

## **Context of Usage and Aesthetics of Selected Proverbs from Southern Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Globally, proverbs are symbolic expressions of people. In Nigeria, proverbs are influenced, to a large extent, by the linguistic and socio-geographical experiences and orientations of the diverse peoples that make up the country. The imagery in proverbs, their form and context of use as well as aesthetics reflect the peculiar natural environment of the users, whether from the Northern or Southern regions of Nigeria where hundreds of languages are spoken or elsewhere in the world. Deploying Dell Hymes' 'SPEAKING' model of speech analysis, twelve proverbs from Southern Nigeria are randomly but purposively selected and subjected to content analysis in this study. The selected proverbs are investigated in order to demonstrate that they have diachronically but aesthetically performed and still capable of performing certain socio-cultural functions of entertainment and education within communities of their significations. They make people in many Southern Nigerian communities conform to desired rules, mores and traditions of the land as well as teach a method of expressing life which is aesthetically flavoured. Drawing on the foregoing, this study recommends that: (i) more research should be carried out on proverbs from Southern

Nigeria; (ii) universities should make available grants for collection and documentation of Nigerian proverbs especially those from the South; (iii) proverbs from Southern Nigeria, especially those from the south-south area should be studied with a view to gaining insights into what could yield a possible solution to the crisis in the Niger Delta; and (iv) proverbs should be used in schools to instruct and delight the younger generations.

**Keywords:** Southern Nigerian proverbs, surface level of meaning, aesthetics, images, linguistic saltiness, deeper level of meaning, humanity, context of usage.

## **Introduction**

Globally, proverbs are symbolic expressions of people. They describe plant and animal life and all activities of man in the world; they point humanity on the way forward or the acceptable way of living. Jegede (2008:182) identifies “proverbs as a dynamic mode of discourse with unique identity...” He further posits that proverbs form a pool of linguistic and thematic resources from which speakers and writers in rhetoric, politics, economics, jurisprudence, philosophy, history, religion, technology, etc, draw inspiration (2011:35). This presupposes that the functions of proverbs as a means of embellishing speech and performance, projecting business sense of people, portraying the image of a community and preserving the history and culture of a people can be aesthetically underscored among speakers and listeners. In fact, Manikas-Forester and Syswerd (1990:661) assert that “...these wise sayings (proverbs) describe patterns that operate in everyday life, offering us advice on how to conduct ourselves in various situations.”

Aesthetically speaking, a proverb may be used to show joy, to mourn, to praise, to indicate failure or to warn. So, apart from the literal and linguistic contexts, the social context of any proverb determines its suitability of use in a particular situation (Bashir and Idris-Amali, 2012:495). The meaning of a proverb, to a great extent, depends on the circumstance of use, the dexterity of the speaker (user), the iconic cultural and interpretative skills of the listener (audience), among other linguistic tropes which embody its aesthetics. Suru (2010:171) affirms that aesthetics deals with those responses to natural objects (including proverbs) and the judgement of them whether they should be regarded as beautiful or ugly. Omoera (2012: 66), though in a slightly different context, argues that what we see/say/hear has ‘colour’ or ‘art’ attached to it and equally constitutes an aesthetic

essence, which is a ‘moment’ of beauty in both tangible and intangible terms. Here lies the aesthetic bite and relevance of proverbs as artistic embodiments that can engage, provoke, evoke or prod human thoughts/ideas tangibly and intangibly depending on the speaker/listener and native intelligence interfaces. However, the aesthetics as seen in the context of usage of proverbs is of paramount interest to this discourse.

In Nigeria, proverbs are influenced, to a large extent, by the linguistic and socio-geographical experiences and orientations of the diverse peoples that make up the country. The imagery in proverbs, their form and context of use as well as aesthetics reflect the peculiar natural environment of the users, whether from the Northern or Southern regions of Nigeria where hundreds of languages are spoken. In this study, select proverbs from Southern Nigeria are analysed in order to demonstrate that they have diachronically but aesthetically performed and still capable of performing certain socio-cultural functions of entertainment and education within communities of their significations; they make people in many Southern Nigerian communities conform to desired rules, mores and traditions of the land as well as teach a method of expressing life which is aesthetically flavoured.

Deploying Dell Hymes’ ‘SPEAKING’ model of speech analysis, twelve proverbs from Southern Nigeria are randomly but purposively selected and subjected to content analysis in this study. Hymes (1974) developed a valuable model to assist in the identification and labelling of components of linguistic interaction that was driven by his view that in order to speak a language correctly/competently, one needs not only learn its vocabulary and grammar, but also the context in which words are used. In the Hymes’ speaking grid the following aspects of the linguistic situation are considered.

**S – Setting and Scene** – The setting refers to the time and place while scene describes the environment of the situation.

**P – Participants** – This refers to who is involved in the speech including the speaker and the audience (listener).

**E – Ends** – The purpose and goals of the speech along with any outcomes of the speech.

**A – Act Sequence** – The order of events that took place during the speech.

**K – Key** – The overall tone or manner of the speech.

**I – Instrumentalities** – The form and style of speech being given.

**N – Norm** – Defines what is socially acceptable at the event.

**G – Genre** – The type of speech that is being given.

This model has several components which can be applied to many sorts of discourse: message form/message content; setting; scene; speaker/sender/addresser; hearer/receiver/audience/addressee; purposes (outcome); purpose; purposes (goals); key; channels; forms of speech; norms of interaction; norms of interpretation; and genre. Similarly, Lyons (1975:413) notes that the context of an utterance...must be held to include, not only the relevant objects and actions taking place at a time, but also the knowledge shared by the speaker/user/oral artist and hearer /listener/audience of what has been said earlier, in so far as this is pertinent to the understanding of the utterance. It must also be taken to include the tacit acceptance by the speaker and hearer of relevant conversations, beliefs and presuppositions taken for granted by members of the speech community to which the speaker and the listener belong. It is this sense of flexibility that resides in proverb discourse and the application of Hymes' speaking model to different linguistic situations that intellectually excites and foregrounds this study's inquiry into the context of usage and aesthetics of select proverbs from Southern Nigeria.

Looking at the Nigerian situation before colonization, Oyeyinka (2002:119) informs that:

By nature and character of its evolution as a nation state at least historically before 1914 Nigeria appears to be a nation state with many polities, more or less culturally and linguistically distinct from one another. There are close to two hundred and fifty cultural and linguistic groups, each of which was independent until British occupation and annexation... Oyo kingdom, the Benin kingdom, the Nupe, Junkun and Hausa states and many other chiefdoms including the many semi-autonomous polities like Bonny, Opobo, Brass, in the Eastern and Riverine parts of the country all of which were welded together under the Pax-Britanica.

Diachronically, the situation has hardly changed. There has been political, social and cultural antagonism as some of the ethnic groups try to dominate others. Others resist and fight back, killing and destroying the property of the domineering group and vice versa. This has led to the Nigeria civil war (1966-1970), as well as various ethnic and religious crises.

Consequently, the people are impoverished. Very few ‘smart’ people have all the wealth in their hands. For instance, the Nigerian civil war brought with it much economic hardship, retrogression, bitterness and mistrust. Ogbemudia (1991: ix) captures the scenario vividly as he informs that “Midwestern Nigeria (now Edo and Delta States) was a bitterly divided people. Many of them had been displaced. Schools were closed, while hospitals overflowed with wounded soldiers...; infrastructures had been put out of use while government activities had come almost to a halt.”

Regrettably today, Nigeria is still struggling to come out of the trauma of ethnic and religious crises that plague it – Boko Haram in the North, Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the East, ethnic militias in the Niger Delta, Odua People’s Congress (OPC) in the West, Christian-Moslem skirmishes and many other incendiary activities here and there. The relatively recent political upheavals and election manipulations and litigations in parts of the country have caused much bad blood and despair among the citizens. There is much hardship and struggle for survival everywhere. Interestingly, this is reflected in many Nigerian proverbs. However, proverbs from the Northern part of the country appear to differ from those from the Southern part, especially the South-Southern region where the researchers come from. The imagery that abound in the proverbs of the people of the Southern region - Benin, Isoko, Izon, Urhobo, Ika, Owan, Esan, Igbo, Yoruba, Itsekiri, among other peoples and languages, are different from those found in proverbs from the North. This is probably because the Northern part of the country is inhabited mostly by the Hausas of the Muslim religion.

### **Nigerian Proverbs as Symbolic Expressions and Communications**

Nigerian proverbs are as numerous and different as Nigerian languages are overwhelmingly numerous. Heine and Nurse (2000:96) in the 1996 edition of *Ethnologue* put the number of living languages in Africa at 2011 and list the total number of living languages in the world as 6500; while they list 515 for Nigeria. The proverbs, especially those from Southern Nigeria are effective means of communication, as they exploit the resources of metaphor, hyperbole, similes, among other striking artistic forms. They have graphic qualities with which they spice speech. Chinua Achebe extols this aspect of the Nigerian proverb when he remarked that among the Igbos, proverbs are the “palm oil with which words are eaten.” He imagines and invents a situation where words are put in the mouth like pieces of yams and chewed, after dipping the yam (word) in palm oil.

From time immemorial, good speakers communicate their ideas vividly and tersely with proverbs. For example, King Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs that described every area of life and he was acclaimed the wisest king that ever lived on earth. The book of 1Kings 4: 29-32 states that: “God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breath of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore... He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five.” Jesus Christ, spoke many parables during the course of his teaching his disciples and other people. This is because proverbs are used to get into and explain matter better. They suggest meaning by use of indirection, invention and imagination. Finnegan (197:393 ) affirms that 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.”

Finnegan’s statement contains some pointers to the analysis of proverbs. These include shortness, terseness, fixity and poetic (aesthetic) quality in style and sense. In proverbs many abstract ideas, values, and emotions are represented by certain emblems. In some proverbs some animals, birds with some peculiar attributes are used to symbolize some actions and used to compare the proverbs in progress to some other happenings. Symbols could be fixed or unfixed. The unfixed symbols are some emblems and actions which are symbolic in their context only, while fixed symbols are those emblems, actions and values which are culturally recognized anywhere and anytime. Indeed, a user of proverbs has the arduous task of ensuring that his usage is appropriate and suitable for the occasion he is using it (Hymes, 1974; Bashir and Idris-Amali, 2012:495). Okojie (2004:2) states that among the Esans, “anybody who makes a proverb and does not end it well is a confused man.” This serves as a warning to people who speak in proverbs to express themselves clearly or face the consequence of being misunderstood. Therefore, “proverbs epitomize a people’s language showing not just wit, humour, wisdom but the life experience and, hence, it is the major medium of expression of the aged and wise” (Okojie, 2004:2).

Older people, especially men use proverbs to communicate meaning to the younger generations. According to Okpewho (1992:230), “age and experience put them (elders) in a better position to understand the full implication of the wisdom and truth contained in the proverbs and so to impart these to the younger members.” This is probably why older folks talk more in proverbs than the younger people in Nigeria. While Alagoa (1968:235-242) states that proverbs are pithy sayings of the wise, which embody personal and general

historical experience, Akporobaro (2004:78) asserts that “proverbs are to portray for people their way of living, their criticism of life, moral truth and social values.” Abraham (1972); Finnegan (1977); Okpewho (1979); Egudu (1985); Agheyisi (1986); Okojie (1994); and Erhahon (1998) have made similar assertions about the linguistic saltiness of African proverbs. In fact, Nigerians, especially Southerners, use proverbs more frequently than other genres of oral literature because they are shorter and easier to remember and they are weightier as they carry compressed thought and meaning.

### **Analysis of Select Southern Nigerian Proverbs**

Proverb is literature, the study of a definite method, a way of expressing life. Egudu (1985:1) teaches that in analyzing proverbs one must use the method of literature which consists in:

- a.) The act of suggestion and indirection
- b.) The act of creating a situation
- c.) The act of imagination and invention

In Egudu’s illustration with the saying “let the hawk perch, let the eagle perch, anyone who says the other should not perch, may it lose it wings,” he suggests that the meaning is: “let people be considerate of one another.” He goes further to say that talking overtly (on the surface) about the birds while implying persons is a good example of the act of suggestion or indirection which is one of the methods of literature and the act of creating a situation in which birds are possibly perching and one may possibly lose wings is the act of imagination or invention, meaning that if men were birds, they should allow one another perch or lose wings. That is, get punished, if they refuse to tolerate other people. Egudu’s illustrative dicta above are conceivably hinged on the speaker/listener interface. Consequently, it dovetails with aspects of Dell Hymes’ ‘SPEAKING’ model of speech analysis which constitutes an intellectual infrastructure for this study.

Furthermore, Nigerian proverbs can be analyzed at two levels: first at the surface level; then second at the deep underlying structural level. These entail an understanding of the surface linear and sequential movement as well as the underlying images that constitute the conceptual element of any proverb. This shows, however loosely, the aesthetic relationship between the signs or words and what is signified. Again, it draws interest to the social context of the proverbs, as well as the individual creative elements the makers of

proverbs use to make their sayings unique. This is possibly why proverbs instruct and delight when they are analyzed. The moral lessons inherent in proverbs make the audience wiser, even as they get entertained within the artistic/aesthetic cusp of the proverbs they are listening to.

Twelve proverbs have been chosen for analysis in this study. These are made up of two proverbs each from different parts of Southern Nigeria. These include: Yoruba, Esan, Urhobo, Igbo, Ika and Benin. The proverbs shall first be written in the local language; while a fair attempt would be made to literally translate them in English.

(i) **Yoruba:** *A kii ra oyi ko maa koni loju.*

English: You do not buy wind with money without experiencing storm.

**Context of Usage and Aesthetics:** The proverb talks overtly about spending money to buy wind and experiencing storm. The artist, that is, the proverb maker creates a situation where someone goes to the market to buy wind and thereby experiences a storm. This is at the surface level. At the deeper underlying level the artist suggests that those who stir up trouble suffer the grievous consequences. The proverb serves a social function, as it indirectly admonishes troublemakers to desist from causing problems to other people, or bear the consequences of their action. The aesthetics of the proverb lies in the images of spending money, wind and storm. One is expected to spend one's hard earned money on something beneficial. It is unimaginable that one can spend money on wind or nothing and get into trouble.

(ii) **Yoruba:** *Ti ebi ba kuroninu ise, ise buse.*

English: If hunger is out of poverty, poverty is finished.

**Context of Usage and Aesthetics:** The proverb serves as a social function. It talks about the priority of food over every other thing. The artist overtly talks about hunger being a part and parcel of poverty. Poverty has to hold fast on to hunger in order to continue to exist. At the underlying deep structural level the artist suggests that people should work hard to put food on the table. If this is done, all other problems can be solved. The aesthetics of the proverb lies in the images of hunger and poverty existing side by side until food is used to break the relationship.

(iii) **Urhobo:** *Oro diwame oriene ogbuko phia ere.*

English: He that dives into water does not remember or know that his back is exposed.

**Context of Usage and Aesthetics:** At the surface level the artist invents a situation of pleasurable diving and swimming in a river. Rivers abound in Urhobo land in the Niger Delta area and people swim often. The images of water and the diver with exposed back are striking and aesthetically pleasing at the surface level. At the deeper underlying level the proverb admonishes that whenever a person tells a lie; traces are always left behind with which the person is trailed and caught by the truth being revealed. Water is used to symbolize lies, while the exposed back symbolizes the truth that would be revealed later. The act of diving into water symbolizes water. The proverb serves a social function, as it is often used in cases of investigations, fact finding and settlements. It also serves as a deterrent to intending liars and criminals. The beauty of the proverb lies in its brevity and symbolic nature.

(iv) **Urhobo:** *Unu koko kogbophioro.*

English: When mouths are together, the forest can lead easily to the town.

**Context of Usage and Aesthetics:** At the surface level the proverb maker invents a situation where different mouths are put together, as the owners look for a way to go to town and go without glitches to the town through the forest where there has originally been no way. At the deep structural level the artist indirectly suggests that when people combine their efforts they achieve success together. The proverb calls for unity among people. It serves a social function of encouraging every member of any society, different ethnic groups to unite and bring about positive achievement or desired change. The beauty of the proverb lies in its symbolic nature. Mouth-gathering symbolizes reasoning, thoughts, labour, and effort that are combined to achieve a common purpose. Forest leading to town symbolizes unusual accomplishment. The ironic picture of forest leading to town with just the gathering of mouths is aesthetically pleasing.

(v) **Ika:** *Ogi furu eze ke we eye eze.*

English: It is the kola nut that befits a king that is offered to a king.

**Context of Usage and Aesthetics:** At the surface level the proverb speaks overtly about befitting kola nuts being presented to the king. These could be very big and attractive. At the deeper underlying structural level the proverb is indirectly used to suggest that honour be given to who honour is due. The symbols of kola nut presentation and a king in his full regalia as the ruler of his people and the bridge between them and the supernatural world strike the mind with force and vividness. Hence, the proverb under investigation is capable of setting the intellectual ‘antennae’ of any insightful person on communicatively fruitful thoughts within the socio-linguistic milieu of its signification.

(vi) **Ika:** *Ndi chan okwu ekuruni Oba, abiesini ndi gbe ncha y’eru.*

English: Those who washed their legs did not meet the Oba, let alone those who rubbed soap on sponges.

**Context of Usage and Aesthetics:** At the surface level, the artist paints a picture of vassals who are in such a hurry to meet their master/king that they wash their feet instead of bathing and yet missed their appointment with their master who does not waste any time. It is imagined that those who rub soap on their sponges and bath themselves thoroughly will never see the ‘break light’ of the master as he must leave before they arrive the venue of meeting. Indirectly, at the deeper underlying level the artist suggests that punctuality is the soul of business and that there is urgency and time limit for any achievement. The images of human beings washing only feet, rushing out and yet missing the mark and those bathing and rinsing off soap foam for a long time and yet aiming at going to get the same opportunity as the fast starters are aesthetically pungent.

(vii) **Esan:** *Ai yomo nuwale, se we eghoghon re.*

English: You don’t have to tell a wise child to stay out of smoke.

**Context of Usage and Aesthetics:** At the surface level the proverb maker invents a situation where an environment is smoky and a child looks on, as if unsure of whether to get into the smoke or not. This is interesting to imagine. A grown up child that has experienced the choking effect of smoke and scorched by fire will run away from fire, by himself/herself without being told. The artist indirectly suggests that “once bitten twice shy.” The imaginative use of ‘smoke’ as a trope of warning or admonition underscores the aesthetic proclivity of the above proverb.

(viii) **Esan:** *Ebe gboria a vade, Ebe himolen ye vade.*

English: When what is to kill someone is coming, what is to save him is coming too.

**Context of Usage and Aesthetics:** The proverb serves a social function of admonishing people never to give up. That is, they should keep on keeping on in spite of the challenges that life may throw their way. At the surface level the artist invents a situation where someone is condemned and about to be killed, but another person intervenes and rescues him/her. At the deeper underlying level the artist indirectly suggests that one should not despair because the solution to the most problems one faces in life are often encysted in the problems. In other words, it is advisable that one squarely faces one's problems and solves them. The moment you take the first step to solve your problem new ways will open for you to fix the problems and put them behind you. Here the aesthetics derives from the parallelism in "...what is to kill someone is coming" and "...what is to save someone is coming."

(ix) **Igbo:** *Egbe belu, ugo belu. Nke sibe ya ebene nku akwariya.*

English: Let the hawk perch let the eagle perch. The one who says the other should not perch, let his wings break.

**Context of Usage and Aesthetics:** The proverb performs the social function of teaching tolerance among different groups of people. At the surface level the artist invents a situation where two birds are perching on a tree. One can imagine the wild flapping of wings as each bird tries to maintain its balance on the tree, warning that the other bird should not push it down. At the deeper structural level, the artist teaches that people in society should tolerate one another and live in an atmosphere of peace and cordiality. Anyone who breaks this rule will have his/her wings broken. The long arm of the law will come after him/her to discipline him/her. Here lies the aesthetic/moral preachment of this proverb.

(x) **Igbo:** *Nwanyi kuru nu zo agba egwu nwe onye nakuru ya egu n'ohia.*

English: A young woman who stands on the road to dance has a drummer in the bush.

**Context of Usage and Aesthetics:** The proverb performs a social function of warning people to beware of who they deal with. At the surface level a woman dances on the road without caring that cars and other road users ply the highway. In other words, she could not

care less. At the deeper underlying structural level of meaning the artist indirectly suggests that a woman who says “I can succeed without you” has a secret male friend behind her, so you mind what you do or say to any woman. The aesthetics of the proverb lies in the act of imagining a woman dancing with reckless abandon on a busy road, without a visible source of music.

(xi) **Benin:** *Ayon ne o ma se Edo da ne o gbe Uselu.*

English: It is the wine which to Benin is inadequate for consumption that intoxicates Uselu.

**Context of Usage and Aesthetics:** The proverb performs a social function of teaching the virtue of being contented with what one has. At the surface level the oral artist compares two quarters or places; Edo and Uselu in relation to wine consumption. At the deeper structural level, the artist uses some iconic cultural settings in Benin Kingdom to teach the whole of humanity that what seems to be old-fashioned or outdated in one quarter or place or part of the world may be the vogue or fad in another part. Thus, ‘wine’ is metaphorically/aesthetically reinvented to mean ‘trend’ in human activities, which has different timelines and datelines. This epigrammatic statement gratifyingly taxes one’s imagination while admonishing one to be contented with whatever one has.

(xii) **Benin:** *A i mu ada dien egbee.*

English: One does not carry a sceptre and claim supremacy over one’s family.

**Context of Usage and Aesthetics:** At the surface level the proverb talks about headship position in family circles. The artist/proverb maker invents the pithy scenario to warn people who may have become so rich to delude themselves that they can lord it over their elders. At the deeper underlying structural plane of meaning the artist obliquely admonishes that one’s high position, wealth, intellectual endowment, political or social clout cannot and would never get one seniority in one’s family. The aesthetics of the proverb lies in the act of imagining a megalomaniac, for instance, trying to force certain decisions down the throat of his/her elders when he/she knows that it is pointless to dare such because everyone knows his/her position in the family.

Critically looking at the foregoing, the tone and attitude to life of Southern Nigeria reflect the joys, challenges and sorrows experienced by the people because of the conditions

imposed on them by their environments. Although many of the proverbs tend to thrive in a socio-cultural background of despair, fatalism and superstition, there appears to be a common understanding that people fail because they lack wisdom, they have decided to do nothing to improve their situation and because they are arrogant. This point is well instantiated by Chinua Achebe (1958: 19) who asserts that “When a man says yes, His *chi* will also say yes.” This shows optimism, progressive spirit, as well as the need to struggle and take responsibility for one’s life as expressed in most of the proverbs that were investigated in this study. It is therefore not surprising that proverbs are still very relevant in most communities in Southern Nigeria just as they were in the largely oral societies of days of yore.

Many people employ proverbs in both oral and written communications in different aspects of life. There is usually a profuse use of proverbs in social activities such as marriage ceremonies, burial ceremonies, age-grade initiations, title-taking/chieftaincy installations, dispute/conflict resolutions, musicals, video-/stage dramas, among others, in contemporary Southern Nigeria. Many Southern tribes such as the Benins, Esans, Yorubas, to mention a few, use proverbs to enliven their speeches, make critical comments on burning issues of the day in their communities, sound a note of warning on certain issues or celebrate or mourn the passage of their loved ones. Paul Wabara (1992) asserts that proverbs make a speech to be powerful and stirring, thus making the listener to go along with the speaker. Hence, proverbs can be used for ethical information; they teach morals, influence and change behaviours of man for the better. At any rate, proverbs as a means of communication will continue to be part and parcel of the life of most tribes in Southern Nigeria because proverbs are seen as a means of communication and expression of the spirit and soul of the people. This, perhaps, made Lauhakangas (2004) to underline the usefulness of proverbs in human society, thus:

If one focuses upon the use of proverbs and their functions in social interaction, one will find issues of selective memory, reconstruction of experiences, explaining and reasoning about the past, giving instructions and warnings for the future, amusing or encouraging each other, etc.

## **Conclusion**

This study has demonstrated that Southern Nigerian proverbs traverse many fields of human endeavour and are couched in different indigenous languages. The oral

artists/speakers or audiences/listeners, at different levels, make use of everyday occurrences and images located in their environments to emblematised and express the life that is peculiarly theirs. There is great excitement in analyzing, interpreting and visualizing the pictures that Southern Nigerian proverbs present; they are food for thought for the wary and intelligent. Southern Nigerians use proverbs in their everyday language, their public speaking as well as in their oral and written literature. The obvious familiar words in most of the proverbs mean much more than they seem on the surface. The deeper underlying level of meaning of the proverbs is filled with images and symbols that are aesthetically illuminating. Therefore, Southern Nigerian proverbs are philosophical, instructive and delightful and have the potentialities of enriching the indigenous knowledge base of the people. It is on the strength of the foregoing that the following recommendations are made:

- Grants should be made available by stakeholders, including cultural aficionados, governments and language research centres, for the collection and documentation of Southern Nigerian proverbs to boost the indigenous knowledge base of the people.
- The study of proverbs should be given a place in the curriculum of studies for schools and universities in Nigeria.
- Proverbs that unite the country and make the Niger-Delta calm should be emphasized.
- Much emphasis should be placed on the proverbs that teach tolerance, honesty, hard work and sense of self-worth.

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