J, K, L, M, N, P, Q, R, S, T, V, W, X, Y, Z (Nordquist, 2003). Therefore, in Annang proverbs alliteration found its place thus:

- i. Nte atong afo 'jem agwo asana, nte atong afo suko ke adunam.

(If like soap you try making men clean, like soap you dwindle in the act).

People might want to take another for granted here if they are soft and always trying to dialogue with people to see how things should be done peacefully. This calls for the fact that, once in a while, one has to be a bit strict in dealing with others so as not to belittle one self.

- ii. Agwo fire ntak, ntak atoho saade mkpo inanake ntak.

(When you forget the cause, the cause becomes irate because everything has a cause).

The Annang show respect to her ancestors as an obligation by remembering them during libation sessions and at other times, sometimes at the expense of the living. Again, people should not forget to appreciate every good gesture extended to them.

- iii. Agwo adiono nte 'mana, idionoke nte akpa.

(A man knows where he/she is born but does not know where he/she would die).

This proverb tells every human that a person can only know where he/she is born and cannot predict or tell exactly where he/she would eventually die or the circumstance that would warrant his/her death. This also shows that in life a person would not know where the toils in life would lead one to in the day-to-day endeavour.

- iv. Nnuun ked isioho nnan k' iwuod.

(A single finger cannot remove a louse from the head).

A single person is unable to do all the things he/she is supposed to do alone. The assistance of others must be sought. It also explains that such a person would not be an embodiment of everything himself/herself.

- v. Aduok nton ke nton akene.

(Whoever throws ashes, must have the same ashes trailing him/her).

Anybody who perpetuates wickedness must reap repercussion. This proverb is not in support of evil acts by persons.

vi. Anwan arok mme nnan, arok inyieghe ujo mkpo, nnan imonoke mkpo.

(The fight between the dumb and blind, the dumb cannot speak and the blind cannot see).

This proverb tells how two incapacitated people would do in times of distress. It tells how people that are inexperienced and not well vested in knowledge and wisdom could be successful in a partnership business venture or life endeavour.

### **Rhyme**

According to Ansorge, Lucas, Mecoy & Tower (1942, p.797) “rhyme is the similarity in sound of the last accented syllables in two or more lines of verse and rhyming schemes are indicated by letters of the alphabet using the same letter for each of a set of rhyming lines”. Rhyme also occurs when two or more words have similar sounds and happens at the end of the words but this is not always the case (Nordquist, 2003). Nonetheless, rhymes are identified in *ufied* (proverb) used in daily conversations by the Annang as shown below:

i. Ekpo sak ekpo.

(The poor laugh at the poor).

A poor person tends to laugh at another person who is equally poor without having a second thought that he/she is of the same shoe. It explains that a person who is deficient should not see to another person of being more deficient by reducing the person to a mere subject of caricature. Therefore, people have no right to criticize another person unconstructively and neither have they the right to condemn others for behaving in the same way they do.

ii. Ujo agwo ade ujo awasi.

(The voice of the people is the voice of God).

This does not mean that the voice of every person is wise and good, but only that it is irresistible. It also means that God passes through people to speak to others and those spoken to should take good pieces of advices seriously.

iii. Ered adaka, ered ada.

(As a tooth falls off, another is replaced).

This is a reflection of the strict order in nature which abhors vacuum. In the well ordered system that the world is, there is no vacuum and no blanks exist. Order in nature presupposes that the older person shall be more knowledgeable, capable and wiser than the younger ones.

iv. Agwo utom adod utip utom.

(A labourer is worthy of his/her hire).

Any person that has been called upon to work should be rewarded. At no point should any person try to cheat on a worker who has successfully completed his/her work. This is one of the reasons workers in the Nigerian society at one time or the other decry for befitting salary wages and incentives from government to commensurate with their diligence at work done and the living standard in the country.

## **Folktale**

In many pre-literate cultures, folktales are hardly distinguished from myths since especially in tales of trick stars and heroes they presuppose a background of belief about tribal origins and the relations of men and gods. Folktale is often defined as a tale or legend that begins from and is traditional among a people or folk, and springs from a shared history of a particular community (Besant, 2011). According to Radin, Marvel & Sweeny (1953), the Annang reason why the sun and the moon live in the sky is stated thus:

Many years ago the sun and the water were great friends, and both lived on the earth together. The sun very often visits the water but the water never returned his visits... The water gave a condition of building a tremendous compound by the sun for its visit so that it will accommodate his people. The sun had to tell the moon as they lived together before starting to build a very large compound that would contain the water...unfortunately, each time the water visits the compound, it could not contain the water as the sun and moon would have to push upwards. This continued until they eventually found themselves in the sky (p.41).

Another interesting Annang folktale is that of the choice of the vulture as the messenger of god. According to Udo (1983) the reason is given thus:

The vulture likes to eat most types of food. It does not mind where it perches to eat: in the rubbish heaps, on rooftops, on carcasses, etc. It is usual for a vulture, as soon as it smell slaughtered meat to swoop down on it. Hence, the Annang believe that the gods have sent it to come and share in the food and, because of this belief, he fears killing and incurring its anger. Therefore, the vulture, even though it is so filthy and sluggish in its movement, is regarded by the Annang people as God's messenger. No important offering of sacrifice, was said to be acceptable to the gods if no vulture showed up to eat the blood of the animal offered (p.272).

## **SOCIAL PROVERBS**

It is imperative to mention certain unique roles of social proverbs in Annang community. Annang proverbs were frequently used in all manner of situations such as: social control, resolution of conflicts, judicial decisions, truth, justice, respect for rights and obligations, law and order, filial piety and respect for one's parents and the common good of the society, etc. Social proverbs had a strong significance on the lives of the Annang people, as they were elements of unity among them.

Accordingly, of all the various forms of folklore employed today, Annang proverbs (*ufied*) stand out with its distinctive features. In view of this, they are often used to foster social values that are pragmatic and communalistic in nature in a bid to solving the problems of life. As it has been rightly put, social proverbs are characterized by communality and values. Consequently, it is the contention of this paper that aspects of these proverbs (*ufied*) need be treated and they include: proverbs about human relationships, marriage and family life, and communal life.

### **Proverbs about Human Relationships**

- i. Atem adia ikpong k' adim abong akom.

(Rain beats the roof of "cook-eat-alone").

Selfishness is what the Annang community kicked against. This is evident in their clarion call on people to be their brother's keeper. This proverb says that there is joy in sharing. This is so because if something happens to an individual in a community who is selfish, people may frown

at such a person but what befalls him/her also affects the whole community as well (Udeme, 2013, Personal Communication).

- ii. Ekabom agwo anyie ujo inan, asio iba, iba asuho.

(An elderly person has four voices, he speaks with two and reserves two).

This proverb shows that an elder speaks wisely and does not speak carelessly but reserve comments that could adversely affect, destroy, separate and ruin either himself/herself or others in the community. It must be added that their words are very useful to those who care to listen (Inyene, 2013, Personal Communication).

- iii. Agwo udono ajem awia-ibok.

(A sick person seeks for a doctor for help).

People with ill health of all sorts are to go out and look for those who could help them cure their sickness. People are also informed by this proverb to share their problems with others so that the necessary assistance could reach them. This proverb discourages myopic and wishful thinking as well as the culture of silence.

### **Proverbs about Marriage and Family Life**

- i. Ufok adom isifonofon agwo, ase 'memeghe.

(Matrimonial home is not rosy, but could be adaptable).

This means that some measure of hardship is experienced in a matrimonial home and one has to be prepared to adjust one's self to it. It is also an advice given to sons-in-law, daughters-in-law by their respective parents to be steadfast during trying times.

- ii. Nwuan akama isung, atang ujo iko ebe.

(A debtor's wife speaks the voice of her husband).

When a married man is indebted, the wife seems to be in support of the excuses and reasons that the husband will give to exonerate himself from problems. At times, when the wife is met at home she would have to support the husband in all ramifications.

- iii. Ajen amakpon, ujo ajet akpuho.

(When a baby grows up, the tone of crying would change).

As a child grows old every day so is great change in his or her life. Sometimes, the problem that makes the baby to cry may in due course become more demanding for the parents to endure. At



other times, new things may continue to make the baby to cry as the day unfolds showing that the child becomes mature every other day.

### **Proverbs about Communal Life**

- i. Eto isidagha ikpong ikaba akai.

(A tree cannot make a forest).

This proverb calls for co-operation and collaboration among people living or working together. Human beings are dependent on each other as far as the world is concern. By this many trees make up a forest and the communality of the nature of the Annang community makes this proverb to encourage the seeking and rendering of help to one another (Jimmy, 2013, Personal Communication).

- ii. Iwuod iba, afon akan ked.

(Two good heads are better than one).

Closely related to this proverb is the one afore-mentioned earlier. It is good to share one's problem with someone else's that thinks rightly before reaching an important decision. Seeking other's advice is what this proverb teaches.

- iii. Ubok mum ubok mum, anye ben ekrat.

(A collective hand carries a log).

Giving others a helping hand goes as much as alleviating the person from his/her present situation. It is difficult to do alone the things that are supposed to be done by many hands as it causes delay. This proverb teaches that communality in Annang community is an important virtue that was instilled in the lives of the people.

### **IMPORTANCE OF ANNANG PROVERBS**

To better understand Annang proverbs and their meaning, it is important to see what role they play in the society. Therefore, once they are used, it is important to understand why they are used in the first place, example, "*Amana mme ewa, ademe mme nnan*" (When one sleeps with a dog, one wakes up with lice) reminds people to always try to identify and know the people that live close to them in the same environment or community as neighbours. This is because associating with people of questionable character could cause someone to be roped in a crime that he/she knows nothing about. Again, "*Nkosiosio mbiara ered, inua ata mkpo k'ukpeme*"

(Until the rotten tooth is pull off, the mouth must chew with caution) for instance, portray the fact that until an armed robber is fished out in a particular society, members of that society continues to live in fear.

In other situations, proverbs teach what is right, fair, honest, makes the immature wise and gives knowledge and sense to the young. They provide a means of alluding to values and norms accepted by society without offending the beliefs of others. Proper application of a proverb in a given situation is a skill that is developed through time and experience. For example, “*Agwo isikamake mkpo iba idok anyong*” (One cannot hold two things in one’s hand to climb up) teaches that trying to climb a tree top with things in both hands is difficult. It further shows that one cannot learn a trade in two different locations or place at the same time. This proverb calls for focus and concentration in a particular endeavour for better productivity and result. “*Inuen ked k’ubok afon akan iba ke ikot*” (A bird at hand is worth two in the bush) tells people that whatever they have succeeded in having or holding on to like a job is preferred than having an expectation of so many things without being sure of them. For instance, people are told to give up on their jobs through resignation to contest elections that they are not sure of being elected or selected and when they fail regrets come after. Further, the importance of proverbs could be felt in its elaborate form thus:

Proverbs have a didactic function, used for ethical instruction and for traditional preservation to expand philosophical ideals (Essien, 1978, p.198). In support of this Montapert (1964, p.vii) states that “the sayings of wise and good men are of great value and they are like the dust of gold or the sparkle of the diamond”.

Ifiok ikeme agwo.

(The knowledge and wisdom people possess is always inadequate).

Akpan mmafiok mma, afid asejire ke erem afong.

(When people claim to know everything, they are bound to make mistakes).

In view of this Anthony (2013) affirms that:

A certain man (Akpan Mmafiok Mma) lived in a far country of Cameroun and was very rich. He returned home to invest in business and was advised to buy the male bicycle that he could display his products on the front and back carriers. He

refused and bought the female bicycle which made him unable to advertise his products. Also, when he was to marry in the next village, he wore his new and expensive clothes. On his way, he was pressed and went into the bush to use it as his convenience. On his return from the bush, people noticed remnants of the stool on him and told him but he refused to believe them just the same way he refused their advice of removing his clothes before going into the bush. On account of the smell from him and shame, his friends left him and never followed him to his marriage anymore (Personal Communication).

This proverb tells everyone to always have a listening ear to what others may have to say or contribute towards their welfare. Claiming to know all things keep one in a disadvantage position which may bring disgrace and show the level of ignorance in a person.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- i. Going by the state of our society today, government at the local, state and national levels should ensure that adequate security measures are put in place to curb crimes and insurgencies in the society.
- ii. Traditional rulers, priests, votaries of Annang traditional religion should help promote and educate their subjects and others on the need to preserve Annang folklore as a language of social communication.
- iii. The print and television media is an educative medium and as such should be made to feed from a reservoir of a well established and documented Annang literature.

## **CONCLUSION**

Proverbs continue to be a source of guidance of conducts in the society. This is because they contain wisdom and value that regulates the entire traditional society and were drawn and used based on the experiences of the people at all times. Its origin has been traced to the constant repetition of acts and conducts by members of the society. However, it should be noted at this point that proverbs could be categorized into alliteration, rhyme and folktales. Social proverbs were categorized generally on proverbs about human relationships, marriage and family life, and communal life. These proverbs were also treated in its short as well as elaborate form showing its importance and relevance in contemporary society and appropriate recommendations made.

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