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A DAILY DOSE OF WISDOM: GLOBALIZATION AND SMS PROVERBS IN NIGERIA

Abstract: Globalization ensures connectedness, the sharing of knowledge across nations and across continents. This is facilitated mainly by growth in information technology which, to a large extent, is dominated by the developed world. The SMS text message is a product of technology as people can send written messages through their cell phones. The language of text messages is of necessity brief and full of abbreviations and symbols because the cell phone SMS facility has a limited capacity for containing written texts. In relation to artistic production the SMS facility is grossly inadequate. It is however appropriate for containing and relating gnomic narrative forms such as the proverb. This paper acknowledges the receipt of SMS proverbs on a daily basis from centre 5020 and centre 5810. The paper looks at one year's collection of such proverbs, analyses its distribution, and examines its form, particularly the pseudo-proverbs that are presented alongside the proverbs and comments on some of the major themes embedded in them. The paper concludes that modern technology is a career of culture and that a developing world like Nigeria needs to be an active participant in the global world lest it be culturally swallowed by the technologically advanced countries.

Keywords: African, cellphone, globalization, ICT (Information and Communication Technology), Nigerian, orature, proverb, SMS (Short Message Service), technology

Introduction

Since time immemorial people all over the world have used the proverb in order to spice their conversations, to instruct young people, and to strengthen their arguments. The proverb then is situated in discourse and is a mark of eloquence and wisdom. As society developed over the ages there was criss-crossing between the cultural values of one group and another. Through social interactions people exchanged tales, songs, riddles, jokes and proverbs to the extent that today there are synonymous tales and proverbs across cultures.

The exchange of ideas and values has taken many forms including the forcible, the brutal such as slavery where people found themselves singing their songs in foreign lands and gradually having their cultures submerged in the cultures of the new land. Colonization was yet another form of disproportionate exchange with the colonized at the receiving end of alien ways of life. In the field of orature, Europeans tended to emphasize the importance of the written over the oral. Ime Ikiddeh states that “the colonial conditioning...is...a concomitant of the tyranny which the written word has exercised for centuries on a section of the world” (1987: 133). This denigration of African orature was largely fostered by the Evolutionary School which saw orature items as mere residues of ancient, decadent culture that are of no relevance to modern, civilized society. Africans were to feed on the diet of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Arnold, Dickens and other Western writers. Indeed, Ngugi Wa Thiong’O laments the severance and dismembering of African memory and argues that cultural colonialism was an act that was backed by and was essential to political and economic colonialism. The memory of the colonized subject was cut off from the subject’s collective body as the colonialists “dismembered the colonized from memory, turning their heads upside down and burying all the memories they carried” (2009: 4). Today, however, some of these lost memories are being resurrected and being seen as dynamic ingredients of modern culture. Both Western and African scholars have engaged in more rigorous study of African orature which they see as valuable. Such study includes the interface of the oral and the written, of the ancient and the modern, particularly in relation to a technologically advanced and globalizing world.

Globalization

Globalization suggests the integration of people, the coming together of nations in social, economic and to some extent, political terms. It infers the socialization of the world, a harmony of ideas and views all of which are engineered by the new technology of the internet, the computer and the cell phone, among others. In this sense globalization is synonymous to multiculturalism and is consequently seen as enhancing the cultural knowledge of the people. Michael Maduagwu quotes Felix Wilfred as saying:

Present-day globalization is but a continuation of a long tradition of over five hundred years of imperialism. Globalization is only the latest phase and expression of this uninterrupted history of domination and subjugation of peoples, nations and cultures through the conquistadors and colonizers. It is a tradition of political, economic and cultural domination of some nations over others. (1999: 4)

Globalization is here seen as a process in which local, third world cultures are being integrated into the mainstream of Western culture. It is a course of action through which the identities of people in the third/developing world are gradually being obliterated.

Tunde Adegbola also looks beyond the façade of globalization as integrative, as benefiting everyone, as advancing the growth of democracy in the world and as a process that intensifies and accelerates social exchanges and activities. He points out that: "History teaches us that powerful individuals, powerful communities and powerful nations will always express a quest to control less powerful individuals, communities and nations" (2006: 4). In their strivings to modernize and to embrace global aspects of life, developing countries need to be very conscious of the forms of exchange. For example, we know that many social and economic boundaries of African countries have been broken and Nigeria in particular keeps calling for foreign investors to come as if their coming is going to erase the social injustice and inequality that pervades the society as a result of many years of bad governance. The critical question is: how does the developing world manage globalization? Who sets the rule of the game and who benefits from it?

Joseph Stiglitz believes that globalization has its positive values because it has the capacity to enrich everyone, adding that:

[W]e all share a single planet. We are a global community, and like all global communities have to follow some rules so that we can live together. These rules must be – and must be seen to be – fair and just, must pay due attention to the poor as well as the powerful, must reflect a basic sense of decency and social justice. (2002: xv)

The question of fairness and justice should of course be the concern of the developing countries that are largely on the disadvan-

taged side since they lack the technological power that is at the heart of globalization.

In relation to orature, globalization has both positive and negative tendencies. Globalization and its technological component are supposed to ensure a world of shared information, knowledge and ideas but as Maduagwu argues: “The communication dimension of globalization has the potential of eroding national cultures and values and replacing them with the cultural values of more technologically and economically advanced countries” (1999: 2). In a consumerist nation like Nigeria where almost everything is imported, the flow of information is lopsided and the onus of ensuring *fairness and social justice* in the matter rests on us. It depends on how we manage the ICT at our disposal – the internet and the cell-phone, for example.

SMS Proverbs: An Analysis

The technological revolution that ushered in globalization has affected orature by taking it to another dimension. As Liz Gunner points out: “In an era of globalization, orality has not disappeared but has often adapted itself in its many different forms to become a vehicle for the expression of the fears and hopes of new generations of Africans” (2007: 70). Technological advancement has continued the interface of the oral and the written. Nigerian writers like Achebe, Soyinka, Rotimi, Alkali, Osundare and others, have incorporated aspects of orature in their literary works (Mieder 1994, Mieder and Bryan 1996). Proverbs receive the greatest attention in this respect and are often put in the context of day to day conversations. This has ensured the continuity of the oral in modern times and has also helped in recording the wisdom of the people for posterity. Many Nigerian scholars have also collected, analyzed and published the proverbs of their people while others have posted such works on the internet. This has further opened the flow of information to the global world and has consequently served as a means of contributing to the general pool of human culture. The wisdom of our people, their philosophy and world view, is seen to be worthy of continuity.

In addition to books and the internet the cell phone is now being equally used as a carrier of orature. The cell phone is of course a mini-internet with various possibilities for the flow of information, knowledge and ideas. It has the capacity for oral exchange

and for the written mode. In terms of text messages, however, it is limited in the sense that the number of words it can carry per message is limited. Lengthy messages or articles cannot be conveyed through it. The proverb, because of its short, epigrammatic nature, is a fitting habitat of this world as are other forms of sayings and short quotations.

One can subscribe on the cell phone and have access to particular types of information just as I get a proverb a day from centre 5020 and centre 5180 of Airtel. From 1st July, 2012 to 30th June, 2013, I have received and saved 313 proverbs. This means that about 52 proverbs have not been received in the period and this might be due to occasional battery failures of my cell phone and lack of service from Airtel. The failure of technology in the third world can be due to many factors and can have great consequences on the social and economic lives of the people, including research work by intellectuals.

Out of the 313 proverbs received, 227 seven are from Africa as the table below indicates:

Country	Number of Proverbs
Burkina Faso	1
Burundi	1
Congo	6
Gambia	2
Ghana	24
Kenya	6
Liberia	2
Libya	1
Malawi	2
Mali	3
Nigeria	147
Rwanda	1
Senegal	1
Sierra Leone	1
South Africa	4
Sudan	2
Swahili	1
Tanzania	9
Uganda	3
Zimbabwe	1

Out of the 227, Nigeria has 147 proverbs representing 65%. This is followed by Ghana with 24 proverbs representing about 1%. But for Tanzania with 9 proverbs and Kenya and Congo with 6 proverbs each, the rest of the African countries have very insignificant contributions. Many African countries such as Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Niger, Chad, Guinea Bissau, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Zambia, Angola and Namibia are not represented at all.

The table below highlights the distribution of Nigerian proverbs across language groups in the period under study.

Language Group	Number of Proverbs
Nigeria Unspecified	22
Efik	1
Fulani	14
Igbo	50
Yoruba	60

Yoruba proverbs top the list with about 41% followed by Igbo with 34%. Fulani has 14 proverbs representing about 10% while Efik has just 1 proverb representing about less than 1%. Hence out of the over 250 language groups in Nigeria only two, Yoruba and Igbo, and to some extent, Fulani are fairly represented. Some of the major language groups such as Hausa, Kanuri, Igala, Tiv, Ibibio, Urhobo, and others have no representation at all, not to talk of the so-called minority language groups that have been suffering neglect of representation even in written forms or usage in the media.

The 86 non-African proverbs have the following distribution:

Country	Number of Proverbs
China	71
Japan	8
English	2
Jewish	2
Others unspecified	3

China tops the list with 82% seconded by Japan with 9%. English and Jewish proverbs each represent 2%. Hence many other countries of the world such as India, Russia, France, Germany, United

States of America, Latin American countries, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and others, do not feature at all. Nobody expects the representation of all countries but it is intriguing to know why China features much and why Japan is the second. Certainly it is not because they have more proverbs than other nations. Could it be that their proverbs are more readily accessible to the programmers of the SMS proverbs? We note also that though the services are provided mainly for Nigerian consumers, Chinese proverbs are higher than that of any single Nigerian language group. Yoruba, which is the highest in Nigeria, has only sixty proverbs to Chinese seventy-one. The number of Japanese proverbs is also very close to that of the Fulani and certainly four times higher than that of the Efik. Again, why the prominence of the Chinese and Japanese proverbs in an information system that is consumed by Nigerians?

Perhaps the answer rests in the control of technology and therefore in how information flow is designed. It is very apparent in Nigeria that the Chinese are everywhere in the economy – from the construction of railroads to the sale of many consumer goods, especially electronics which include our handsets and modems, many of which are made by them. Tunde Adegbola makes an apt observation on the paradoxical nature of the growth of information and communication technology (ICT) in Nigeria:

Today, modern ICT has become the means of generally processing, transporting and presenting information. The age-old technology of speech, the traditional textual technology of print, and relatively more recent electrical technologies of radio and TV are all validly ICTs that have in their various ways promoted the portability of human thought. In recent times however modern ICTs have brought about unprecedented increase in the pace and intensity of human communication and by so doing facilitated globalization.

ICT can either spell doom for our languages and the cultures they bear, knocking the death knell or they can provide new avenues and media to invigorate them by opening up new windows of orality on one hand and redefining literacy on the other. (2006: 8)

The problem really is that it is not having the technology that matters but having full control over it so that it will be tailored to the needs of our society.

The SMS text proverbs are, like all written forms of orature materials, deficient in some of the devices used in proverbial utterances. The written form is fixed and the extra-linguistic features noticeable in the oral form, such as facial expressions, do not feature at all. The SMS proverbs are generally presented out of contexts while the oral forms are usually situated in the contexts of larger discourses where they serve as succinct and profound words of caution, advice, consolation or education. In the text messages gathered, however, an attempt is made to provide some form of conversational platform. This is noticeable at the beginning of all SM texts where some statements are made before citing the proverbs. In addition some traditional markers that announce the proverbial utterances are also used. Some of the various introductory phrases used include: *As the elders say*, *as they say*, *because they say*, *Yoruba say*, *as this Chinese proverb says*, *as the Igbo say*, *that is why the elders say*, *as this Ashanti proverb says*, *just as*, *so that*, *therefore* and others. Below are some of the proverbs and their preambles.

1. There are things that cannot be rushed if they are to be properly done. *As the elders say*, "A forest is not made in a season." (Fulani. 21/06/13)
2. When you overdo things, they lose their value *just like*, "Adding legs when painting a snake." (Chinese. 30/03/13)
3. Search around you for the cause of the problem *because*, "The enemy lives in the backyard. The one who inflicts injury lives in the home." (Yoruba. 06/08/12)
4. Make sure the action you take matches the situation *because this proverb says*: "The bush fowl of a village cries in the dialect of the village." (Igbo. 16/12/12)
5. You cannot know today what will happen tomorrow *for they say*, "Tomorrow makes known to us what tomorrow will bring." (Tanzania. 28/10/12)

We note that in each of the above, a statement is first made which attempts to provide a conversational framework that is immediate-

ly followed by a signal word or phrase – those indicated in italics – then followed by the proverb. As in real discourse situations, the proverbs seem to be aimed at supporting or strengthening the speaker's statement.

In most cases the ideas in the initial statements agree with those in the proverbs but sometimes the initial statements do not seem to agree with the spirit of the proverb or they may provide just one alternative view to the meaning of the proverb. Context is crucial to providing the meaning of a proverb. Wolfgang Mieder notes that:

Proverbs in actual use are verbal strategies for dealing with social situations. As speech acts they must be viewed as part of the entire communicative performance. This is true to proverbs employed in oral speech but also in their frequent appearance in literary works, the mass media, advertising, popular songs, cartoons, comic strips, etc. Only the use and function of proverbs determine their specific meaning. (1998: viii-ix)

Some of the meanings ascribed to the proverbs below depend on the context of usage, and, consequently some of the meanings provided may not be quite adequate.

1. Grow up in wisdom and insight. Respect the opinions of elders because, "Cows are born with ears; later they grow horns." (Sudan. 19/10/12)

The metaphorical proverb here suggests various stages of growth which may have to do with wisdom and diverse types of skills. Ears may refer to natural endowment at birth while horns, which are necessary for the survival strategies of cows, develop with age. The proverb thus could be used in cautioning a person not to be in a hurry to judge or underrate a young person who later in life may prove dynamic and heroic. In such a case the issue of respecting the opinions of elders does not arise. The idea of respect for elders in connection to the Sudanese proverb perhaps came with the application of the English idiom, "growing horns," which implies becoming stubborn. It is a transfer of meaning that seems to be out of place with the tenor of the proverb.

2. Inexperienced people won't know something is wrong until it is too late because, "After the child has eaten his fill, he remembers the soup is bad." (Igbo. 07/06/13)

The point of the proverb is hardly the issue of inexperience. While eating, the child must have definitely noticed the quality of the soup from the taste but hunger must have forced him/her to eat the bad soup. Satisfaction makes him/her realize later on that what he has eaten is neither delicious nor fresh. It is a belated thought but it is equally an experience that the child might repeat given a similar situation of hunger. Poverty, destitution and need compel people into uncomfortable and weird behaviors. It is hence not necessarily a question of choice or naïveté or immaturity but rather the issue of availability. A corollary proverb from the Tangle people of Gombe State is, "People do not choose *the thing* with which to push the night." *The thing* refers to food and this is usually uttered in a period of starvation when any kind of food is welcome.

3. Be grateful for anything done for you because, "he who purchases the food eats, and cares not what the season is; his yams always flourish like trees." (Yoruba. 27/03/13)

Here the introductory statement is not fully in agreement with the proverb because the emphasis of the proverb is not on gratefulness but rather on differences in sources of livelihood. A person who does not farm cares less about the seasons but a farmer always looks for clouds in the sky once it is the farming season. Yams are always available in the market, whatever the season may be. Thus the proverb implies that different people have different needs, depending on their social situations. What may be a problem to one person may not be to others. In a world of varied desires and varied social states there is bound to be disparity of expectations, longings and hope.

4. Don't be afraid to begin something, the support you need will come because, "Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it." (Igbo. 15/12/12)

The keyword in the proverb is *something else* which stands beside *something* hence suggesting difference. The conversational context provided in the opening statement does not really fit in as the *something else* of the proverb does not in reality indicate assis-

tance, support or help but rather, the existence of a contrary. The proverb evinces the spirit of contraries or dialectics, the idea that life is complex and that just as death exists besides life, good also exists besides evil. Every body has a shadow and every shadow has a body. There is duality in every being. The proverb thus recognizes the paradoxical nature of life and equally the need for people to tolerate differences of tribe, race, sex, ideas/opinions, and human choices. With reference to the Nigerian state, for example, the proverb captures the spirit of the world of conflicting values, beliefs and experiences. Biodun Jeyifo quotes a contextual usage of the utterance by Achebe thus:

It is in the very nature of creativity, in its prodigious complexity and richness, that it will accommodate paradoxes and ambiguities. But this, it seems, will always elude and pose a problem for the uncreative, little mind. The literal mind is the one-track mind, the mind that cannot comprehend that where one thing stands another will stand beside it. (2010: 9)

5. Don't boast when you are around people you don't know because, "The blacksmith in one village becomes a blacksmith's apprentice in another." (Ghana. 25/07/12)

The introductory statement and the proverb agree but the proverb can be interpreted in other ways depending on the context. The proverb shows that nobody is all-knowing and that the degree of our skills, its evaluation, depends on where we are. Whether or not we boast about our expertise we should know that someone in another clime may do better than us in our chosen area of specialization. The proverb hence acknowledges the limitations of the skills of individuals. One can be the best expert only in relation to one's locality.

We note therefore that while many of the preambles provided to the SMS proverbs are appropriate, some are misleading as they do not agree with the apparent meanings of the proverbs. Even when the meanings agree, the preambles often present only one side of the story without recognizing the polythematic and poly-functional nature of proverbs. The meaning of a proverb, we stress again, resides in the context of social interaction. As Eric Aasland states: "Proverbs... are defined by their contexts. Their meanings

are defined by being situated” (2009: 2). The feeble attempt by the SMS to situate the proverbs is worthy in that tries to replicate the proverbial state in face-to-face encounters. We need, however, to be careful in matching the proverbs to the words in the preambles.

In terms of order of presentation, there is no clear cut regular pattern of issuance of the SMS proverbs. In some weeks Nigerian or African proverbs predominate but sometimes it is a mixture of both African and non-African proverbs. For example from 1st July, 2012 to 09/10/12 African proverbs predominate while we have a series of Igbo proverbs from 07/11/12 to 10/12/12. Japanese proverbs are presented from 12/12/12 to 24/12/12 and we witness a profusion of Chinese proverbs from 27/12/12 to 05/02/13 – a period of more than a month. Most of the proverbs are, however, mixed up in terms of the language groups that they represent.

The proverbs are also not grouped according to themes, functions or structure. Various themes are scattered across the days or months. Some of the various themes discernible from the proverbs include that of education, hard work and perseverance, giving and kindness, listening to the advice of elders, sharing and solidarity, violence, honesty, selfishness and hope. We will examine a few of the themes.

Five of the proverbs relate to elders out of which one is Chinese and the other four are African. This definitely shows the high regard that people have for elders in traditional African society. The proverbs are:

1. One must take into consideration whatever an elder says because, “If you refuse the advice of an elder you will walk until sunset.” (African. 10/02/13)
2. Do not neglect the advice/words of an elder; they are precious gifts just like “A pearl from an old oyster.” (Chinese. 12/01/13)
3. Never reject the advice of elders, for it is said, “The arrow the child used to kill the vulture, it was an adult who carved it.” (Igbo. 20/11/12)
4. Always pay heed to the words of those who are in important position for they say, “From the words of an elder is derived a bone.” (Rwanda. 28/09/12)

5. Old people have a lot of knowledge to pass on to young ones, as this Mandinka proverb says, “Every time an old man dies, it is as if a library has burnt down.” (Mali. 21/03/13)

All the proverbs above recognize elders as repositories of wisdom, as custodians of vital words that are needed for communal guidance. The first proverb stresses the dire consequences that one is likely to face if one rejects an elder’s advice while the second and fourth proverbs point to the precious nature of the words of elders. To listen to the words of elders is like possessing a valuable jewel or having a juicy bone to chew. The third proverb implies that skills and expertise are to be learnt from elders. The proverbs therefore indicate the need for people to learn from elders or from people in senior positions of work who have acquired experience over the years in chosen fields of specialization or in life in general. As the store-house of knowledge elders are to be respected and listened to. The sixth proverb hinges on this significance of elders as bearers of wisdom. It is equally a saying that is often quoted to remind African scholars of orature of the urgent necessity of collecting and documenting orature items before the sources are lost.

About twelve proverbs focus on the issue of sharing and of the need for unity and collective action. People are advised to help their kith and kin. All the proverbs are from Africa and a few of them are:

1. Be willing to share whatever you have to spare because, “Everyone should be concerned about his/her welfare without neglecting that of kin.” (Igbo. 14/12/12)
2. You should help others when you alone have the power to do so for they say, “A tree on a hill in the savannah is a meeting place for birds.” (Congolese. 26/09/12)
3. Try to help those in need and you will be helped when you are in need because, “One hand washes the other” [this proverb might be appropriated from the English]. (Zulu. 26/07/12)
4. A collective power from everybody is the root of human development because, “Many hands make light work” [this proverb might be appropriated from the English]. (Tanzania. 28/08/12)

5. You should cooperate with people around you because, “one hand does not catch a buffalo.” (Ghana. 28/08/12)

6. There is strength in numbers, working together towards a common goal. As the Yoruba say, “It is with fingers bundled together that one strikes one’s breast.” (Yoruba. 12/07/12)

The proverbs stress the significance of solidarity with those around one and highlight the virtues of collectivism. Just as one should help those in need one should also realize that there are tasks that demand many hands. Collaboration is therefore very vital. This is true of life in the traditional past as it is in modern, technological society.

Closely related to the above theme are eight proverbs that focus attention on the virtues of giving and kindness. Again they are all from Africa some of which are:

1. A generous person will always be honoured wherever he goes as they say, “The big spender is never disgraced in the presence of the miser.” (Yoruba. 09/04/13)

2. Anyone who is kind will always have friends around him as this Ashanti proverb says, “My house is like a spongy coconut, anyone who likes comes to visit.” (Ashanti. 06/04/13)

3. Always be willing to help a fellow man, as is said, “One who has palm fruits should give it to the bush rat because the bush rat does not climb.” (Igbo. 06/04/13)

Kindness is therefore seen as a virtue and the proverbs imply that to be kind is to be blessed. Africans generally appreciate the virtues of giving and of being kind.

On violence, there are four proverbs, one Chinese and three Africans. They are:

1. If you threat someone badly, the person can react violently because, “If men are cruel to the cat, the domestic cat becomes a wild animal.” (African. 13/03/13)

2. You must know when to apply aggressive measures to a tough situation. That is why the elders say, “Fight fire with fire” [this proverb might be appropriated from the English]. (Chinese. 20/02/13)

3. When you start trouble you must be ready to face the consequences for, “If you provoke a rattlesnake, you must be prepared to be bitten by it.” (Kenya. 07/02/13)

4. Trouble makers cause trouble for themselves too because, “Smoke does not affect honey bees alone; honey-gatherers are also affected.” (Liberia. 03/10/12)

The proverbs warn on the dangers of the use of violence in society and caution that those who use violence suffer the consequences. This is because, by implication, violence often leads to counter-violence. A cycle of violence may therefore emerge and the final results could be cataclysmic. The implication is that dialogue or the use of other subtle means of persuasion is preferable to the use of force. This is a message that both local and international terrorists need to learn. The ideas of the proverbs are being realized in Nigeria today as the Federal Government has woken to the reality that only through the use of soldiers can it be able to combat the deadly menace of the Boko Haramists in the North-Eastern sub-region. Violence is being met with violence. This also agrees with the Chinese proverb that sees the necessity of violence in quelling violence. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Frantz Fanon argues at length that revolutionary violence embarked upon by the oppressed is necessary for combating the violence of the oppressor.

There are sixteen proverbs that deal with education, discourse and knowledge out of which only four are African, the rest are Chinese. The following are examples:

1. A fast horse needs only a lash of the whip, just as, “A quick student needs only one word of wisdom” (Chinese. 05/02/13)

2. A teacher exposes you to knowledge but the way you take advantage of it depends on you. “Teachers open the door; you enter by yourself. (Chinese. 04/02/13)

3. You can always learn anything by observing and imitating because, “When the mother goat chews her cud, her children learn.” (Igbo. 23/11/12)

4. You can truly benefit from teaching others. “To teach students for three years is to teach yourself.” (Chinese. 29/01/13)

5. One must learn something well before one can teach it to others therefore, “First be a student, then be a teacher.” (Chinese. 30/01/13)

6. Actions speak louder than words because, “Teaching by example is better than teaching by preaching.” (Chinese. 31/01/13)

The proverbs above and many others centre on the acquisition of knowledge which is seen to be beneficial to both the student and the teacher. Education is presented as a necessary requirement for a successful profession and learners are advised to be alert and dedicated to their studies. Though mostly Chinese in origin, the proverbs are relevant to the basic needs of Nigeria for, at the heart of technological advancement and globalization is knowledge which comes with education.

There are also twelve proverbs dealing with work or the need for perseverance. Nigeria has two, China five and other African countries four. The proverbs urge people to work hard, to be patient and persevering and warn against the dangers of laziness. People should also not feel discouraged by difficulties since hardship is often a precursor of wisdom. Some of the proverbs are:

1. Take great pride in performing your duties properly, “To do one’s duty is to eat the prized fruit of honour.” (Fulani. 24/04/13)

2. One often gains wisdom after experiencing a misfortune. As the Chinese proverb says, “Suffer a fall into the pit, gain in your wit.” (Chinese. 03/02/13)

3. If you want to succeed at anything, you must be willing to do your best because they say, “A feeble effort will not fulfill the self.” (Dogon from Mali. 28/03/13)

4. Nothing good can be done if you do not put in hard work and determination because they say, “You cannot kill game by looking at it.” (African. 15/02/13)

5. People should be aware that enjoyment is a result of hard work because, “The one who eats has tasted the hardship of labour.” (Congolese. 18/09/12)

There is therefore a diversity of themes in the SMS text proverbs and though there is an unbalanced presentation in terms of nationality of the proverbs we note that the selected proverbs are

rich, valuable and appropriate to the needs of contemporary Nigerians. The Chinese proverbs, like other African proverbs, are useful to the aesthetic and pedagogical needs of contemporary Nigerians. The issues of kindness, solidarity, violence, hard work and education are of universal relevance as they are perennial matters that human beings all over the ages and in all parts of the world will continue to face. A proverb may be local in composition and usage but its impact and meaning may be borderless. The universalistic import of proverbs has been noted by D'Israeli who states that many proverbs appear common to various nations due to similarity of human nature: "Similar situations and similar objects have unquestionably made men think and act and express themselves alike. All nations are parallels of each other" (1823 [2006]:14). Again, Bernth Lindfors acknowledges that "works of art communicate in such a universal human idiom that they are capable of transcending their particular time and place and speaking to all mankind" (2002: 2). A proverb may also be ancient in origin but still function in modern contexts. As Wolfgang Mieder argues:

Modern paremiology is an absolute open-ended phenomenon with many new challenges lying ahead. There is no doubt that proverbs, those old gems of generationally-tested wisdom, help us in our everyday life and communication to cope with the complexities of the modern human condition. The traditional proverbs and their value system give us some basic structure, and if their worldview does not fit a particular situation, they are quickly changed into revealing and liberating anti-proverbs. (1997: 416)

In fact most of the preliminary statements that accompany the SMS proverbs are proverbial as well rather than hypothetical discourse situations.

The basic limitation of SMS text proverbs is its essential lack of context. There is no identifiable speaker such as we might find in a literary text like plays or novels. There is consequently no specific audience neither is there a social interactional situation that obtains in oral day-to-day conversations. The senders and the recipients of the proverbs are both anonymous and the proverbs are therefore presented out of context.

Despite the above deficiency, however, we note that the cell phone, like the computer, is a cultural agent, a technological phenomenon that has reached all the cities and villages of the world. The question is who is responsible for uploading some of the items we download from them. How active are we in taking advantage of the technological revolution to document and circulate our cultural artifacts such as proverbs? Mercy Nwegbu et al. note the transformative power of globalization thus:

The advent of ICT has forced libraries and librarians to operate with such concepts and phrases like information society, digitization, computer or information explosion, globalization, cyberspace and information superhighway. These technologies have forced the developed world to operate in a context of change which automatically affects the ways our cultural heritage are documented, preserved and practiced. It has brought the culture, folklore and heritage of western countries onto our doorsteps, reading tables, desktop or laptop with just a press of the computer or a click of mouse. Where is Nigerian cultural heritage in the world cultural arena? (2011: 9-10)

Nigeria, and indeed Africa, needs to make its presence felt in an increasingly multicultural world where every society presents its wares.

Conclusion

The study of the proverb in contemporary African society goes beyond primary orality and its use in literary texts. With technological development, the internet and cell phones are now the habitat of proverbs. This paper acknowledges the receipt of SMS text proverbs and notes the disparity in the range of distribution across countries/continents and across Nigerian language groups. We note that cultural products such as proverbs are globalized through technology and that the content of the internet or cell phones is largely determined by the manufacturers and controllers of the internet or cell phones. Whatever the politics of the distribution may be, we equally point out the deficiencies inherent in an oral form finding itself in a written form that lacks the context of performance. The SMS version attempts to use some of the traditional markers associated with proverbs in daily discourse.

There are varieties of themes which we note are worthy of universal application and therefore pertinent to the aesthetic world of modern Nigeria. In spite of the numerous weaknesses of globalization to Nigerians – and there are many lapses – SMS text proverbs have proved to be veritable sources of cross-culturalism. They equally afford scholars raw materials for comparative study of the content and form of proverbs. While feasting on the cultural diet of other nations, however, it is our duty to Nigeria and to humanity to make significant contributions to the global world. In this way we will be able to re-assert our human dignity and reveal our specific identity as a nation that is culturally rich and diverse. As Abdul-Rasheed Na’Allah points out: “The terminology ‘World as a Global Village’, doesn’t just emphasize the shrunken world, but also affords every member ethnicity of the world’s cultures the opportunity to maintain and project their voices and identities as part of a multicultural world” (2011: xiv).

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