
ANIMAL METAPHORS IN *IGUTA* PROVERBS OF THE ANAGUTA PEOPLE OF JOS, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines animal metaphors in Iguta proverbs. Proverbs as a valuable and integral aspect of oral literature are by their inherent features the doorway that provide the entrance into the customs, mores, traditions and the value system of the Anaguta people. Primarily, animal metaphors are proverbial expressions which have been predominantly employed to depict certain human behavioural peculiarities. Through careful observation of the physical behaviours and traits of these animals, the Anaguta people conceptualized these behaviours and traits into proverbial metaphoric expressions in order to address anti-social behaviours and to promote as well as re-enforce positive behaviours so as to maintain social order in the community. The Anaguta who are users of these proverbs harness animal behaviours and traits to creatively compare with corresponding human experiences. These proverbs are utilized to check against social excesses and negative actions and also deploy the same structure to enhance social order, creating balance in daily lives of the people. The data for this article comprise thirty-two proverbs associated with animals. The study discovers that both domestic and non-domestic animals such as birds, snakes, cocks, horses, hares, flies, hedgehogs and many more are exploited to advise, caution, ridicule, praise and warn against unwholesome attitudes and social vices. Also, the deployment of these goals in the proverbs is to clearly and directly draw people's attention towards positive behaviours and traits such as patience, hard work, honesty, tolerance, faithfulness, wisdom among others.

Keywords: *Anaguta, Animal Metaphors, Traits, Human Experiences, Proverbial Expressions.*

INTRODUCTION

The proverbs which are embedded in the culture of a people present not only the intangible aspects of their culture, values, norms and their entire philosophy on life but also their physical environment couched on their

flora and fauna. This paper examines some of the proverbs that represent the fauna of the Anaguta people of Jos North, Plateau State, North Central Nigeria. Through proverbs couched utilizing the animal life, aspects of the Anaguta people's belief system is captured in these proverbs. While Iguta is the spoken language, Anaguta refers to the ethnic group. The term for proverb in Iguta is *Ushizhah-Iguta* which means indirect speech. There is no single universally acceptable definition for the term proverb. Therefore, this paper will be anchored on three definitions that capture the essence of this paper. These scholars believe that the proverb should be defined based on its values, its functions and the purpose it plays in handing down communal wisdom from one generation to another. Silverman-Weinreich (1994) points out that "the key to a precise definition of a proverb as a genre apart lies in focusing on its function as a starting point. All other criteria lead to contradictions and exceptions (7). Also, Ogunjimi & Na'Allah opine that "Proverbs embrace the philosophical and socio-cultural value system of the people. They point to the individual, domestic and collective life patterns of the society from which they are derived" (Ogunjimi & Na'Allah, 2005: 84).

Furthermore, Obelkevich's (1994) definition is also in agreement with the functional role of the proverb. He views the proverb as a means of transmitting practical and moral wisdom in an artistic and witty manner. He emphasis the view in these words:

is not its internal layout but its external functions and that, ordinarily, is moral and: people use proverbs to tell others what to do in a given situation or what attitude to make towards it proverbs are then strategies for situations; but they are strategies with, formulating some part of a society's common sense, its values and way of doing things (213).

According to Fred B.O Akporoboro (2012), the content of proverbs may vary. These include without limit; human nature, human vices, characteristics of women social norms. Also, many are coined after careful examination of animal behaviours and other related objects of the natural world. Adopting William Bascom's functional theory, the role of Iguta animal proverb is examined in this study. The functional theory interprets oral literature based on its fundamental functions in the society. These functions are:

- i. Educating the community through communication of ideas, morals and values.

- ii. Maintaining communal conformity to accepted or standard behaviour
- iii. Validating the culture of the community.
- iv. Communal amusement.

Bascom summarised the four functions of folklore in the following words:

Folklore is an important mechanism for maintaining the stability of culture. It is used to include the customs and ethical standards in the young, and as an adult to reward him with praise when he conforms, to punish him, ridicule or criticize when he deviates, to provide him with rationalization when the institutions and conventions are challenged or questioned, to suggest that he be content with things as they are, and to provide him with compensatory escape from hardships, the inequalities, the injustices of everyday. Here, indeed lists the paradox of folklore, that while it plays a vital role in transmitting and maintaining the institutions of a culture and in forcing the individual to conform to them, at the same time, it provides socially approved outlets for repressions which these institutions impose upon him (Bascom, 1954:349).

These four functions aptly captured by Bascom provides the lens through which the use of animal proverbs will be contextually examined. The term animals in this paper include domestic, wild, birds and insects. Traditionally, the Anaguta people are not only hunters but also rearing domestic animals is a common practice. Through their careful observations of these animals and their peculiar behaviours, they were able to compare such behaviours and include them in their proverbs to express truths of their reality and also the future generations.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this paper were purposely selected from a cache of proverbs collected through interviews and observations. A total number of thirty-three proverbs were selected for this study.

Animals as Metaphors in Iguta Proverbs:

The employment of animal metaphor in Iguta proverbs is a common stylistic device. Since hunting and rearing of household animals is habitual among the Anaguta people; comparisons are made with both wild and domestic animals. These animal metaphors are utilised to convey general truths and reprimand social deviants and to promote socially acceptable

behaviour in order to enhance social order and create balance in the daily lives of the community.

1. *Uzohmoh wuzah mahnag kihnih undoh kah mah bukkah mah bal undoh kah-mah tahyi mah wuh*

The hare does not get angry with the person that shot it, but with the person that discovers its hole. This *Ushizhiih-Iguta* is employed in advising both young and old, male and female to be very careful who they trust. If an individual puts his/her confidence in a person that is not trustworthy, he/her is indirectly putting his/her life in danger. So, this *Ushizhiih-Iguta* advises individuals on the need to be very careful about what they disclose to associates and friends.

2. *Bakah uuh guh mohkoh buginih, Mohkoh bang ship nah ruhkpah buh gahnah mangalah.*

If you want to catch a fish, catch it by its head if not it will slip off. The need for proper planning and execution of projects/tasks in order to get desired results is advised. This proverb emphasizes the need for individuals to tackle their problems, execute projects by facing the situation head on. It goes to say that people should not shy away from being direct when the need arises. "Ship" in this proverb is an ideophone underscoring the need to hold on tightly or to be extra careful or diligent in order to achieve set goals.

3. *Gah na pih tsi-kpah nih ron wuh.*

Do not make hair with lice. This proverb stresses the need to clean up any dirt that stands in the way of progress. When hair is made with lice, it causes discomfort and it also embarrasses the person. Having lice in one's hair portrays the person to be dirty and others are repelled by that.

4. *Gah nah wun zah uh gur-nh uh ushim ruh-wuh*

The gathering of flies on a skin, they will not carry it, or make holes, when it is dried, they leave. This *Ushizhiih-Iguta* advises against engaging in a venture, activity or project that is not beneficial in anywhere to them or the community. The Anaguta believe that the presence of flies on a fresh skin adds no value to the skin and also that the flies do no harm to the skin. The gathering of flies on a skin is a metaphor for unproductivity. Therefore, this proverb is cited to rebuke unproductive venture and associations in the community.

5. *Gah na bihrah ihkuh na zhi av ribuh wuh.*

Do not plant guinea corn in the eye of a guinea fowl. This proverb underscores the need for individuals to keep their secrets secret. It discourages revealing secrets, ideas or dreams to people who are opposed to one's views. The image presented here is that if one plants guinea corn before the guinea fowl, it will eat the grain planted because it knows exactly where it was put. So, this *Ushizhah-Iguta* advises people to know their opponents and keep away anything that these opponents can use against them.

6. *Uh gahkih bah mah bumbuhzah vanah ah mah lahzah uh pal nah ruh mohroh wuh.*

A hawk not hatch child his without a mark on neck.

A hawk does not hatch its chicks, without a mark on its neck.

This proverb implies that a child is like the parent in appearance as well as character. This indicates that physical traits and character are transmitted from parents to their offspring. Thus, the hawk that is completely black with a white patch on its neck always hatches its younger which resembles him. This Anaguta proverb brings to mind the English proverb "An apple does not fall far from the tree".

7. *Uh goroh owh nah zhi kanso owh.*

Your cock is your horse.

The little that you have is equivalent to the much the others have.

Members of a community are differently blessed with material possessions. Some are very wealthy; some have average means of livelihood and some struggle to survive. This proverb refers these situations. It stresses that the little one has is the wealth he possesses. This proverb encourages individuals to be grateful with the little they have which is equivalent to the much that others have. The proverb is speaking about contentment. It discourages comparing oneself with others, but accepting what one has and seeing it as equivalent to the wealth of others. Being content with what one has is the message of this proverb. When one appreciates what he/she has; more value is added to that possession.

8. *Tsilem suh uh nyar-nyar.*

The tongue of the monitor lizard. The monitor lizard's tongue is split into two at the tip. This paints a picture of duplicity. When one is said to have the tongue of the monitor lizard, it means one speaks from the two sides of his/her mouth and it is an indictment on one's character. This implies

that such an individual is indecisive and is always changing or distorting the real issue. This *Ushizhig-Iguta* is cited to rebuke individuals who always distort information and prolong matters or decisions that need to be taken immediately. On the other hand, it is uttered to rebuke people who twist information. The image of the split tongue is used to create a vivid picture of duplicity.

9. *Ih goroh uh rep-poh bah toh-ruh-zoh mih rah wanka nuh sha wanka dih wuh.*

Two people cannot head a family or an office at the same time.

In any human setting, there is usually a head. The head stands for authority and leadership. This proverb stresses the point that there can only be one leader in a community or occupying an office. Therefore, the led are to respect their leaders and work with them to promote the values and the vision of the community or office. The proverb is cited to warn against unruly behaviour or disrespect for authority.

10. *Bah ah yihzih-zhig uh-nwiyah nah ruhgal ruh mah wuh.*

You cannot disrespect a snake in its hole.

When a person does not know his limits, he oversteps his boundary. Overstepping one's boundary shows disrespect. This proverb stresses the need to respect constituted authority as well as show respect for other. The proverb is cited to resolve a brewing or full-blown conflict, where upstarts who do not respect adults or authority are rebuked. A snake in its hole is a metaphor employed to depict the advantage or goodwill that an individual has or enjoys at home as against a stranger or an estranged family member who may suddenly want the support of his/her people.

11. *Bah uh gah-hah iyyen uh tsurah nah ruh kpah rahwuh, koh zuh bah uh yah hah iyyen dih pih uh chebiah nah ruh kpah roh wuh.*

You cannot stop birds from flying over your head but you can stop them from building their nests on your head.

The image of birds flying over a person's head represents other people's opinions on matters or issues that affect the person directly. This shows tolerance for others on one hand. On the other hand, not allowing these birds to build their nests on one's head means one has the final say in such matters and must be firm with others if not, the same people tolerated will take such tolerance for granted.

12. *Bushi nuh kwarah bang nah matong.*

A bee that attacks has honey.

The English say "The best defence is attack". This proverb is used to warn against those who may want to block the chances of a reconciliation. It is said that in every conflict, there are those who benefit. The proverb is cited to discourage such behaviour in conflict resolution.

13. *Tih tah shit uh uh-nwah kih nih uh kangsi nah ruh gel, undoh kah mah Kuhn-duh shoro dih mah suh-ruh.*

The co-habitation of a snake and a hedgehog in a hole, the person that is not comfortable should leave. The snake's skin is usually smooth, soft and easily penetrable and the bandicoot is a mouse-like animal with spikes on its skin. This duo portrays a picture of an unlikely co-habitation. The proverb stresses the difference in nature and the need for people to be tolerant and accommodate others in spite of individual differences. The proverb can be cited to older and younger people. The essence is peaceful co-existence.

14. *Ganah wuhzam ihshokorih uhtoh kohroh wuh mah burkuh mah dih nurah.*

Do not entertain me like the cock, it scatters so that it will get.

The entertainment of the cock refers to the characteristic way a cock scatters grains when the owner of the grain tries to stop it away from pecking at the grains. This portrays a picture of a person who will boldly confront others even when he/she is at fault. In order to smoothen this friction out, the proverb is cited to the offender.

15. *Uh goroh huh gyen kah-bah uh gommoh tok mak kah tsutsuh uh virah uh tuh-zuh uhmah.*

A cock that keeps digging into the refuse heap; will bring out the knife that will be used to slaughter it. The individual that will not let go but insists on getting even or getting his right; or wants to know everything may end up exposing his own weaknesses. The proverb is cited to rebuke one who refuses to let peace reign. Such a fellow will end up drawing the hatred of others to himself or get disaffection or jeopardize his fortune or chances. The image of the cock persisting in digging the refuse dump also creates the picture of a meddlesome individual who constantly find himself/herself in difficult or embarrassing situations.

16. *Bah ah kunsu iwih nuh dalang kusum wuh*

You can never block or cover mice in a pot.

The proverb is used to console or give hope to individuals by reminding them that all is not lost. Just as mice will always find a way of escape if one way is blocked; so also, people should be hopeful that whatever they have lost, there is hope of recovery.

17. *Mormoh mah azomoh.*

Rabbit's sleep.

The Anaguta people believe that the rabbit is a light sleeper. This enables them to be alert and sensitive to movement in its surrounding. Thus, it does not easily fall prey to other animals or hunters. This proverb is uttered to encourage the old and the young to be sensitive and alert to happenings around them. If one is alert and sensitive to situations around him/her, it is likely that he/she will succeed in life.

18. *Bah ah ruh zah vana nah tih toh Mandih nah reh-poh wuh.*

You cannot bite a young goat on the ear twice.

This shows learning from one's mistake (experience). The ability to learn from an earlier experience sets an individual on a higher level of understanding. This *Ushizhah-Iguta* shows that level of understanding. It stresses the need to learn from one's mistakes in order not to repeat it.

19. *Uh ngwah wul bah nah tohmoh yah nih kizih mah tuhnah.*

A snake rubs with saliva before it swallows.

The act of "rubbing with saliva" in this statement means that there are acceptable and proper ways of executing some tasks, even tasks as mundane as eating or swallowing. If the snake does not rub its prey with saliva, it will not be able to swallow it. This could lead to starvation or death. This *Ushizhah-Iguta* teaches the young ones the process of handling the matters of life. It points to the fact that there are guidelines or procedures in executing tasks or roles assigned to them. The proverb is cited to discourage people who may want to cut corners in order to succeed in life. The act of rubbing presents an imagery that portrays diligence.

20. *Baka angu mokuh uzarum, tuh churnah nih char.*

If you want to catch a monkey, there are many ways. The monkey is a shrewd animal and a difficult game to catch. But even at that, an individual who wants to catch a monkey knows that he has to set several traps not just one. This proverb is cited to urge the society to diversify for the desired

results or reward another will. It is to educate the community on the need to adopt different means in achieving a set goal.

21. *Minih muh mah biu vahtih muh dih marnah nah buginih*

Water is almost finish for the fish. This suggests a desperate situation in which one may even be at the point of death as indicative of fish without water.

22. *Uh mahjuh gwal mah kur-mah nah raih ah mah a gyam.*

The vulture has returned to its old residence.

Returning or going back paints the picture of instability. Elders in the society are expected to be stable and act as a rallying point for all but in the event that an elder does not maintain his/her integrity or goes back on his/her words, he/she becomes an object of ridicule. The act portends danger to the society because if the elders are not outstanding in character, what will they bequeath to the young generation? This proverb is cited to rebuke dishonesty and to encourage uprightness.

23. *Rai ruh woroh*

Heart of a dog.

A dog's heart.

A typical dog will always go back to its master no matter the form of maltreatment meted out to the dog by the master. This implies that for those individuals who always go back to those who insult, maltreat or abuse them, their hearts are just like that of a dog. These types of individuals have no shame in accepting scraps laced with insults. They easily forget such maltreatment and go back to receive another round of abuse. This proverb is cited on one hand to ridicule such individuals and on the other, to encourage such individuals to stand on their feet.

**24. *Undoh kah ah mah nuh binda nuh warah, mah huh yaha uh warah
ruhmuhmah ah mah uh lakar dih.***

Person that holding stick in hand, if he/she leave dog bite him/her, he/she is a fool. If a person holding a stick allows a dog to bite him, he is a fool. Being in possession of a stick is akin to a person having a form of weapon or protection against a possible attack. Not using whatever form of protective device by a person to protect himself or herself is basically foolishness. This saying is cited to ridicule people who possess protective gears yet become victims to what they would have easily defended themselves from. The stick in this proverb is metaphorically used to

represent an advantage that one may have in certain circumstances or a situation “allowing the dog to bite him or her” represents his/her inability to harness such advantage or advantages at hand to progress.

25. *Uh huh yahpah nuh nwah nah rih bituh, mah pkangaruh.*

If step on snake on tail, it will strike you.

If you step on a snake’s tail, it will bite you.

The proverb is a cautionary statement. The statement is said so that one would watch the steps or decisions one takes taken as one interacts daily with different people. Sometimes there are people known with certain unpleasant attitude and there are decision when taken that could come back and hurt one. This proverb is said to encourage people to be mindful of people or decisions that could hurt them.

26. *Uh yahrung mah shiriti mah luhpah tuh buhnah.*

Cricket if full it kicks its legs.

When the cricket is satisfied, it kicks it legs.

Image of a cricket kicking its legs having a satisfying meal paints a pick of ingratitude. This is used to scold individuals who are not appreciative of kindness shown to them. These people usually repay such benevolence with insolence. Therefore, this proverb is cited to ridicule such behaviour. The image of kicking one’s legs is a presentation of ingratitude shown to an individual, it also signifies haughtiness in the individual’s character.

27. *Nah gah nah yahah tuh mahjulgwah nahryah ih kyezeh em wuh.*

Do not allow vultures to devour my corpse.

When an elder cites this proverbs, he/she is cautioning his family especially the younger ones to be responsible men and women as that they can eventually afford to bury him/her properly. For if the members of his/her family out to be irresponsibly, they may likely not be able to give him/her a befitting burial. Vulture in this proverb is used metaphorically to represent irresponsibility. A vulture is a scavenger and being a scavenger paints a picture of aimlessness and irresponsibility

28. *Isanti mah minah nuh lam tukuruh uzharum mah shirih mah lupah mumpah*

Cowpea has yielded bountifully on the farm, the monkey is satisfied and kicks the sand. When a stranger benefit from the largess of the community, yet still looks down on the people of the community. Monkey is used metaphorically to buttress the nature its nature. The monkey reaps where

it did not sow. Not only that, it also destroys what is left on the farm. This statement is an indictment on people who benefit from generosity, yet pay back with ingratitude and possibly, betray their benefactor. It is cited to discourage this attitude. The monkey is used metaphorically in this proverb to represent people who are destructive, ungrateful and proud.

29. *Undoh wuhnah buh yehrang nah buh chuhnuh buh ujah*

He/she that kills the mosquito on the king's forehead.

A king is a custodian of the people. His office comes with a lot of authority and respect. Killing a mosquito on his forehead is suicidal and foolish. The statement is cited to ridicule someone who has undertaken a suicidal decision as well as rebuke others who may want to follow the fellow's path.

30. *Uh huh wah uh warah nah mar ruh mah yihuhruh mah ruh ma'u*

If you back a dog, it will turn and bite you.

The proverb advises people on the level and extent that they should sacrifice for others. It is a cautionary statement that shows the need for individuals to gauge who or to what extent they can assist, who they recommend, take responsibility for or express confidence in. Backing a dog is an unusual behaviour therefore it connotes sacrifice. A bite inflicts pains. In this context, it means betrayal. The act of backing a dog is a metaphor in this proverb to ridicule to extent to which some people will sacrifice despite the fact that they know the inherent danger in their decisions.

31. *Uh kautsi nah tuhuhnah tih nazih mah kuh shuhuhzuh.*

Although a horse has four legs it also misses a step.

This proverb is uttered to indicate the fact that as human beings not matter how meticulous an individual is, he/she is bound to make a mistake. It is human nature therefore, when individuals make mistakes, they should not dwell on it but rather learn from it and move on. It is also said to express people's humanness and to indict people who expect perfection at all times. Four legs in this proverb represents more therefore the ability to excel beyond expectation. In spite of that, it is evident that possessing four legs does not equal great achievement.

32. *Umandi nuh shwang uh yirah kyen-kyen.*

Goat with diarrhoea you see clear.

A goat with diarrhea is seen clearly.

Diarrhoea in this proverb is used metaphorically to indicate either guilt or problems which in most cases cannot be hidden for long by the individuals. This proverb is cited to establish such facts and for the guilty party to confess. For an individual in need of assistance, it is said in order to make the individual comfortable and at ease in charting a way out of the difficulty. Another interpretation is that of guilt being visible. In this case, it is uttered to make the guilty confess to whatever crime one has committed.

33. *Uh nwah wa yimah tubuna.*

A snake inside the legs.

A snake that is around your legs.

Most snakes are poisonous and dangerous to human beings. An individual who pretends to be a friend, but clearly has no real interest in that friend. The "snake" in this proverb is metaphorically used to refer to such an individual who is around you but is dangerous and will cause great damage to you. This proverb expresses the wish that this should not be the case therefore, it is cited to warn individuals who have such friends so as to save them from an eventual heartache. A snake is used metaphorically to show the evil nature or the deceptive nature of such individual who exhibit these characteristics.

FINDINGS

The findings of this paper on animal metaphors in *Iguta* proverbs has given insight into the social psychology and the worldview of the *Anaguta* people. These proverbs highlight the people's perception of human-animal relationships. The animals exemplified in these proverbs reflect the biodiversity and ecological consciousness of the *Anaguta* people. Furthermore, some of the animals cited in the proverbs are culturally symbolic to the people. These animals represent key traits, values and communal roles. The cock represents sacrifice and humility. Houseflies represent slothfulness and unproductivity. The tongue of the monitor lizard stands for duplicity and the vulture stands for potential disaster. This finding puts forward that specific animals convey distinctive meaning tied to the cultural beliefs and their environment.

In addition, these distinct proverbs serve didactic and moral roles providing guidance in the community. These proverbs are specifically couched to promote good morals on the one hand and to check unwholesome behaviour that will be detrimental to the community. Proverb 7 is utilized to buttress the need for individuals to be content in life. Proverb 10 stresses

the need to respect constituted authority and for one not to overstep one's boundary. Proverb 11 expresses the fact that there are diverse opinions and issues that may affect individuals and their right to accept or reject them. Proverb 13 underscores the need for acceptance of people from different backgrounds, promoting tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Proverb 19 underpins the need to follow duly laid down procedure in the executions of tasks or assignments. Overall, this paper has contributed in documenting and preserving his aspect of Anaguta orature. It has also contributed in appreciating metaphoric language utilization in indigenous communities in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

This paper clearly portrays the Anaguta people as highly observant of their fauna. And through this keen observation and close interaction with their physical environment, they couch some of their proverbs using animal behaviour to draw attention to the messages embedded in these proverbs. Crafting these proverbs in this manner reveals the depth of their knowledge not only on the traits of domestic and wildlife found in their environment but they also possess the creativity to employ these traits in the proverb to satire, ridicule, warn advise, caution, praise or console. Taking specific mode of behaviour of animals found in their domain, the Anaguta people convey certain messages in a witty and satirical manner. The utilisation of these proverbs assists in checkmating anti- social behaviour detrimental to the growth and peaceful existence of the community and on the other hand, promote virtues, morals and cultural practices that will ensure the progress of their community. The findings of this paper align with Bascom's functional theory in educating, entertaining, promoting core values thus validating the culture of the Anaguta people.

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