

AFRICAN PROVERBS SERIES 3



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VOLUME 3

Lugbara Wisdom

ALBERT DALFOVO

SERIES EDITOR, JOHN S. MBITI

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Cover illustration

The band at the top of the cover is used on all works in the African Proverbs Series. The design composed of four circles is the symbol of wisdom, knowledge and prudence in the *adinka* symbol system of the Akan people of Ghana. In Akan it is called *Ntesie (Mate Masie)* "I have heard and I have kept it."

In memory of my brother

JOACHIM DALFOVO

(1926 - 1992)

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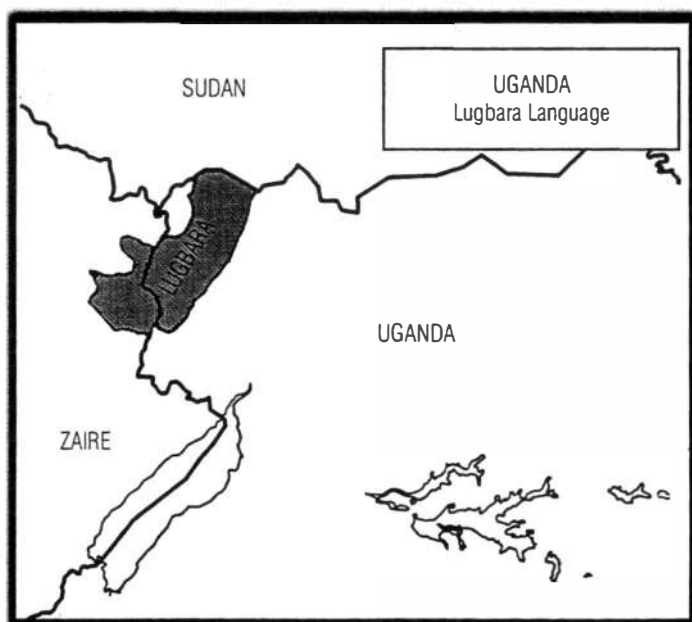
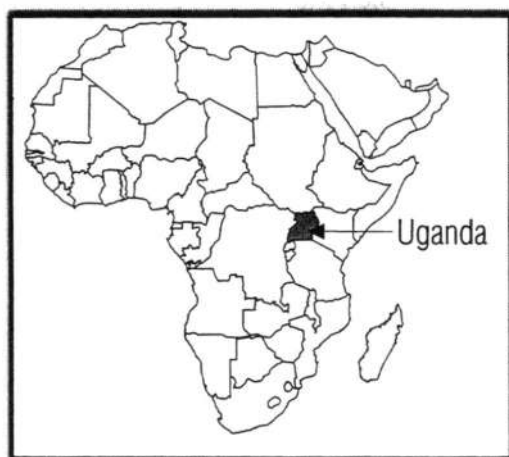
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Albert Dalfovo
Makerere University
Kampala, Uganda
July 1995

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CHILDREN CONFER GLORY ON A HOME

Introduction to the African Proverbs Series

by John S. Mbiti, Series Editor

In recognition and appreciation of women in society, an Ethiopian proverb affirms, *Where a woman is not, the feast is not tasty*. Another proverb warns everyone, *You can trust neither the sky in the rainy season nor babies' bottoms!* From observing nature, people in South Africa reflect succinctly in a proverb which says, *The strength of the crocodile is the water*. A Kenyan proverb asserts, *The head is best known by the owner*.

Africa is rich in a variety of ways, including natural resources, manpower and culture. Within the framework of culture there is a wide range of heritage including religion, music, dance, art, architecture and oral literature. And in the realm of oral literature we find the immensely rich world of stories, fables, recitations, songs, poetry and proverbs. It is intended in this series of publications to focus attention on the proverbs. They adorn and beautify any language the way that, as the Nigerian proverb tells, *Children confer glory on a home*. This is particularly the case in the oral culture of African peoples, who have cultivated an extremely complicated use of language, audio and oral communication.

Proverbs are deeply rooted in this culture and almost everyone who grows up in a village becomes a living carrier of proverbs. They are interwoven in local languages. At the same time, they constitute a sub-language of their own. This language of proverbs, this way of speaking by employing proverbs, is known by many people who use it with various skills more or else throughout their lives. For example, in the area of Ukambani, Kenya, where I was born and grew up, I know people who hardly utter a few dozen sentences without including a proverb or citing a proverbial phrase. For them, the language of proverbs is a whole way of seeing the world, a way of speaking with other people, a way of feeling the atmosphere in the society in which they live. Similarly some preachers in the Church spice their sermons with proverbs, almost as

if they could not think and speak outside of the world of proverbs. This is admirable.

In this African Proverbs Project and series of books, we wish to enter and explore this fascinating world of proverbs—to listen to their sounds, to capture their flashes, to reflect on their values and message, to open our minds to their almost timeless dimension.

The language of proverbs has a rich vocabulary of words, phrases, combination of words, symbols, pictures, allusions, associations, and comparisons. It is drawn from the whole of society, so that every part of society is captured in the proverbs. It is fascinating, if not imperative, to study, explore and analyse this language, this unique world of proverbs, to critique it and even “exorcise” its unwanted spirits. How has it evolved? How does one learn it? How does it adjust to changing social and historical circumstances?

Symbols belong to proverbs. Indeed proverbs are themselves symbols of communication packed into short sentences or even anecdotes and stories, sometimes carved on wood, stone or other material, or even sung or danced or acted. They are drawn from and refer to all activities of society, natural objects and phenomena. We hear, for example, in a proverb from Kenya, *One finger cannot kill a louse*. (Two fingers are needed to do that.) A similar proverb from Ethiopia says, *One finger does not catch a fly*. On the surface these are simple proverbial statements drawn out of living experiences in which people kill body lice by using fingers or finger nails to squeeze them (until they burst), or two fingers to catch flies. However, the two proverbs are employed to refer to more serious matters of solidarity, working together, joining hands to accomplish tasks or objectives which cannot be done by one person. They point to unity, mutuality, togetherness and helpfulness. Here we see how seemingly trivial terms are used symbolically to handle deeper issues of people's character and working relationships.

Many proverbs act as catalysts of knowledge, wisdom, philosophy, ethics and morals. They provoke further reflection and call for

deeper thinking. For example, when a South African proverb says, *Marriage roasts (hardens)*, one is challenged to look at marriage seriously, to reflect on it and see how far this proverbial statement is true, false, or both. Similarly, the following proverb from Tanzania calls among other things, for patience and calmness, especially in times of family, social or national strain and provocation: *The water boils but never forgets its home, i.e. that it can get cool again*. Reconciliation is possible even where relations have been damaged or fights have ensued. After being hot, tempers cool down again to a normal state--given patience, calmness and time.

But proverbs also call attention to dangers in human relations. People are not perfect. For that reason, for example, they say in Tanzania, *Your neighbour is a snake, he/she kills you without your knowledge*. This can be true while at the same time neighbours can be friendly and helpful to one another. Yet, enmity can spring up where it is not expected (e.g. in the neighbourhood) and this can be dangerously threatening or destructive. Proverbs serve not only to cement relations but also to caution people about their behaviour, their character, their relations with others and about the imperfect world in which we live.

Some proverbs appeal more to emotions than just reflection. But then that is a major part of the human constitution--to feel, to laugh, to cry, to be happy, angry or sad, to love and even to hate, to appreciate, to admire, to feel jealous, accepted or rejected, to fear and despair. The proverb is very much represented in these areas of human emotions. For example, in Uganda an easily frightened person might be ridiculed (with the intention of encouraging her/him to be brave) with the following proverb: *The coward fled from his/her shadow!* In the same country, great anger is thought to be damaging to the person concerned, and for that reason an appropriate proverb warns, *Anger killed a mother cow*. That hypocrisy and arrogance are not appreciated comes out in a South African proverb which says, *Horns which are put on do not stick properly*. A further application of the same proverb refers to scolding another person unjustly, without proper grounds. This last proverb is an

example of how some proverbs carry different applicabilities, some are paradoxical or even "contradictory". Likewise, one situation may provoke the application of several proverbs, which shows a degree of flexibility in proverbs and their uses.

Proverbs that deal with ethical and moral issues reach not only to the head but also to the conscience. They stir the conscience, they give assurance, they help in the exercise of deciding between good and evil, justice and injustice, right and wrong. Many are highly pregnant with religious content accumulated over the generations. They address themselves to all parts of society--from the family to the nation, from friends to foes, from rulers sitting on golden stools to beggars squirting by the gutters. They praise and critique; they encourage and ridicule; they set boundaries and draw people together. All activities of society are addressed through proverbs, including working in the fields, herding in the plains, hunting and fishing, cooking and looking after children, medical and health matters, travelling and building homes, childbirth and burials of the dead. Some deal with male-female relations, parents-children relations, kinship and neighbourliness. There are those that relate to daily activities like eating, drinking, working, resting and talking. Still others address themselves to unfortunate happenings like crime, war, calamity, catastrophe, suffering and death. Some concern themselves with taboos and secrets, some are used as slogans, hidden language, as rebukes, threats, warnings, songs and promises.

There are proverbs that deal with bodily parts from the hairs on the head to the nails on the toes. Qualities such as hard work, kindness, love, bravery, strength, unity, trust, justice, fairness, friendship and generosity are articulated and encouraged through proverbs. Likewise there are proverbs that discourage and disapprove of unwelcome tendencies in personal and communal life such as laziness, thieving, backbiting, injustice, untrustworthiness, greed, slander, lying and murder, arrogance, selfishness and incest. Proverbs have a measure of power and authority, they are culturally loaded. They can also be misused, in private and in public, to

threaten, deceive and brainwash people. They continue to be created, just as some of them lose their applicability, according to the changing conditions of life. We find many similarities with, and echoes from, proverbs of other societies, peoples and cultures of the world. African proverbs are part of a world-wide phenomenon.

Proverbs are a rich source of African Religion and philosophy. They contain and point to a deep spirituality, as well as theological and philosophical insights. In this case they form a bridge between traditional African religiosity and biblical teaching. This concern is one of the main objectives of the African Proverbs Project, and is taken up in more detail in individual volumes on *Proverbs for Preaching and Teaching Series*, edited by the Reverend Joshua Kudadjie of the University of Ghana, Legon.

In short, proverbs present an opportunity for interdisciplinary exploration and discussion in various fields, including religion and philosophy, sociology and anthropology, linguistics and literature, history, geography, economics, medicine and communication. A comparative study of the proverbs themselves has barely been undertaken. There is a growing literature on African proverbs, numbering at least one thousand items in 1995, of which Professor Wolfgang Mieder's *African Proverb Scholarship* (Colorado Springs, USA, 1994) with 279 items (books, dissertations and articles) is the most comprehensive annotated bibliography to date. Other bibliographical material appears in *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont, U.S.A. One purpose of the Project is to assemble an annotated bibliography of proverb collections (paremiography), as well as copies of the publications themselves, which would be deposited in a few academic centres in Africa and abroad. Some of the proverbs in the various publications are put on CD-ROM for computer users. This is, however, a small portion of the over two million African proverbs, whose complete collection in written and electronic form will clearly take many decades, if not centuries, since new ones also continue to be created. Under the Project a few other collections are being made of some proverbs that have not yet

been recorded and may be in *danger* of being lost, if the languages represented die or living conditions change considerably.

A big THANK YOU is due to The Pew Charitable Trusts of Philadelphia in America for financing the African Proverbs Project; and to the Project's coordinator, the Reverend Dr. Stan Nussbaum of Colorado Springs, USA. Meetings and symposia have been held in Accra, Maputo, Nairobi and Pretoria, to discuss various aspects of this Project which have been very informative, inspiring and supportive. My further gratitude goes to the editors of these individual volumes, who collected the proverbs, translated them and put them together to produce the respective volumes in the series. Each volume has its own individuality in content, style and size, but they all belong together in contributing to African (and international) paremiography and paremiology.

We conclude this Introduction with a Ghanaian proverb which reminds us, *Wisdom is like a baobab tree; a single man's hand cannot embrace it*. That can appropriately be applied to the vast treasure of African proverbs: one person cannot collect them all, cannot analyse them all, cannot put them all in their context and cannot use them all. For this reason, we have employed several hands in this Project. They come from different countries and regions of Africa, and from beyond. They are men and women whose arms, hands and fingers are adorned with golden bracelets and diamond rings of--you guess it--African proverbs. But in these books, those hands stretch out towards others--to touch, to embrace, to warm, to give support along the path that leads to the Source of life. Another Ghanaian proverb assures us, *God arranges things so that a leper's sandal breaks under the camel-foot-shrub, which provides the rope to mend it*. We hope that these proverbs, these riches of African heritage, can become pieces of one such rope that mend someone's broken sandals along the way...

John S. Mbiti, Series Editor
CH 3400 Burgdorf, Switzerland
21 October 1995

LUGBARA WISDOM

Introduction to Volume 3

1. THE LUGBARA

1.1 The People

The Lugbara people live astride the Nile-Zaire divide, partly in north-west Uganda and partly in north-east Zaire. They numbered about one million in 1995, and they are usually classified under the Moru-Madi group of Eastern Sudanic peoples, speaking a monosyllabic tonal language. Lugbara traditional society is described as acephalous with a permanent re-arrangement of various more or less independent groups according to the change of situations. Today Lugbara are fast absorbing the past social organization into more complex patterns. The people however retain a general vision of reality that derives from their cultural heritage of the past.

The geography of the land is attractive. Climatic conditions are pleasant, with no temperature extremes. The land gently undulates, with a few high hills and three conspicuous massives, the Liru, the Eti and the Luku. Although today game is not abundant, up to the beginning of this century it was. The land is partly covered with forests and savannah, and partly taken up by grassy plains, excellent for stock rearing, which consists of cattle, goats, sheep and chickens. Rainfall lasts almost throughout the year, usually with a brief dry spell in December and January. Rivers and stream valleys are abundant. There is a rich variety of crop cultivation and one finds, for example, millet, sorghum, beans, peas, simsim, cassava and potatoes.

Lugbara history has its roots in the migratory movement of peoples inhabiting the central African quadrangle roughly situated between Lakes Turkana (Kenya), Tana (Ethiopia), Chad (Chad) and Albert (Uganda) about a millennium ago. The ancestors of the Lugbara immigrated from Southern Sudan in different groups, varying in size and following different routes. They arrived in their present

homeland between 1600 and 1650. Lugbara consider themselves descendants of the hero-ancestors Jaki, Dribidu or Banyale. Subsequent to those early immigrations, there followed internal movements that brought about the settlement of the people as they are today. Around the middle of the 19th century, the Lugbara began experiencing their first contacts with people from distant societies. In 1860 Lugbaraland became part of Egypt's Equatorial Province. In 1894 it passed under the Belgian domination as part of Congo. In 1909, Eastern Lugbaraland was transferred to Sudan and in 1914 to Uganda. In the space of 30 to 40 years, this territory passed through more vicissitudes and experienced more interest on the part of foreign powers than any other part of Central Africa.¹ From 1914, Eastern Lugbaraland became part of British colonial Uganda and independent in 1962, while Western Lugbaraland became part of Belgian colonial Congo and independent in 1960.

1.2 The Organization

Traditionally the Lugbara are a segmentary society, namely an acephalous society with a permanent re-arrangement of various more or less independent groups. Political authority is not generally held on an individual basis as in centralized societies. Public relations are thus maintained by groups rather than single persons. The consequent alliances among these groups and their competitive attitudes are liable to change quite often. It is thus extremely difficult to map the group-structure of this society in fixed patterns. Situations are so complex and varying that it is only by living within them that one finds one's bearing among the various groups.

The total structure of this society is of the type called "segmentary" by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, and when the segments of the structure are lineages we speak of a "segmentary lineage system".² The Lugbara have this latter system, namely a seg-

¹ C.H. Stigand, *Equatoria, The Lado Enclave*, London, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968 (First ed. 1923), pp. 4, 5.

² J. Middleton and D. Tait, (eds.), *Tribes without Rulers*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1958, p.7.

mentary lineage system. Usually groups grow and split; technically speaking, they segment to form more groups or segments. In these segments one considers two aspects. The first one, which may be called "horizontal", consists of a cluster of families or groups living in the land either together or scattered, making up sectional segments, or mere sections, and comprising only those who are physically living. The second aspect which may be called "vertical", consists of groups considered to be genealogically linked with certain ancestors, making up lineage segments or lineages, and including both living and dead. Sectionally the smallest group is that made up of a family cluster, which may consist of a single elementary family or of a group of compound families. Besides consanguineal relations, this family cluster may include affinally related persons and other persons who have attached themselves to this cluster for one reason or another. It is a corporate group on a more or less defined territory, over which it has autonomous power. It has a head in the person of an elder with authority over the cluster, supported by mystical means, and thus extending directly over "blood" relations only, and indirectly over the other members of the cluster. This family cluster is the most ancient and better defined unit in Lugbara society, and it is also referred to as its nuclear group.

1.3 The Culture

Lugbara culture is rich in internal diversities in the sense that its cultural cohesion allows for various internal characteristics and linguistic differences. In this regard, one needs to bear in mind the general texture common to all the population vis-à-vis the particular characteristics proper to specific groups. This general affinity within specific diversities is echoed in the history, organization, language and other aspects of the people's individual and social life. One finds it reflected in proverbs as well.

Introducing the grammar of this language, Crazzolaro writes: "The grammar as a whole in its general features, details or rules, is common to all parts of the country. The vocabulary however differs

considerably from one part to another."³ These linguistic differences reflect a cultural variety that allows the dynamics of oral literature to develop particular characteristics resulting, among the rest, in a variety of forms of the same proverb. This cultural pattern offers a rich opportunity for research on proverbial wisdom. At the same time, it also poses a challenge with regard, for instance, to the discernment of the popularity of proverbs (i.e. on how widely accepted a proverb should be), of their linguistic structure (i.e. the difference of words vis-à-vis the fixity of expression in the same proverb) and of their meaning (i.e. different interpretations of the same proverb).

2. THE COLLECTION OF PROVERBS

2.1 The Approach

I began this collection of Lugbara proverbs in 1965. The motivations behind it was dual. It was first of all suggested by the condition of change affecting Lugbara society. Social change requested the preservation of cultural memory of which oral literature was a substantial part. "Two thousand years ago Aristotle wrote of proverbs as fragments of ancient wisdom preserved amid wrack and ruin for their brevity and aptness."⁴ The preservation of proverbs was particularly arduous due to their brevity. At the same time, their loss was particularly disturbing due to their wisdom.

A second and more specific reason for the collection derived from a research on Lugbara ethics I was undertaking at the time. In that research, I inevitably came across proverbs as enshrining and transmitting ethical values.

The methodological approach adopted in collecting the proverbs began by listing the proverbs I came across in my conversations with the people. I then submitted the list to the people to hear

³ J. P. Crazzolara, *A Study of the Logbara (Madi) Language*, London, Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1960, p.viii.

⁴ E. Winstedt, *Malay Proverbs*, London, John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1950, p. 2.

whether they knew other similar expressions. I kept renewing such lists by dropping from them the proverbs that had been thoroughly explained and by adding on the latest I had come across. In this way I could obtain new proverbs and clarify those I had collected. In 1984 I published a provisional collection of the proverbs to use as means of stimulating more information on the same. Five years later a permanent publication of them could be finally made.⁵

2.2 The Presentation

In compiling the final list of proverbs, the cultural differences within Lugbaraland emerge, echoed in the variety of linguistic expressions used for the same proverb. Sometimes these linguistic differences affect, in some way, the meaning, as, for instance, in proverb 184 having **aooko** (anger), **aza** (stupidity) or **omoko** (grudge), and in proverb 18 having **ewa** (elephant), **ndri** (goat) or **odru** (buffalo). This collection of proverbs reports such major differences in footnotes to the proverbs concerned. Other minor variations that are generally dialectal, and concern simply the material structure of the word, are not recorded here. They are many and they would render this collection unnecessarily complex.

The English translation which I give to the proverbs tries to be as close as possible to the original style in its condensed and forceful form. Obviously, only the Lugbara original version can communicate the genuine pithiness of its proverbs. Several Lugbara words, for instance, have no corresponding English term that can exhaust the original Lugbara meanings. Thus, a word like **elifiri** may mean "begging, looking, waiting for something, covetousness, greed, moving eagerly around"; the verb **li** means "to cut, to judge, to lead into troubles, to get right". In such cases, their translation requires choosing a single English word which implies adopting a specific understanding, interpretation, and application of a proverb.

⁵ A.T. Dalfovo, *Lugbara Proverbs*, Rome, Comboni Missionaries, 1990. The copyright of this publication is by General Direction MCCJ. Grateful acknowledgement to the same is here made for permission to use it in preparing this publication on *Lugbara Wisdom*.

The explanations recorded here do not exhaust all possible meanings of a proverb. The nature of proverbs rarely allows for such complete explanations. A proverb is characterized by its being general and allusive; it represents past experiences synthesized in a few words, in view of enlightening similar situations in the future. The ensuing proverbial style is general in order to be as inclusive as possible, and it is also allusive so as to be correct in all possible situations. The result of this is that a proverb has an ample shade of meanings and more than one application. Besides this variety of meanings and applications, the context in which a proverb is uttered adds a specific significance that increases the difficulty of being exhaustive in explaining its meaning. Thus the explanations in this collection limit themselves to the fundamental understanding of a proverb that may help the reader to learn other possible meanings and applications of the same.

3. THE NATURE OF PROVERBS

There is no definition of a proverb that has gained general acceptance. Paremiologists tend to propose a description resembling the one from the *Oxford English Dictionary* that characterizes a proverb as "a short pithy saying in common and recognized use ... often metaphorical ... held to express some truth ascertained by experience ...".⁶ A proverb could thus be described as a short, pithy, fixed, popular, experiential, prescriptive (educative) and allegorical sentence. This description reveals the three stages in the life of a proverb, namely its origin in experience, its existence in allegorical language and its fulfilment in a prescriptive purpose. I moved into my research on Lugbara proverbs with this tentative vision at the back of my mind, and I discovered that, adapting it with flexibility, it could guide the research I had undertaken.

3.1 The Origin

A Lugbara proverb is experiential in the sense that it originates directly or indirectly from experience. This experiential origin is

⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Proverb".

echoed in the topics that interest the proverbs and that span the entire life of a person. The experiential aspect is widely recognized as the fertile soil in which proverbs sink their roots. In the words of Cervants, they are "short sentences drawn from long experience"⁷ or, as the Abbé de Saint-Pierre writes, "proverbs are the echoes of experience".⁸ John Russell says that "a proverb is the mind of one and the experience of all".⁹ The experiential origin of proverbs is so described by Nyembezi: "The proverbs are a collection of the experiences of people, experiences some of which have been learned the hard way. Those experiences are stored in this special manner, and from generation to generation they are passed on, ever fresh and ever true."¹⁰

The credibility of the proverbial message derives from the same experiential background from which the proverbs originate. People accept a proverb and its message because they recognize their own experiences and their own life in it. Hence the authoritativeness of a proverb sinks its roots in the same experience that originates it. The message conveyed by a proverb is fundamentally as obvious and common as the experience it comes from.

Hence, proverbs do not belong to the category of rigid principles in the sense that they do not stand as unquestionable and objective theoretical statements that shape existence; proverbs are rather conclusions of an experience. They are not a deduction from an abstract principle but rather an induction from concrete experience. As a result of this situational or practical characteristic, generally speaking no controversy arises over a proverbial assertion as it could do over a theoretical enunciation.

⁷ E. Winstedt, op. cit., p. 1.

⁸ M. Abdelkaf, *One Hundred Arabic Proverbs from Libya*, London, Vernan & Cates Ltd., (n.d), p. vi.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ C.L.S. Nyembezi, *Zulu Proverbs*, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1954, p. xii.

The experiential origin of proverbs characterizes also their application. This implies that proverbs are situational; they aim at a situation rather than at generalizations.

The impression that proverbs at times convey a contradictory message needs also to be referred to their experiential origin and to their situational application. As experience embodies contradictory situations, proverbs are bound to reflect them in their content. This however is not to say that the same proverb both asserts and denies the same statement in the same context. Proverbial contradictions are in fact merely apparent as they refer to different contexts for which they have different meanings.

3.2 The Language

The language of a proverb is generally short, pithy, fixed and allegorical.

It is short, namely proverbial utterances are reduced to the minimum needed in language to communicate a message. This terseness of style is not only a linguistic and grammatical device resulting in an easily memorable and greatly effective sentence; the shortness of a proverb is itself the result of wisdom. In fact wisdom is traditionally associated with few words, properly chosen and timely spoken; a proverb is a typical expression of such wisdom.

Pithiness is also a characteristic of proverbs and it is the one that draws them near poetry. Proverbs are classified as literature; and poetry is the literary form to which proverbs come closest. Both poetry and proverbs are frugal in words and rich in meaning; both are most effective in conveying a meaning that goes beyond the simple material expression of the words.

Proverbs are structured in a fixed form. Lugbara proverbs are not linguistically fixed in a strict sense, as allowance must be made for variations resulting mostly from the nature of oral literature, the situational context of proverbs, and the diversity of Lugbara culture.

Proverbs belong to the field of oral literature transmitted from the past into the future in the changing stream of tradition. Oral tradition is unhampered by the static references to written codification. Its linguistic expressions, including the fixed form of proverbs, follow the laws of social change.

The situational context in which proverbs are concretely used tends to demand some linguistic adaptations. Some proverbs allow for this adaptability and thus for some variations in their linguistic fixity.

Dialectal diversities within the Lugbara language and culture, as already explained, cause certain alterations in the fixed structure of proverbs. People in different areas may express the same proverb in different forms that affect some words and also the entire sentence.

In the light of these exceptions, the fixity of a proverb needs to be sought in its main structure. The meaning of a proverb is the same all over Lugbaraland; but the same proverb may have linguistic variants. However, if listeners can easily continue and complete a proverb in their own variant when it has been enunciated to them, then such proverb may be considered sufficiently fixed as its variant is fixed within a given area.

This same consideration applies to the fact that proverbs are popular, namely, they are known and used by a considerable part of the population. Here, too, due allowance must be granted to Lugbara cultural and linguistic differentiations in establishing the degree of popularity required of a proverb.

The allegorical nature of proverbs implies that it conveys its message by describing a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance. A proverb develops a meaning that differs from the literal meaning of the words used.

The allegorical characteristic of Lugbara proverbs emerges from the term used to designate them, which is *e'yo obeza* or also,

more rarely, **bibila**.¹¹ **E'yo** is a very expressive term referring to "word", "speech", "reason", "issue", and similar meanings. **Obeza** derives from the verb **obe** that the suffix **za** adjectives. **Obe** means "to mix", "to twist", The combined expression **e'yo obeza** literally means "mixed words", "twisted speech" or "indirect talk". One who speaks in a way one is not understood, may be told, **E'yo mini yoleri ni e'yo obezaro**, "What you are saying is mysterious." An elder explained: "One talks **e'yo obeza** when, for instance, one backbites, but in a way in which one does not seem to be doing it. One uses words that do not reveal what one is really saying." **E'yo obeza** is an expression proper of "upper" Lugbara, although it has now spread to the rest of Lugbaraland. The corresponding expression in "lower" Lugbara is **bibila**, which also means "indirect talk".¹² Here too, the statement **Mi bibila to** would mean, "Your words are very mysterious."

The preference for the allegorical aspect of proverbs emerged also when compiling my collection of Lugbara proverbs. Several persons supplied mere allegorical utterances as if they were proverbs. Asked why these idioms were considered proverbs, the answer was that "they were not direct". The allegory was taken as the essential component of proverbs. Also riddles were sometimes supplied as proverbs, because of their allegorical language.

Some proverbs are literal, namely presenting their message in a simple and direct manner. However, by its very nature, a proverb contains a meaning vaster than its material expression entails. Hence, even the literal form of a proverb is not to be considered as such in a strict sense; also literal proverbs have some implied references to a meaning that goes beyond its material expression.

¹¹ **E'yo obeza** is used in the Lugbara translation of the Bible in which the Book of Proverbs is called **E'yo O'beza** (*Biblia*, Kampala, The Bible Society in East Africa, 1968). This use has consolidated the adoption of the term by all Lugbara.

¹² The specifications "upper" and "lower" refer to geographical positions approximately corresponding to the south for the "upper" and to north for the "lower" Lugbara.

3.3 The Purpose

Proverbs fulfil themselves in their prescriptive purpose and, more generally, in their educational function.

Proverbs are prescriptive in the sense that they are not merely stating a fact or reporting an experience, but they are conveying a message. Observed experience (i.e. the origin) mediated through an appropriate linguistic structure (i.e. the medium) results in the message of a proverb. In proverbs, experience has become courage, foresight, prudence, patience, moderation, truthfulness, cooperation, and other approved traits to be inculcated and practised; likewise experience has become shortsightedness, restlessness, falsehood, selfishness, laziness, greed, pride, and other negative traits to be avoided. Hence, a proverb is not merely descriptive; it is prescriptive; namely, it does not merely state a fact or report an experience, but it conveys a message in a prescriptive way. Some proverbs appear to be merely descriptive in nature; but people tend to see a prescriptive message behind such description; this relates to what has been said about the allegorical nature of proverbs, namely that also literary proverbs are allusive in nature, this allusion being to their message.

Some people consider the prescriptive aspect of proverbs to be identical with a moral message; others however specify that the message may be amoral and also immoral at times. In the case of Lugbara proverbs, it is difficult to illustrate these positions with specific examples as, on this point, proverbs are open to different interpretations. One could however recall that a proverb neither asserts a theoretical principle nor denies it; it merely reflects an experience which it prescribes or allows or tolerates on some practical grounds without involving itself in an assessment of principles.

Proverbs are educative in several ways, the main one being that they carry prescriptive values. Education is said to fulfil itself in the transmission of values whether they be made to bear on the individual or on society as primary beneficiaries. When the individual is the main beneficiary then values go to fulfil his/her poten-

tialities. When instead society is the main beneficiary, then values go to preserve society. In actual fact, the educational exercise comprises both individual fulfilment and social preservation.

Proverbs educate also at the level of the mind, especially in the use of language in expressing ideas. Proverbs represent a very effective way of communicating in which the language is put to its best use; as proverbs are short, well worded and popular, they are quick, efficient linguistic instruments to present an idea in a favourable context; a proverb is a model of a precise and concise use of language. It is brief but to the point, it is terse but very meaningful. This model stimulates an accurate selection of words for an effective manifestation of ideas. Besides this use of language, a proverb makes abundant use of metaphors. This allegorical language inspires an appropriate use of images in order to produce an interesting and attractive way of speaking enriching the imagination and facilitating communications. This same allegorical style develops the mind in the use of abstract ideas.

4. THE USE OF PROVERBS

Generally speaking proverbs have no specific moments demanding their use. They are not set apart as befitting certain exclusive occasions. They co-extend with the general use of the language, entering in all conversations and involving all occasions. Proverbs represent one of the most effective ways of human communications. In fact, as proverbs are short, well worded and popular, they are quick, efficient linguistic instruments to present an idea in a favourable context.

People dedicate a great part of their conversations to moral evaluations and judgements. A purpose widely recognized as typical of proverbs is the moral/ethical one. Proverbs are considered among the most appropriate means to encourage and to deter, to appraise and to condemn.

Proverbs are used often as unquestionable, popular and objective terms of reference in arguments and conduct. As already said,

proverbs are not principles shaping experience but rather conclusions of an experience; as such, they carry in them the contradictory manifestations of the same experience. Nevertheless proverbs represent established acquisitions, fixed experiential conclusions shared by all people.

In the enduring tensions and conflicts in society, proverbs are an established, accepted and efficacious manner to keep these tensions and conflicts in check and to solve them as peacefully as possible. In fact, by using a proverb, offensive and provocative points are conveyed in a general and impersonal manner. In this way, the weak and lower members in society can speak up against the strong and higher ones, in an atmosphere of acceptance and respect, avoiding direct and open confrontation. This is particularly relevant in consideration of the acephalous character of Lugbara society.

5. THE WISDOM IN PROVERBS

Even though Lugbara proverbs can be used on any occasion and by any person, their actual use is not always easy. Proverbs originate from wisdom and they need to be applied with wisdom. Perceiving the full expressiveness of a proverb within its proper context so as to be able to use the appropriate proverb at the appropriate time needs a wise combination of knowledge and experience that not everybody can afford. One can sometimes encounter people who utter a proverb, and then regret having done so improperly, as in the case of a young man who used a proverb that only the credibility of an elder would have justified in that particular instance; or in another case when a proverb had the effect of a sarcastic remark instead of a soothing piece of wisdom. Proverbs encourage knowledge and experience that contribute wisdom.

The experience that is at the origin of proverbs is the common one met by people in ordinary life; this experience becomes a proverb through the process of observation (wisdom). Proverbs echo this act of observing as they echo the fact of experience itself; they encourage to observe events so as to grasp what is genuine in them.

Experience alone does not produce a proverb unless observation condenses and fixes such experience in the linguistic form that is typical of proverbs. A proverb is not just experience, but observed experience. As a matter of fact, only some aspects of human experience become proverbs through the observation of some people. Lugbara proverbs do not only prove experience to be at their origin; they also elaborate on the need to observe and to ponder over such experience.

Observation of experience results in a linguistic form that is typical of proverbs; but this form is only the material structure that is meant to contain a meaning, a message, a value. The material structure is but instrumental to such value. Hence, what observation draws from experience is a lasting element described as a value or a non-value, depending on which of the two a proverb emphasizes. In fact, value and non-value may be considered as the front and back of the same medal; which of these two is primary in a given proverb depends on its linguistic form and the context in which it is used.

Although theoretically everybody can use proverbs, in practice only those with grey hair or wisdom can do so properly. A young person is neither grey haired nor widely experienced; time will make him so. An elder instead has the experience from which proverbs derive and therefore he has the capability and the credibility to handle proverbs, and to educate through them.

I THE FAMILY

The acephalous structure of Lugbara traditional society makes the family cluster its better defined and most significant unit. The cohesion of the entire society pivots on it and every aspect of authority refers to it. The ideal family consists of many members; it is "extended", rather than "nuclear". Marriage perpetuates it and the bride-wealth sanctions the contractual basis of marriage. Bride-wealth consists mainly of cattle which the family of the bridegroom gives to the family of the bride. Lack of bride-wealth implies impossibility to marry and consequently a life of loneliness. Proverbs envisage family values, like a father's courage, a mother's love and fraternal solidarity, but they also echo shortcomings like a co-wife's jealousy, a child's stubbornness and parents' misbehaviour. It is the challenging paradox of social life in its nuclear group and that proverbs help to manage.

1 Parents

1 *Aku ni nji agupi si.*

A home carries weight because of the husband.

Expl: People tend to show little consideration for a home without a husband. His presence, on the other hand, guarantees respect for everybody in it.

2 *Aku ma ediafe agupi ni.*

The man is the central pole of the house.

Expl: Traditional houses have a central pole supporting the roof and keeping the building in place.¹ The man has the same task in the family.

¹ The wall (*abi*) of a traditional house is built by planting into the ground a circular row of strong poles (*aju*, *ndu'bua*). To them, reeds or small branches are fastened for supporting the plaster. On this wall, the wooden frame of the cone-shaped roof of the house is fixed. A pole (*ediafe*, *agofe*, *apife*) is erected in the centre of the house to help sustain the roof and keep the building structure together. Finally, the roof is thatched and the wall is plastered. The slope of the roof makes a verandah (*abindu*) that runs around the house. It is the place where people, including visitors, usually gather and sit.

3 Agupi ni dra oli a, oku ni dra jo a.

A man dies in the open, a woman indoors.

Expl: A woman escapes from danger into the house while a man faces it at the risk of his life. The husband is the defender of the home.

4 Agupi ni dra malo ndu.

Man dies under the mahogany tree.

Expl: In case of danger, women and children flee while man stands his ground. The hardness of the mahogany (*Khaya anthotheca*) emphasizes the stamina and courage that the husband needs to have in defending his family.²

5 Andre iri yo.

There are no two mothers.

Expl: Nobody can substitute the tenderness and dedication of one's mother. The real mother is one.

6 Ayia ma ndu yo.

There is no other mother.

Expl: One cannot expect the loving attitude of one's mother in any other person. One's mother is unique.



Proverb 7: Satisfied

² Instead of malo tree, a variant of this proverb has maaza tree (*Bauhinia thonningii*), the fibre of which, fastened around the head, confers valour and victory.

7 Okporovu ma apitre 'ba ni.

The satisfaction of a pregnant woman is a child.

Expl: A woman reaches personal happiness and psychological fulfilment in motherhood to which she thus naturally tends.

8 Mi o'buka ba nju mani.

Your o'buka strap left its marks on me.

Expl: A mother reminds her child of the hardships she endured in rearing him/her. The o'buka is an apparatus for carrying the baby on one's back.³

9 Mi ru ta ti; mi ru ama pa ko ra.

I tolerated you in vain; you will clasp my foot.

Expl: This proverb is said by a parent who has been very patient with an unruly child, but to no avail. One day, however, such child will need to apologize and mend his/her ways.

10 Ayia nduri ozuku fi ni.

A different mother is the intestine of the porcupine.

Expl: The intestine of a porcupine is bitter. Likewise a stepmother: she tends to be harsh with the family children who are not her offspring.

11 A'i-azi ni a'ya 'ipi.

A co-wife is the owner of jealousy.

Expl: The jealousy among co-wives is so visible and frequent that it may be regarded as their characteristic.

12 A'i-azi pi edre okaru.

The tongue of co-wives is bitter.

Expl: Co-wives tend to use sour, offensive words among themselves.

13 A'i-azi ti mbili ru.

The lips of co-wives are pointed.

Expl: The language of co-wives, particularly among themselves, is quite often caustic.

14 A'i-azi ti ci, agalio ti ci dri ku.

³ The o'buka is a leather or cloth strap-apparatus for carrying babies on one's back; it is generally cut from a hide or cloth, rectangular in shape and with long strips at each of its corners.

Co-wives are talkative, weaver-birds are not talkative.

Expl: The incessant twittering of weaver-birds vanishes when compared to the talking of co-wives.

15 Awizi ma agoi yo.

A widow(er) has no friends.

Expl: People tend to avoid a widow(er) as her/his company implies being faced with the chronic indigence of a person having many problems and no partner to share them with. Hence, a widow(er) is a lonely person.

16 Mi ma ole ole; ma awizi ni ya?

You always deceive me; am I a widow(er)?

Expl: A widow(er) has no partner to support her/him. In such a lonely condition, she/he can easily be deceived.

17 Mi ondrufe ni ya?

Are you a divorced woman (ondrufe)?

Expl: The **ondrufe**, a woman who has left her husband and returned to her family of origin, is allegedly free-going and troublesome.

18 Ewa mva ni ewa eji.

The offspring of the elephant resembles the elephant.

Expl: Parents inevitably transmit their character, particularly in its moral dimension, to their children. Hence, the behaviour of a child resembles that of his/her parents.⁴

19 Acikale ni acika ma mva.

Soot is the child of smoke.

Expl: As smoke inevitably produces soot, parents unavoidably transmit their dispositions, whether good or bad, to their children.

20 Ata ma afa aji aji, mva ma afa aji aji.

The property of the father is cherished, the property of the child is cherished.

⁴ This proverb refers to various animals, like the goat or the buffalo, to emphasize specific resemblances between parent and child. A goat (*ndri*), for instance, represents stubbornness, a buffalo (*odru*) anger, and an elephant (*ewa*) unconcern.

Expl: The assets of a child, whether material or moral, are inherited from his/her father. Thus, a child should look first and foremost to his/her parents for such benefits.

21 A'u eji ayia ma alobi.

The comb of the hen resembles that of her mother.

Expl: Children take after their parents, particularly in matters of behaviour. Parents have thus a considerable responsibility for the conduct of their children.

2 Children

22 E 'ba mva drilea.

Put the child ahead.

Expl: Adults should keep children before their eyes to be able to attend to them better.

23 Ocoo ombe mva rua ku.

The dog does not lick the body of the puppy.

Expl: Humans beings, on the other hand, should attend to their children in earnest and love.

24 Onji ni oce andri.

What is bad is the bitch.

Expl: A bitch allegedly disregards her puppies once they are weaned. Human beings, on the other hand, should continue to nourish their children.

25 Anji nyiri ei zoo o'dataa si.

Children grow through insults.

Expl: Adults should educate the young by putting them to the test through physical and psychological hardships including harsh language.

26 Mva tree kuri zoo 'ba onjiru.

The undisciplined child grows into a bad person.

Expl: The education of children requires that they be disciplined and corrected.

27 Eri odre dri ni.

It is the beginning of the urine.

Expl: The child is the first born. This refers in particular to the special position of responsibility that such a child is going to have in the family.⁵

28 Eri 'ba ti dezu ni.

He/she is the person born last.

Expl: The lastborn enjoys a privileged position in the affection of parents.

29 Kujaa vuleri ma pa kulu.

The leg of the last calf is big.

Expl: The last calf is fed before the others. The lastborn should be given special attention and love, particularly by the parents.

30 Mva ma afa aji aji.

The things of a child are precious.

Expl: What a child does or gives, though small, is important and it should be appreciated by adults.



Proverb 32: The respectful son

⁵ A firstborn child is brought up with a strong sense of responsibility for the welfare of the family and with a thorough knowledge of its traditions. As an adult, he will have to be consulted on all his family affairs by everybody within and outside the family.

31 Anzi angu driaale be.

Children have their place ahead.

Expl: Children will have in future what adults have at present. Hence the young need to cherish patience and hope.

32 Ngotia tu pa 'i atapi dria ku.

A child does not rise above his/her father.

Expl: Children should remain subordinate to their father, and not to arrogate to themselves the position that belongs to those above them.

33 Mva gu 'i andri onjivu ku.

A child does not deride the ugliness of his/her mother.

Expl: A child should accept and love his/her mother as she is, appreciating her real and inner value, rather than merely her external appearance.

34 Anzi ede ndraa Guzu ni, Guzu dra ra.

The children insulted Guzu, Guzu then died.

Expl: The elder called Guzu died following a humiliating abuse by some children. Elders must be respected, especially by children.

35 Ani si, okuanzi nyo ki Godri pa.

By joking, the girls broke the leg of Godri.

Expl: Excessive fun and lack of respect for an elder had a serious consequence, namely it caused a painful accident to him.

36 Anjia 'du 'i nyuka.

The child has brought *nyuka* upon himself/herself.

Expl: *Nyuka* is a serious misfortune. Special vigilance is needed to avoid incurring it. Also a child can be affected by it.⁶

37 Izimandri drisu yo.

The adopted child has no judiciousness.

Expl: Adopted children may grow somewhat independent of their foster parents, developing no real respect for them and no proper manners in general.

⁶ *Nyuka* is a misfortune with long-lasting and disastrous effects. It strikes people on account of some grievous faults they have committed. It usually leads to the extinction of a person's family. *Nyuka* cannot be usually redressed.

38 Odekua ma si yo.

A baby has no teeth.

Expl: An adult, on the other hand, has them. This implies that an adult should not be treated like a baby. At the same time, an adult should behave responsibly.

39 Odekua ma otriki aza yo.

The gums of a baby are not painful.

Expl: What does not hurt or concern a baby can instead grieve or interest an adult.

40 Emvoa ma afa dri a yo.

The orphan has nothing in his/her hands.

Expl: An orphan is totally indigent.

41 Emvoa ma afa dri a.

The things of an orphan are in his/her hands.

Expl: The little which an orphan possesses can be held in his/her hands.

42 Yuku 'du envoa ku.

The kite does not take away an orphan.

Expl: It is unrealistic to expect that an orphan be suddenly lifted (by a kite, for instance) out of his/her condition of loneliness and poverty. This condition tends to be enduring.

43 Endrao oce emvoa ku.

A niggard does not rear an orphan.

Expl: The person wanting to rear an orphan needs to have a generous attitude.

44 'Ba oce emvo enyanya si ku.

An orphan is not reared on poison.

Expl: Orphans are disadvantaged and they should not be treated harmfully.

45 E ka le emvoanzi oce, mi edre ma adri kile ocoo driri le.

If you want to rear orphans, your tongue should be like that of a dog.

Expl: A dog licking its puppies exemplifies the tenderness recommended in caring for orphans.

46 Emvoa ocepi dra ku ya?

The person caring for the orphan, does he/she not die?

Expl: The person attending to an orphan is also a human being with his/her needs to be catered for.

47 Yilo ma omvo zo ku.

The orphan of a jealous person does not grow up.

Expl: One does not feel encouraged to help an orphan whose parents were excessively jealous.

48 Malaja omvo zo ku.

The orphan of malice does not grow.

Expl: A child continues to suffer for his/her parents' misbehaviour.

49 Malaya omvo zo ku.

The orphan of a harlot does not grow.

Expl: Such an orphan does not know a father to refer to for help.

3 Other Relatives**50 Ode 'baru yo.**

No young people at home.

Expl: The young guarantee the defence and maintenance of the home. At the same time, they should prove their effective presence by their activity.



Proverb 51: The speed of youth

51 Karile nju ongu bala.

Young men run faster.

Expl: The young are more vigorous than the old. Their youthful vigour should be positively felt in the community.

52 Ojolo ei mba okpo be.

Bachelors grow with strength.

Expl: The vigour of the young may foster in them overconfidence in their abilities. They need advice from the elders.

53 Ondre ti la adripi azi.

What one looks for in vain is a brother.

Expl: Having a genuine brother is not always easy. When one has such a brother, one should avoid anything that may undermine one's relationship with him.

54 Adri azi ni opaku mifi ni.

A brother is the eye on the back of the head.

Expl: Having a brother enables one to see behind, namely to know what would normally remain unknown.

55 Ata anji ki za onze nduvu nduvu.

Brothers pick the meat only among themselves.

Expl: Certain advantages and gestures are shared only within the family circle.

56 'Ba e'yo ene adro a.

People copy from their maternal uncles.

Expl: Maternal uncles have a remarkable influence over their nephews/nieces who like to be in their company and at their homes.

57 'Ba e'yo ni adro a.

People come to know at their maternal uncle's home.

Expl: A cherished place to visit is the home of one's maternal uncles, where one gathers ideas and experiences.

58 Adro ma ndu yo.

There is no other maternal uncle.

Expl: People have a special love for their maternal uncles.

59 Agu ka mu adro a 'bo, a'di ni oku je eridri ni?

If a person has gone to his maternal uncle, who can get him a wife?

Expl: The frequent and prolonged visits to maternal uncles keep one away from home and work. When the time for marriage comes, will one have managed to gather the necessary bride-wealth?

60 Andrapiri ndu ndu ri onzi.

Different maternal aunts are inconvenient.

Expl: Maternal aunts tend to intervene in the affairs of their nephews/nieces (born of different mothers). Such diversified interventions compound issues among brothers and sisters in a family.

61 Ojolo nya awubi.

A bachelor eats awubi.

Expl: Awubi (*Crotalaria ochroleuca*) is a vegetable generally disliked. However, a bachelor eats it as he has no wife to serve him with a better food.

62 Ojolo zi celecelea ku.

The bachelor does not ask for the celecelea meal.

Expl: The celecelea is a special meal prepared by a wife for her husband. A bachelor obviously cannot request it.

63 Ojolo ma loma yo.

The bachelor has no ribs.

Expl: The ribs represent a wife. The life of a bachelor is weak and ineffectual.

64 Anji mbe ki kumvuku ku.

Children do not drink the kumvuku milk.

Expl: Kumvuku milk is reserved for the elders and the privileges of elders must not be interfered with.⁷

65 Tusu jole ambaa ni.

The remains of saliva are for the elders.

Expl: The remainder of food, particularly that prepared for sacrifices, is reserved for the elders. What tradition assigns to the elders must go to them.

66 Ambo nya lucuo.

⁷ Kumvuku or aridri or lekewa is a cow that has its milk reserved for the elders. This milk is not drunk by anyone else, not even by the children who may seem to need it most.

The elders eat the **lucuo**.

Expl: **Lucuo** is the meat reserved for the elders. Elders have this and similar privileges to which they have a right and which they also abuse at times.⁸

67 Acife amba pia ta ni.

The divination stick is the food of elders.

Expl: Following the indication of the divination stick, animals are sacrificed and shared as food among elders. The divination stick is an instrument reserved for the elders who could manipulate it to their own advantage.⁹

68 Ama odroki olokoto mi be ku.

We did not chase lizards together with you.

Expl: We did not share the same childhood games, as we were not peers. There is a difference of age and relationship among us.

69 'Ba gu 'ba azia 'ba ku.

One does not deride the relatives of others.

Expl: Respect for others should be extended beyond one's relations, namely to everybody.

70 'Ba azia 'ba oluo-oci.

The relatives of others are the **oluo** thorns.

Expl: In case of need, one should turn to one's relatives. Other people resemble the thorns of the **oluo** tree (*Erythrina abyssinica*); they are more likely to hurt than to help.

71 Ori'ba turu pa ago si.

Kinsmen touch each other with the toe.

⁸ **Lucuo** is the offering brought by people to some of their relatives, usually maternal uncles, in order to restore peaceful relations. The **lucuo** is often an animal, and it is the privilege of the elders to eat its meat. The part of the animal reserved for them is the kidney, accompanied by the liver and the heart.

⁹ The **acife** is the magic stick for divination; it is about 40 cm long and very smooth. The diviner operates it by holding around it a loop of grass, derived mainly from the root of the spear-grass (*Imparata cylindricum*), previously dampened in water, and sliding the **acife** up and down inside the loop. Names of persons or causes of a particular misfortune are mentioned. When the **acife** gets stuck inside the loop and stops, the particular person or cause mentioned at that moment is considered to be the one the diviner was looking for.

Expl: Kinsmen who have a secret message to pass to each other in public do so in a stealthy manner, like touching the other person's foot with one's toe.¹⁰ The solidarity among kinsmen is particularly intense.

72 Wa'dio ma afa dri agelea.

The things of a relative are on the palms of his/her hands.

Expl: Members of the family receive what is enough for their needs. They should not expect to be treated like a guest who is given more generously.

73 Oyoa kini yi a, "'Ba ako".

The monkey said in the valley, "No people."

Expl: The monkey lamented the absence of relatives. One should have numerous kin to avoid the loneliness of the monkey in the valley.

74 Ndu ma wa'di yo.

Buttocks have no relatives.

Expl: Buttocks stand for sexual attraction, and having no relatives means having no preferences. Everybody is equally attracted by sex.

4 Marriage



Proverb 78: The bride-wealth

75 Ti alu je oku ku.

One mouth does not marry.

¹⁰ Instead of ago (toe), a variant of this proverb has edu (heel).

Expl: In arranging a marriage, one person alone is not enough. Momentous affairs need the collaboration of many people.

76 Ti alu je oku ku.

One cow does not get a woman.

Expl: The bride-wealth comprises several heads of cattle that one must work hard to acquire.

77 Lico aku tia ri 'ba ni.

The cattle-pen near the house means people.

Expl: The cattle-pen indicates the presence of cows which are an asset for marriage guaranteeing the birth of children.

78 Ti ma awu eri oku ma lulu ni.

The bellow of cattle is the cry of women.

Expl: Cattle constitute the bulk of the bride-wealth, namely a guarantee to marry.

79 Ngoti okuri ti onyi'bi ni.

A baby-girl means the beauty of cows.

Expl: A baby-girl will fetch bride-wealth consisting mainly of cattle.

80 Ti onyi'bi eri vele aku a yo.

No beauty of cows at his/her home.

Expl: Cows are not kept for beauty but as an asset for marriage.

81 Ti ze aku a yo, ngoti ze aku a yo.

No cow-faeces at home, no child-faeces at home.

Expl: With no cattle for bride-wealth, no marriage can be envisaged and consequently no children.

82 Zaa 'ipi 'i zaa nya ni.

The relatives of the girl profit by the girl.

Expl: The relatives of a girl acquire bride-wealth through her marriage. They have a duty to prepare her for it.

83 'Ba azi ko 'ba azi ma zaa anyapa ba ku.

Nobody holds the bride-wealth by the rope for the girl of someone else.

Expl: Marriage affairs are to be dealt with inside the family. Outsiders should not interfere in them.

84 'Ba je oku 'ba yuri ni ku.

One does not get a wife for an absentee.

Expl: One cannot decide on behalf of a person who is not present, particularly with regard to a momentous affair like marriage.

85 Zaa onjivururi de akua ku.

The ugly girl does not age at home.

Expl: Though ugly, a girl will not remain unmarried. In fact, it is not aesthetics that prompts marriage but the need to continue life.

86 Zamva ma ra erindikuru.

A girl should creep to be the *erindiku* grass.

Expl: The *erindiku* (*Cynodon, dactylon*) is a creeping grass that spreads all over the ground. A girl should likewise proliferate through her many offspring.

87 Zamva ma di ozoro.

A girl to be like rain.

Expl: The children of a married girl should be as abundant as rain.

88 Mileaci wu 'ba ru ku.

Restlessness does not win over a partner.

Expl: One wants a guarantee of seriousness and stability from one's future partner in marriage, which an unstable person cannot offer.

89 E'yere ni aliria ole ra.

Slowly one wins over a virgin.

Expl: Perseverance and patience are needed to achieve a woman's assent to marry.

90 O'di'dika ni izinaka ni.

Novelty is a bride.

Expl: Knowledge of the new bride who comes into the family takes time. She will be appraised as she gradually manifests herself.

II THE COMMUNITY

The community centres on the home. The ideal home has many people in it, not only family members, but also visitors. Hospitality is the link between the family and the wider society. A deserted

home is an abandoned home (390). A home comprises a cluster of houses, a central one for the parents and smaller ones around it for the other family members. A separate house accommodates the kitchen. One or more granaries for storing food occupy a prominent place either in the centre of the house cluster or slightly at the side of it. The enclosures for domestic animals, like the poultry-pen and the cattle-pen, are just outside the home compound, and beyond it there are the fields. Family clusters live at some distance from each other, separated by their fields. The worth of a home is in the people ("the worth of a cattle-pen is in the cows", (92) who contribute togetherness to the home but who can also undermine it by their isolationism. The community should be like a traditional house: poles, reeds and grass, all properly fastened together into a structured unity of purpose.¹¹

1 The Home

91 Abindu ni duu 'ba si.

The verandah floor is clean because of people.

Expl: The presence of many people in the home contributes to its propriety and fulfils the ideal of a home.¹²

92 Lico ma be ti ni.

The worth of a cattle-pen is in the cows.

Expl: What makes a cattle-pen are the cows in it. Likewise, what makes a home are the people in it.

93 Adamanaka joruvu yo ni.

It is the night-jar that has no nest.

Expl: People do not see where the night-jar, appearing suddenly with the dark, comes from. They thus believe it has no nest. People, on the other hand, have, or should have, a home.

94 Ovaa ma goli ni duu ovaa si.

The abode of the dikdik gazelle becomes smooth because of the dikdik gazelle.

¹¹ See footnote to proverb no. 2.

¹² Instead of abindu (verandah), variants of this proverb have aku (home) and akuti (entrance). See also footnote to proverb no. 2.

Expl: Human beings are the ones who turn a place into a suitable and comfortable home.

95 Otaria aa 'i 'bu ti.

The cricket chirps by its hole.

Expl: Those who are near home can easily retire to it in case of danger.

96 Oya pa ru jere si.

The monkey saved itself because of the forest.

Expl: People should keep within reach of their homes to find safety in them.

97 'Ba nda 'ba otu si ku.

A person does not look for another during the day.

Expl: People move freely anywhere during the day. It is only when the night falls that one goes to look for family members who are not yet at home.

98 'Ba si jo yi dria ku.

People do not erect a house on water.

Expl: As a home is built on a solid basis, likewise other undertakings, as well as rational arguments, are to rest on sound foundations.



Proverb 99: The unfinished wall

99 Abi ijijiri atri egbe ku.

An unplastered wall does not keep off the cold.

Expl: The unplastered wall of a traditional house consists of supporting poles with reeds or small branches fastened to them.¹³ It offers only limited protection. An unfinished home (with unmarried people in it, for instance) needs to be completed in order to fulfil its purpose.

100 O'da baru 'ba onvezu.

Names are given to invite people.

Expl: Self-invitations are to be avoided. People have a name by which to be invited.

101 A'di omve oya zaa ni ya?

Who called the monkey to the meat?

Expl: Monkeys stay in the forest. The question refers to the intrusion of an unwanted person in the home.

102 Jo eri oce ni.

A house is a forest.

Expl: People do not talk freely in a forest, as they may be overheard. The same caution is needed in a home.

103 Edro abinduri galaa dri ese.

The rat under the wall draws snakes.

Expl: A troublesome person in the home or in the community tends to bring more troubles on them.

104 A'ya si, aku a candi.

Due to jealousy, there is sorrow at home.

Expl: Jealousy causes sufferings also in one's home.

105 Atiliko aci ve eri ni.

The fireplace burned him.

Expl: The fire of the hearth here stands for domestic problems and its burning indicates negative effects. The problems in question had their origin at home.

106 Eri erafe si eri dri ni.

¹³ See footnote to proverb no. 2.

His/her granary pole knocked his/her head.

Expl: The granary is a typical and central component of the home. The problem in question needs to be traced to some home issue.

107 Ti ti ru alo tia.

The cattle choked at their peg.

Expl: The cattle are kept within one's home. The problem being considered has originated within the home.

2 Togetherness

108 Cucua pa alu, te le dri tre.

The **cucua** granary has one leg, but it needs many hands.

Expl: The **cucua** granary stands on one pole, but it needs the collaboration of several people to put it in place.

109 Acife idri yabi ndu ni.

The life of the divination stick is in the root of the spear-grass.

Expl: The operation of the divination stick is made possible by the loop of the spear-grass (*Imparata cylindricum*) inside which it is made to slide.¹⁴ Effective results can only be achieved through the combined operation of two or more persons.

110 Acife ni uu yi si.

The divination stick sounds because of water.

Expl: The diviner operates his/her stick by sliding it inside a loop of grass previously dumped in water. The wet grass rubbing against the stick produces a particular sound.¹⁵ A lonely person, though important, needs the contributions of others to obtain effective results.

111 Abalaa si ni uu ajiko si.

The spoon sounds because of the pot.

Expl: The spoon produces a sound only by scrubbing the inside of the pot. Two or more persons need to come together to attain meaningful results.

112 A'baliko ni ajiko 'dipi ni.

The spoon is the owner of the pot.

¹⁴ See footnote to proverb no. 67.

¹⁵ See footnote to proverb no. 67.

Expl: It is the spoon used for scrubbing the inside of the pot that makes the latter sound. Something small can enhance the value of what is bigger through cooperation.

113 Anya ni ta ma orindi.

Millet is the soul of food.

Expl: A little millet contributes a substantial ingredient to a meal. Few people can make a substantial contribution to the activity of a group.

114 A'umva ni alu onjayia si.

The taste of the chick is in the pepper.

Expl: Few people can give a welcome zest to an occasion, or a small contribution can put the finishing touch to an undertaking.¹⁶

115 Gbuluku kini, "Gbufu mi avu mari, gbufu ma miri avu."

The ground-hornbill said, "You blow mine, I blow yours."

Expl: One blows the speck from one's friend's eye and the friend reciprocates. People need to help each other.

116 Angili 'de angili ndu.

The **angili** fruits fall under the **angili** tree.

Expl: People tend to associate with those like them, just like the fruits of the **angili** tree (*Parinari curatellifolia*) fall together under it.¹⁷

117 Aria wura aluri ei nga tu alu.

Birds of a colour fly together.

Expl: Birds of a feather flock together.

118 Ti fi aku ti lico akori aa ku.

A cow does not enter a home without a cattle-pen.

Expl: A cow tends to go where other cows are. People associate with those like them.

119 'Ba ose ndaa ti si.

¹⁶ Instead of **onjayia** (pepper), a variant of this proverb has **a'i** (salt).

¹⁷ This proverb employs other types of trees according to which of them is more popular and characteristic in the area where the proverb is used. These trees are, for example, the **edio** (*Combretum nigricans*), the **edoo** (*Vitex doniana*), the **kumara** (*Butyrospermum paradoxum/parkii*), the **odolo** (*Kigelia aetiopica*). Except for the **kumara** corresponding to the "shea butter tree", the English name of the other trees has proved difficult to find.

A person seeks affluence using the mouth.

Expl: A person profits by communicating with others. One should exploit one's ability to speak.

120 Ku ni 'ba fu dri apinaka anzi be.

Only the ant-bear's offspring are not met.

Expl: It is extremely difficult to come across the offspring of the ant-bear. People, on the other hand, have always a way of meeting among themselves.

121 Ku ni oni fu dri ni.

Only mountains do not meet.

Expl: People are not motionless like mountains. They move and meet.

122 Apa ku inia 'be ni.

Only a mountain does not escape.

Expl: People, instead, are able to depart and to return.

123 Ape ti ku otoko ni.

Only the termitehill does not respond.

Expl: People should be susceptible and react to the words and needs of others.

124 Ciri ni, fe ni ya?

Quiet, is it a tree?

Expl: Trees are still and indifferent. People should be active and social.

125 E'yo nde ko ni pati ni.

Only a tree is not overcome by problems.

Expl: Trees are not affected by anything.¹⁸ People, on the other hand, feel the problems of life.

126 I gbi 'di 'ee ewa rua.

You shot an arrow at an elephant.

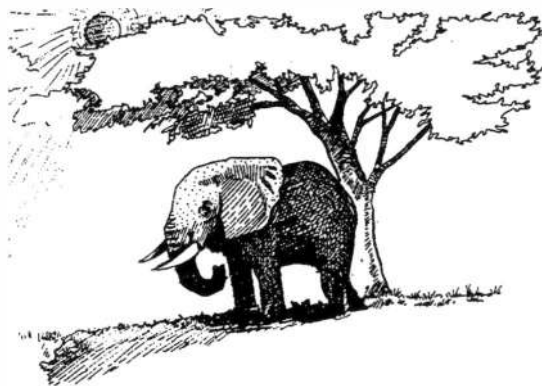
Expl: Your words or actions have left people unconcerned.

127 Ewa ma amboo etu ni.

The lord of the elephant is the sun.

¹⁸ Instead of pati (tree), a variant of this proverb has Eti (Mount Eti).

Expl: An elephant is not concerned about the weather. The sun, however, makes it withdraw under the shade. There is a way to move apathetic people too.



Proverb 127: The powerful sun

128 Atetea si, ozoo 'ba co co.

By waiting, people are caught in the rain.

Expl: Concern for others may not always be the best policy.

129 Abi ndu'bua ako ni yo.

There is no wall without supporting poles.

Expl: The wall of a traditional house consists of poles to which reeds or small branches are tied and plastered.¹⁹ Society needs the support of leaders and elders.

130 Alaka ni onya ma mifi ni.

The **alaka** grass is the eye of the termites.

Expl: The **alaka** grass (*Hyperhenia rufa*), burnt in bundles to attract termites at night, is a guide to them. Leaders have to be a light indicating the way in which to move.

131 'Ba ongo alepiri ngo ongo ku.

The leader of the dance (or song) does not dance (or sing).²⁰

¹⁹ See footnote to proverb no. 2.

Expl: The leader does not do everything himself/herself. The community has to offer its contribution too.

132 Ecekelendreki drile ako si ababa.

Without a leader, the ants are confused.

Expl: Without leadership, a community disintegrates.

133 Ewa ri ku dere.

The elephant has sat unconcerned.

Expl: Authority has been inactive, failing in its duties.

134 Anyu ni patifu ma ojoo.

The bee is the doctor of flowers.

Expl: The visit of the bee to the flowers is like that of the doctor to his/her patients. Both are useful and life-bringing.

3 Loneliness



Proverb 135: Togetherness

135 Anyufi aluri ala tibi ku.

A single grain of simsim does not mix with the sauce.

Expl: A single person does not contribute anything substantial.

136 'Ee-ejufe alu aluri ede acife ku.

²⁰ The word *ongo* means both "dance" and "song", or their respective verbs "to dance" and "to sing".

One spear shaft does not make a divination stick.

Expl: There is more to the exercise of divination than a wooden stick.²¹ A meaningful activity requires the contribution of several people to effect.

137 Aluri pa uu ku.

The foot of a single person does not sound.

Expl: There have to be many people walking or dancing for the sound of their feet to be heard. Likewise for any other human activity.

138 Paale 'baku ca ku.

A large foot is not enough.

Expl: One foot alone, no matter how large it is, cannot walk. One person alone cannot move ahead.

139 Onyofi alu fu ori ku.

One finger nail cannot kill a louse.

Expl: One person alone cannot succeed in performing certain tasks.

140 Era aluri ede atiliko ku.

One stone does not make the hearth.

Expl: The traditional hearth consists of three stones. More than one person is needed to do a job.

141 A'dule mbe tibi esaru.

A loner eats the sauce without savoury.

Expl: The choicest part of a meal loses its taste when eaten by oneself.

142 A'duma lo 'ba ma o'duko ku.

Loneliness does not convey news about people.

Expl: Isolation inhibits communication. It prevents conveying news about oneself and receiving those of others.²²

143 'Ba alu pamvu siriru.

The footprint of one person is narrow.

Expl: A single traveller makes a narrow path. Acting alone does not achieve ample results.

144 Dri alu eco oci anze ku.

²¹ See footnote to proverb no. 67.

²² Instead of lo (tell), a variant of this proverb has ari (hear).

One finger cannot extract a thorn.

Expl: Certain tasks need more than one person to be accomplished.

145 Dri aluri tri nguku ku.

One hand does not scrub the back.

Expl: One needs the cooperation of others to do so.

146 Aluri ne mile si.

A single one looks with the eyes.

Expl: When alone, one can only survey the situation without effecting any intervention. Intervening, in fact, could lead one into troubles that one would be alone in solving.

147 Abe za yi ku.

A handle does not cross water.

Expl: A handle or a hoe cannot cross a river without someone carrying it over. Alone, one cannot overcome certain obstacles.

148 Ajiko si a'baliko 'be kulumbu.

Because of the pot, the spoon threw away the log.

Expl: There is a kind of partnership between the pot and the spoon which removes the food from it. This helps the spoon to overcome the log. A weak person, allied with a strong one, acquires the strength of the latter.

149 Yi ku toko ku, yi ku anya si.

Water cannot curdle pointlessly, water curdles with flour.

Expl: A person needs to associate with other persons to produce solid results.

150 Ewa dra ni 'i dri si ku.

Beer does not ferment by itself.

Expl: Beer needs additives to ferment. Certain tasks need several persons to be accomplished.

151 Okporovu api a'dule ku.

A pregnant woman is not sated by herself.

Expl: Pregnancy is brought about by the union of man and woman. Other activities are equally the result of cooperation.

152 Ndri aroni tini ndri ata koru ku.

A she-goat does not generate without a he-goat.

Expl: As cooperation is needed in begetting offspring, likewise in any other activity that needs to be productive.

153 Karijo pe 'i a'bi ceni ku.

The puerpera does not perform the childbirth-rites by herself.

Expl: The rites that a puerpera needs to perform after the birth of her child require the participation of other women. Important activities require the cooperation of several people.

154 Ojoo ati 'i ceni ku.

A doctor does not cure himself/herself.

Expl: When it comes to one's own problems, even an expert needs the assistance of other people in solving them.

155 E ku 'ba azi mi nguku trizu ci.

Leave someone to rub your back.

Expl: Keep on friendly terms with people whose help you may need one day.

156 'Ba azi eco 'i nguku ifizu ceni ku.

A person cannot smear oil on his/her back.

Expl: There are things that one cannot do for oneself. One needs the help of others to perform them.

157 Nguku atrima le 'ba ma ovu ci.

To rub the back there has to be a person.

Expl: There are tasks to which a person cannot attend. Thus, a person should keep on friendly terms with those who can eventually help in such tasks.

158 Nguku lu mini e'yo ku.

The back does not report to you.

Expl: A person needs someone to keep an eye behind his/her back and inform him/her of what is going on there.

159 Joa, joa; mi etundreko ni ya?

Indoors, indoors; are you the **etundreko**?

Expl: The lizard **etundreko** hides under the stones and in the ground. Some individuals are similarly withdrawn and unsociable.

160 Ti muru 'ba agoyi ku.

A taciturn mouth has no friends.

Expl: A person who does not communicate with people ends by turning them away.

161 Ti mvuru ma mileti eri ori mileti le.

The face of a short-lipped person is the face of a snake.

Expl: People turn away from a severe looking person as they would do from a snake.

162 Acicia dra ndu 'ini ni ni.

The vagabond knows the cause of his/her death.

Expl: When a wanderer dies, nobody knows the cause of his/her death, except himself/herself. Isolating oneself from the company of others leads to unfortunate results, such as death itself.

4 Hospitality

163 Omu ma gbete drinja ni.

The colour of a visitor is shyness.

Expl: The characteristic of a visitor ought to be constraint.

164 Omu dri mba ku.

The head of the visitor is not hard.

Expl: A visitor has a weak social position.

165 A'uata 'be cere 'ba azi aku a ku.

A cock does not crow in the home of others.

Expl: A guest should be reserved and talking with restraint.

166 Ocoo ni saki ndro 'ba azi ma angu a ndro ndro.

The dog lowers its tail in the home of others.

Expl: A guest has to be quiet and controlled.

167 Omu emu nyazu.

A guest comes to eat.

Expl: A guest offers the opportunity of a good meal for everybody in the family.

168 Ta ati 'ba ni ako.

Food existed before man.

Expl: When receiving a person, one starts by offering him/her food, leaving other issues to some later moment.

169 Ojio ma drinja yo.

A messenger has no shame.

Expl: A messenger speaks on behalf of his/her sender and there is no reason for him/her to be ashamed of what he/she says.

170 Ayutaa eri drileba.

Being sent is good luck.

Expl: A messenger acquires experience and trust; he/she is not re-criminated against.

171 Ojio ni e'yo 'ipi ma mifi.

A messenger is the eye of his/her sender.

Expl: A messenger watches and speaks on behalf of his/her sender.

172 Ojio ni afa e'yo 'ipi mifi a ri apee ni.

The messenger picks out the speck from the eye of his/her sender.

Expl: The service a messenger contributes to his/her sender is both delicate and valuable.

173 Ambala ayu ei ku ni Ajia be.

Ambala and Ajia do not engage each other.

Expl: As elders, Ambala and Ajia do not send each other on errands. However, anybody else can be sent as a messenger.

174 Andi ma afa driagele a.

The things of a foreigner are on the palms of his/her hands.

Expl: The little a foreigner possesses can be held in his/her hands.

175 Andi ma era pale yo.

The foreigner has no granary.

Expl: The lack of a granary implies uncertainty concerning sustenance and life itself.

176 Andi ma paagale gburu.

The sole of the foreigner is narrow.

Expl: A foreigner has a restricted freedom of movement. His/her presence leaves a very limited mark.

177 Andi nya hiowa ku.

The foreigner does not eat the hiowa.

Expl: **Hiowa** is a food reserved to elders. A foreigner has no part in the inner affairs and privileges of the society hosting her/him.²³

178 Andi fi awizi ku.

A foreigner does not inherit a widow.

Expl: A foreigner has no blood relations with the widow's children to warrant his marrying their mother. A foreigner has no roots in the society hosting him/her.

179 Andi ma ndu ore.

The foreigner's buttocks are wet.

Expl: A foreigner is in a condition of weakness and marginalization.

180 Andi ni nya muzu.

A foreigner eats to go.

Expl: A foreigner has no permanent residence and lasting interests among his/her hosts.



Proverb 183: Overstaying one's welcome

181 Andi ku alaka otoko dria.

The foreigner left the **alaka** grass on the termitehill.

Expl: Termites are caught by using burning bundles of **alaka** grass (*Hyperhenia rufa*). The termitehill is then cleaned from the rem-

²³ When an animal is slaughtered to prepare an important meal for a gathering of people, the choicest part of the animal is set aside and eaten by the elders within the clan; this special food is called **hiowa**; the rest of the food for other people is called **ari**.

nants of the grass. Foreigners, however, do not do so as they have no future interest in the termitehill and in their hosts.

182 "Angu-vele-juru" niri a'uata ru ni.

"Land-afterwards-to-strangers" is the name of a cock.

Expl: The name of a cock ends with its short life. Likewise the control of the land by foreigners does not last long.

183 Andi ma kali osu ni.

The foreigner's stick is the bow.

Expl: When a foreigner needs to be sent away, strong measures may have to be used; hence, not just a stick but the bow and arrows.

184 Andi dria, alaka du oru.

On the foreigner, the *alaka* grass has grown tall.

Expl: The *alaka* grass (*Hyperhenia rufa*) on the grave of a foreigner grows unchecked, as he/she has no relatives around to remove it.

III WORK AND FOOD

Work, seriously and systematically performed, is one of the highest values in Lugbara life. Young boys are initiated into the responsible care of domestic animals, while young girls help their mothers in the home. The fields, together with work and food, constitute a triadic component providing the topics to the vaster group of proverbs. Work is hard. "Fatigue is the first born" (237). But it is food and it is life. The value of the field is in the work put in it and the significance of work is in the food it provides and in the life it guarantees. The granary occupies a central place in the household, not only physically, but for the values for which it stands. A well provided granary, or even better, several of them, indicate security, success and esteem within the family and in the wider society.

I The Need to Work

185 Odekua vu anya aci ku la ni.

It is the baby who does not cool the food.

Expl: A baby suckles its food. An adult eats it and he/she may thus need to cool it and, before that, to work for it.

186 Avu tu ku la fe.

It is the dead who do not climb a tree.

Expl: The dead do not act, while everybody else, instead, can and should be active.

187 Abe 'aa nga ceni ku.

The handle alone does not dig a field.

Expl: The handle, namely the hoe, needs a person to use it. Work is effected by the person rather than by the instrument used for it.



Proverb 188: The helpless seed

188 Anya faa 'i ceni ku.

Millet does not sow itself.

Expl: Sowing needs a person to do it. Any creative activity is the result of human endeavour.

189 Yilemvu si yi a ceni ku.

The water-pot does not go to the water on its own.

Expl: There has to be a person carrying the pot to where the water to be fetched is.

190 Ocoo ko abe ku la ni.

It is the dog that does not handle a hoe.

Expl: A person, on the other hand, needs to attend to his/her duty and work.

191 Azo 'aa amvu ku ni ni.

Only sickness does not dig.

Expl: Apart from natural impossibility, there are no exceptions to people attending to their work.

192 Amvu ni 'ba anyajo ni.

The field is the stomach of a person.

Expl: Working in the fields provides what is needed for human sustenance.

193 Anikani ma amvu 'i'dia imba ni.

The spider's field is its web.

Expl: Every person has, or should have, his/her specific field of activity.

194 Saa eca onyukunyu ni dri ojiria.

The time has come when flies wash their hands.

Expl: Early in the morning, flies are seen rubbing their legs as if cleaning themselves. It is the time when people are expected to begin working.

195 Nga 'bo ri, nya 'bo ri.

Already done, already eaten.

Expl: Having accomplished his/her work, a person has already assured his/her sustenance.

196 Ndu nya ku, pa nya ni.

The buttocks do not eat, the legs eat.

Expl: Food is not provided by sitting down but by being on one's feet doing something.

197 'Aapi kuri nya ku.

No digging no eating.

Expl: There is no alternative to it: either going to work or encountering starvation.

198 Abe yo, inya yo.

No handle, no food.

Expl: The handle refers to the hoe and to digging. Without this activity in the field, food will not be secured.

199 Mini mi andre jo a le; mani ma andre amvu a le.

For you, you be in the house; for me, I be in the field.

Expl: Staying at home, in idleness, yields nothing. Working in the fields provides sustenance.

200 Mi ozoo atu pa si ya?

Are you stepping in the rain with the feet?

Expl: One should step in the rain with the hoe, namely take advantage of the rain to cultivate the fields.

201 Mi atu ozoo pa si a'dule ku, mi atu ozoo abe si.

Do not step in the rain only with your feet, step in the rain with a handle.

Expl: When the rains start, one should not walk about but take the hoe and dig the fields.

202 Elifiri ma oniaka erafe ru.

The wrestling of the loafer is against the granary poles.

Expl: The idle wanderer undermines the granary, namely his/her sustenance. A person should dig for his/her food rather than go begging for it.²⁴

203 Acicia loo anya ero a ku.

Wandering does not harvest millet for the granary.

Expl: Being indolent and vagabond does not provide the necessary provisions in one's granary.

204 Paale ma oya yo.

The sole brings no profit.

Expl: Mere walking around does not provide any benefit.

205 Ede ni ma eroliko alu.

Idleness has one old granary.

²⁴ The wrestling referred to here is the *oniaka* by which one coils one's legs around those of the opponent, trying to entangle him into a defenceless position. The idle wanderer is imagined to be doing this against the support of the granary of other people, so as to obtain food from it.

Expl: The indolent person remains with his/her old granary as the little produce he/she harvests does not require more than that.

206 Ovuog ga apalako fe ku.

A lazy person does not cut the poles for the **apalako**.

Expl: The lazy does not need the **apalako**, namely the platform where food is kept, as he/she has nothing to put on it.

207 Enja nya ku.

Laziness does not eat.

Expl: Food is provided through work.

208 Enja nya telo ku.

Laziness does not eat the **telo**.

Expl: **Telo** is a special meal served to workers in the fields. A lazy person cannot share it as he/she has not been working in the field.²⁵

209 Eze ako nya alu omvu.

The one without laziness ate the nose of the reed rat.

Expl: The nose of the reed rat is considered its tastiest part. Labouriousness gets the best.

210 Acoabe ni eri ozaa oza.

The handle of the hoe stings him/her.

Expl: The aversion to work is compared to the fear of being stung by the hoe.

211 Aco mini ofu.

For you the hoe is leprosy.

Expl: The repulsion to work resembles that experienced for leprosy.

212 E'bu ako abiri ma ayiko ni.

The absence of the hoe is the joy of hunger.

Expl: Abstaining from work results in hunger.

213 Ovuog le rii ni.

The lazy person likes the compound.

Expl: Lazy people prefer dancing in the compound to working in the field.

²⁵ *Telo* is the meat of a calf or of a young goat. In the past, such meat used to be carried in the fields and prepared there for the workers. A lazy person who did not go to dig the field could not be there to eat that cherished type of food.

2 The Approach to Work

214 'Ba ndri acife badakaru ku.

People do not divine at random.

Expl: Divination is not practised by everybody aimlessly. All activities need to be done competently.

215 Onya nga o'bu kokoru ku.

Termites will not swarm without the rain.

Expl: Most termites swarm after it has rained and cleared. Every activity needs to be done at its appropriate time.

216 Aria o'be jo tizu coti ku.

A bird does not build its nest all at once.

Expl: A work must be given all the time it needs for its completion.

217 'Ba azi osile si be ni yo.

Nobody is born with teeth.

Expl: Every person and everything need their time to come to their full realization.

218 Azi amvu a ri oko o'du alu ku.

Work in the field does not end in a day.

Expl: An activity requires its time to be accomplished.

219 Ozoo 'di ili si ku.

Rain does not fall during the dry season.

Expl: As everything happens at its appropriate time, likewise every activity should be done at its proper time.

220 Ope gbe 'ba osu era gule a ku.

The eggs of a guinea-fowl are not found in rocky crevices.

Expl: Every work has to be accomplished in its appropriate place.

221 'Ba ovu enya otoko ombeti a ku.

One does not cook on the slope of a termitehill.

Expl: An activity should be carried out where it is possible to do so, namely in its appropriate place.

222 Edro o'biri nii 'bile va si ku.

Many rats do not dig a hole.

Expl: Too many people in the same activity cause confusion.

223 Ndri ni nya pari eri izuria.

The goat eats at the place where it has been tethered.

Expl: A person should exploit the position he/she occupies and avoid trespassing on other people's rights.

224 Ojapi liki ru Aringa ti si.

The Ojapi people coveted the cows of the Aringa people in vain.

Expl: The Ojapi people bartered the cows raided by the Aringa people, until the raids ended. People should rely on their steady products rather than on unpredictable items like raided cows.

225 Ti owupi turi ma lesu yo.

The cow that bellows much has no milk.

Expl: The person who talks a lot produces nothing.

226 Andrendreka si, Etoo ma lico ve ra.

By aping others, the house of the hare was burnt.

Expl: By imitating others, the hare brought disaster on its home. One should try to act creatively.

227 Andrendreka si, galaa ga Mayia.

By aping others, a snake bit Mayia.

Expl: Imitating others led to a person called Mayia being bitten by a poisonous snake. One should be inventive rather than imitative.

228 E'bu pililiri 'a amvu ku.

A naked hoe does not dig a field.

Expl: A hoe needs a handle to it to serve its purpose. Any tool needs to be used properly to effect a given work.

229 Abe ni 'i 'ipi 'i.

The handle knows only its owner.

Expl: Only the owner knows the best way to use his/her instrument of work. Such an instrument should be left to him/her to use.

230 Kafu ma okpo ni enga 'ii vo.

The strength of the worn hoe comes from the owner.

Expl: An old tool performs well through the ability of its owner, and he/she should be left to handle it.

231 Abe ni duu 'i 'ipi dri si.

The handle smoothes in the hands of its owner.

Expl: Through constancy, a person acquires expertise in his/her work.

232 Acoabe 'ba azaza driari dra ni.

A hoe in the hands of a lunatic is death.

Expl: Irresponsibly handled, even a useful tool can cause serious problems.

233 Oku azia a'baliko ni oku azia ajiko ku.

The spoon of a woman does not know the pot of another woman.

Expl: A woman does not find dexterity using the scrubbing spoon of another woman. Every implement suits its owner.

234 Ojoo ma kanju ibibiku ni.

The robe of the doctor is made of leaves.

Expl: Everybody has a particular profession and a manner to attend to it.



Proverb 235: The ripe fruit

235 'Bua'bua ni nya ani, vuavua nya awa.

Up one eats the ripe, down one eats the unripe.

Expl: The ripe fruit is on the tree. Only the person striving uphill obtains rewarding results.

236 "Anyo-ako" nya ku.

"No-fatigue" does not eat.

Expl: There is no food without one toiling for it.

237 Anu ni ngoti kaori 'i.

Fatigue is the first-born child.

Expl: Exertion comes before anything else.

238 Ayiko ni ondi ma mva.

Happiness is the child of sweat.

Expl: Success and fulfilment require hard work.

239 Oye ni ocoo nya ni.

It is the dog that eats for nothing.

Expl: A person, on the other hand, is expected to earn his/her food by working for it.

240 Kpaluu ocoo te fa.

Anxiously the dog waits for the bone.

Expl: A person, on the other hand, should not expect to obtain things for nothing, namely without toiling for them.

241 E'bu ni 'ba gaa amvu ni okoria.

The hoe cuts the farmer when the field is about to finish.

Expl: A work can be ruined in its final stage. Constant attention is needed.

242 Emvo dra kaati a.

The pot breaks on the threshold.

Expl: An activity may be impaired at the last moment. Vigilance is needed up to the end.

243 Eri ande ope adro.

He/she got tired chasing the guinea-fowl.

Expl: A person gave up chasing a guinea-fowl that was then caught by another person. Endurance is needed to reap the fruits of one's work.

244 Ojuruko o'bi ira mbe raka.

The termites tried first to eat away the stone.

Expl: The termites gave up biting a stone, only after they found the task impossible. People should tackle difficult tasks before surrendering to them.

245 E ka le ope oce, mi oce a'u raka; mi nga ope oce ndo.

If you want to guard guinea-fowls, guard hens first; you will guard guinea-fowls afterwards.

Expl: One should first do what is within one's capacity, leaving complex undertakings to some later time.

246 Oku ari mva si 'de ku.

A woman does not get tired with children.

Expl: Notwithstanding pains and labour, a woman continues to beget and rear children. Everyone should equally endure in one's specific task.

247 Anyu su ni anyu ma zaapi.

Honey is the daughter of the bee.

Expl: Honey is found where the bees are, and to get it one must deal with them. One has to face dangers to obtain gratifying results.

248 Ei nda nda ka, eri ka amvu a ndo.

Unless earnestly looked for, it will not yield in the field.

Expl: It is only after an intensive cultivation that one's field gives its crop.

3 Food, The Result of Work



Proverb 249: Food is life

249 'Ba ma idri ta ni.

The life of a person is food.

Expl: Food is the guarantee of human life.

250 Enya ni 'ba 'a nje ni.

Food expands the stomach of a person.

Expl: Food is the only thing filling the stomach and making a person live.

251 Enya ni edri ma agofe ni.

Food is the supporting pole of life.

Expl: Food sustains life like the central pole of a traditional house supports its roof and keeps its structure together.²⁶

252 Enya ma agui yo.

Food has no friend.

Expl: Friendship has no value when it comes to food, as everyone has an equal right to it.

253 Ta ma juru yo.

Food has no foreigner.

Expl: Concerning food, there are no boundaries or divisions in the world, namely everybody is the same.

254 'A ni opi ku.

The stomach does not know a chief.

Expl: No discrimination can be effected with regard to food. Every person, whether high or low, is the same.

255 Nyaka si, amba yo.

Concerning food, there is no adult.

Expl: Food is needed by all, without discrimination.

256 Anji ei nya zozu, amba ei nya nguzu.

Children eat to grow, adults eat to fatten.

Expl: Children have a greater need for food than adults.²⁷ Thus, in the case of choice, priority should be given to feeding the children.

257 Acika 'bi'bia ma ta ru ni.

Smoke is the food of bats.

Expl: Bats prey on the insects driven into the air by the fires set to the grass, diving in the smoke that rises from the fires. This gives

²⁶ See footnote to proverb no. 2.

²⁷ Instead of *nguzu* (to fatten), variants of this proverb have *dezu* (to grow old) and *drazu* (to die).

the impression that bats feed on smoke. Human beings, on the other hand, feed on more substantial food earned through hard work.

258 'Ba ru nya kai kai ka, ayiko ndo.

People eat abundantly, then they are happy.

Expl: People cannot be really satisfied unless they have been properly nourished.

259 E tu anya tre dria.

You climbed on one full of millet.

Expl: You have overcome a strong person, strong for having eaten the substantial millet.

260 Nya ma nya mi yo.

The food should eat you instead.

Expl: A person should not allow food to have the better of him/her.

261 Apitre ni ta ma mva.

Satiety is the child of food.

Expl: Wellbeing is derived from proper nourishment.

262 Api tre laa raa ku.

A full stomach does not sleep overnight.

Expl: The satisfaction of having being properly fed fades by the following day. The need of food is constant.

263 Ndri eri anya ni.

Beauty is millet.

Expl: A proper nourishment, exemplified by millet, develops a healthy appearance.

264 Abiri apalako dria yo.

No hunger over the apalako.

Expl: The **apalako** is an elevated platform on which food is stored. When food is available on it, the fear of hunger is dispelled.

265 'Ba acipiri nya ni.

The one who walks eats.

Expl: The one who moves and bustles about has a better chance to find food than the one who sits and waits for it.

266 Eli 'ba nya ni.

It is the covetous who eats.

Expl: The covetous is able to eat because he/she daringly looks and asks for food.

267 A'u fe mva ni ku.

The hen does not give to its offspring.

Expl: A hen calls her chicks to the food but then she leaves it to them to pick it. A person is shown where the opportunity lies, but it is up to him/her to exploit it.

268 Bata fe kula mva ni ni.

The duck does not give to its offsprings.

Expl: Ducklings are left to struggle for food on their own. Human beings, on the other hand, should feed their children.

269 Busua ni nya 'ima so'bi si.

The cat eats with its tail.

Expl: Cats are said to be using their tails to catch their prey, waving it so as to divert the attention of their victims and thus catch them unawares. People should use all the abilities with which they are endowed, to achieve their good targets.

270 Apalako dria otuka yo.

There is no sunshine on the **apalako**.

Expl: The absence of sun on the platform (**apalako**) where food is kept implies that it is actually covered with food and that hunger is averted.

271 Nyaku ni 'ba piri ma andri ni.

The earth is the mother of all.

Expl: The earth produces the food to feed everyone.

272 Enya 'ba azi ma dra tia ri alu alu.

The food taken at a funeral is tasty.

Expl: The taste of food is not affected by the sorrowful circumstances.

273 Badigo mu dra ta ndua.

Badigo went to his death while going for food.

Expl: Having to look for food every time one needs it is inconvenient and dangerous.

274 Ocoo azi ava nyaka ocoo azi aleari si ku.

A dog will not play because of the food in the stomach of another dog.

Expl: A needy person is not satisfied because the needs of others have been attended to.

275 Enya mini ku, mi Aroi ni ya?

You do not eat, are you an Aroi?

Expl: The Aroi clan turned down an invitation to a meal, later to regret it. Such invitations should always be honoured.

276 I nya mini ku, midri koyo ya?

You do not eat, do you use a rattle?

Expl: The person who does not accept food is asked whether he/she gets better food by using the rattle. This is the instrument used by traditional doctors to diagnose sickness, for which they are then served a good meal.

277 'Ba nde 'ba yi vico si ku.

People do not refuse a request for water.

Expl: Water is a fundamental need. It can never be denied to anyone.²⁸

278 Ajiko aca ku; ajiko dra ra ya?

The pot has not arrived; is the pot broken?

Expl: The question relates to a delay in serving food.

279 Enya ako ni 'bu ma ta.

No eating is the food of the grave.

Expl: Lack of food ultimately leads to death.

280 Obalako 'du olufe ra.

The fox has taken away the stirring stick.

Expl: The alleged theft of the stirring stick by the fox implies an unexpected lack of food in the family.

281 Ocoo eniari la ru andru atiliko a ci.

A black dog lies today in the fireplace.

Expl: The presence of a dog in the hearth indicates that there is no fire in it and consequently no food in the family.

282 Abiri ili si ci ku.

²⁸ Instead of vico (desire), a variant of this proverb has adro (spirit).

The knife of hunger is not sharp.

Expl: Hunger may bring about death, but not suddenly as a sharp knife in the hands of a killer would do. Hunger should not cause havoc.

283 Apalako ma acofa enja'ba dri aku a yo.

In the home of the lazy, the **apalako** has no bulges.

Expl: Bulges on the platform (**apalako**) where food is kept indicate that the platform is fully loaded and hunger is thus averted.

284 Abiri nya ze.

Hunger eats faeces.

Expl: The possibility of being driven to feed on faeces reminds people of the need to work hard for one's food.

285 Abiri ni amba ku.

Hunger does not know an elder.

Expl: Hunger affects everyone, also the respected elder.

286 Apalako dria embilika ze yo.

No faeces of the **embilika** lizard on the **apalako**.

Expl: The lizard (**embilika**) goes where food is. Its absence on the platform (**apalako**) where food is kept indicates absence of food resulting in hunger.

287 Apalako dri iniru.

The top of the **apalako** is dark.

Expl: Darkness on the platform (**apalako**) where food is kept implies that food cannot be seen on it and consequently there is hunger.

IV PROPERTY

The right to property is deeply felt. Lack of respect for it, and particularly theft, is unconditionally condemned. "Theft and poison are sisters" (353). By equating theft to poison, one states the unconditional and severe disapproval of the former, as the poisoner automatically deserves death. The sensitivity to the issue of property

emerges also from the belief in **adra**, a power that acts in defence of property, striking thieves with sickness and also with death.²⁹ Lack of property, resulting in a condition of poverty, is feared and avoided, although the poor person is never marginalized. In Lugbara society, property is quite exposed and security measures cannot be entirely adequate. Homes are fairly distant from each other and property such as household implements and domestic animals could be stolen. The community reacts to this possibility through intense education of strict respect for the property of others. This education emphasises the far-reaching consequences of uncontrolled and greedy behaviour unless it is checked in time. Proverbs are an effective instrument of this education.

1 Ownership

288 Afa 'ipi dri kulu.

The head of the owner is big.

Expl: The right of ownership gives ample power over one's property.

289 Afa 'ipi ni afa ma orindi ni.

The owner of things is the soul of things.

Expl: The relationship between the owner and his/her property is wide and deep. The owner is one with his/her property and the property with its owner.

290 Anyu turuari 'ipia ni.

The honey of the beehive belongs to the owner.

Expl: The owner of the beehive owns the honey as well. A person has a right to whatever his/her property yields.

291 'Ba afu ope aiza baka 'ipi be ku.

One does not contend for a trapped guinea-fowl with the owner of the trap.

Expl: The owner has a right to whatever his/her property yields.

292 Angu 'ipi ako ni yo.

There is no land without an owner.

²⁹ See footnote to proverb no. 319.

Expl: Any stretch of land may have someone claiming some right over it. Issues related to land need to be dealt with carefully.

293 Nyaa 'bori, nyaa 'bori.

The already eaten is already eaten.

Expl: Whatever is at hand is better than any other distant possibility.

294 Gaari pamvo ci, yori pamvo yo.

The small leaves footmarks, the absent leaves no footmarks.

Expl: The little which is at hand is better than whatever is not available.



Proverb 295: The cost of honey

295 Anu za mbeela ri ti.

The bee stings the lips licking the honey.

Expl: The owner may experience some inconveniences from his/her property.

296 Ti co 'i 'ipi ra.

The cow struck its owner.

Expl: Property can cause serious problems for its owner.

297 **E'bu abe ni 'i ma 'ipi kumu sii ra.**

The handle of the hoe hits the knee of the owner.

Expl: Besides the benefits, one may derive drawbacks from one's property.

298 **Ndri fu otaku aci a.**

A goat knocked down the pot on the fire.

Expl: A person should take care of his/her household property.

299 **Ngungu a ti fu Ngungu ra.**

Ngungu's cow gored Ngungu.

Expl: One should handle one's property carefully as there are dangers deriving from it.

300 **E'yo ni 'bandre ni nde inia-agaa.**

Things overcome the hard-working woman at midnight.

Expl: The dedicated senior wife ('bandre³⁰), though hard working and foresighted, may still be in need of something. No matter how much one has, there may always be something one still needs.

301 **E'yo ni opi nde indi.**

Something overcomes the chief too.

Expl: Nobody is so powerful and rich as not to be sometimes in need of something or of someone.

302 **Sindani nde opi.**

A needle overcomes a chief.

Expl: No matter how much people possess, nobody is entirely self-sufficient.

303 **Manio ndu mbiliri oli ti kari.**

A bull with bony buttocks brings a young cow.

Expl: A meagre property may yield precious returns.

304 **Oriovu nya anjia.**

³⁰ 'Bandre (namely 'ba andre "mother of men") refers to a married woman with remarkable qualities and an outstanding social position. She is usually a first or senior wife. In most cases her bride-wealth has been provided by the brothers of her husband thus giving a stronger position to her marriage-contract. The 'bandre is epitomized as being hard working, thrifty, efficient and wise. This in turn gives her an authoritative position in the family and in society.

The small basket has eaten the large basket.

Expl: A small possession may bring about large profits.

305 Uri ovunga oli ovu andre.

The small basket of Uri changed into a mother's basket.

Expl: A person called Uri gained a bigger basket than the one he had lost. The property of others needs careful handling as eventual damages may have to be defrayed expensively.

306 Opi je 'ima karia ti su si.

The chief bought his bicycle with four cows.

Expl: The person responsible for the loss of the chief's old bicycle had to compensate it with four cows. The property of others needs attentive care, especially when the owner is an important person.

307 Ti ndu mbiliri oli karii.

A cow with pointed buttocks is compensated by a heifer.

Expl: Thefts or damages are not repaid by mere restitution. They are compensated with something more than their material equivalent.

308 Ei gurunya sa afikoa si.

They cultivate the crocodile scales with a crock.

Expl: The scales of the crocodile refer to its skin which in turn symbolizes wealth. The crock indicates a humble instrument. People can obtain wealth through humble means.

309 Mi nzu ma eti li.

You cut the root of the melon.

Expl: You destroyed the source of your income. In fact, one picks the melon without cutting its root.

310 Anyu ni 'ba odu su si.

The bee stings people on account of the honey.

Expl: Rich people are as assiduous and aggressive as bees in protecting their property.

311 Mifi aza 'ba ta ku.

The pain in the eye does not last.

Expl: Simply looking at the property of others does not cause any harm to it or to its owners.

312 Afa mini ku ri onji.

What is not yours is bad.

Expl: Depending on the property of others is not good. It may land one in problems.

313 'Ba azi afa oluo-oci.

The things of others are the **oluo** thorns.

Expl: Handling the things of others is like handling the thorns of the **oluo** tree (*Erythrina abyssinica*).

314 'Ba azi ma afa eki nya si kala alu dria.

They eat the things of others on one side of the mouth.

Expl: What others give is generally so little that it can be chewed just on one side of the mouth.

315 'Ba azi ma ti ku alo.

The cow of another left the peg.

Expl: When the property of different people is managed together (like cattle, for instance), the tendency is to see to it that it is the property of others which is damaged, not one's own.

316 Esekese ebi arawu ajilako ti.

The birdlime sticks to the mouth of the monkey.

Expl: The repeated requests by a lender to have his/her property back sticks to his/her mouth like birdlime, preventing him/her from attending to better tasks, like conversing or singing.

317 Banja ngu ku.

A loan does not decay.

Expl: A loan remains ever fresh and effective until it is settled.

318 E ka deno le, mi ma emu drusi.

If you want a loan, come tomorrow.

Expl: One avoids taking up a loan by discouraging the other from entering into debt.

319 Ogu afa adra ka ku.

Stolen property does not provoke the **adra**.

Expl: **Adra** is a power that guards one's property.³¹ But property acquired through illegitimate means, like theft, is not protected by **adra**. One cannot claim full rights over illegitimate property.

³¹ **Adra** is a power owned by some people who act in defence of their property. If someone steals from an owner of **adra**, the latter strikes the thief with sickness and sometimes also with death. **Adra** is generally inherited although there are ways to acquire

320 Robia ma arujo yo.

Money has no prison.

Expl: Money cannot be locked up. It ought to circulate freely among people.

321 Robia ma wa'di yo.

Money has no relations.

Expl: When dealing with money, kinship relations become secondary.

322 Robia mifi ci tu.

The eyes of money are very sharp.

Expl: Money sees the way by which to escape. It is very difficult to control it.

323 Robia ma aji to.

Money is very sweet.

Expl: Money is highly desired and cherished.

324 Robia ni Adroa azi ni.

Money is another God.

Expl: Money draws the kind of veneration attributed to the divinity.

325 Robia oka 'ba dii badaru ku.

Not everyone can forge money.

Expl: It is very difficult for people to make or to obtain money.

2 Poverty**326 Alio dra anyu si.**

The poor dies of weariness.

Expl: Weariness accompanies the poor until his/her death.

327 Alio ndu bureru.

The poor man's buttocks are exposed.

Expl: Besides want, poverty brings about humiliations too.

328 Alio to lico ku.

The poor does not set up a home.

it from those who already own it. Owners of **adra** build a small shrine to it where the offerings to the **adra** are placed.

329 Alio si, alio ni la jo a a'dule.

Because of poverty, the poor sleeps alone in his house.

Expl: The poor cannot afford the bride-wealth. He will remain unmarried and spend his nights and life alone.



Proverb 330: Children of the poor

330 Alio ma enya eri luulu.

The food of the poor is cries.

Expl: The poor hears the lament of his/her hungry children around him/her. This anguish is what the poor feeds on, so to speak.

331 Alio ri ndu dri.

Poverty sits on the buttocks.

Expl: When poverty comes, it tends to sit or to settle with a person.

332 Alio bi 'ba si ku.

Poverty does not stick to people.

Expl: Poverty can be shaken off and overcome.

333 Alio o'a eli mudri ku.

Poverty does not last for ten years.

Expl: One who is determined can eventually prevail over his/her

condition of poverty.

334 Alio oraa okpo ni.

The medicine of poverty is strength.

Expl: Sreuous work can gradually help one to overcome one's state of poverty.

335 Onjiri nya anyu si.

The poor eats with simsim.

Expl: The proverb may mean that the poor cannot afford expensive additives to his/her food, but only the ordinary simsim, or it may mean that the poor, who works hard, can have the appreciated ingredient of simsim in his/her food.

336 Alio nya nuru.

The poor eats thoroughly.

Expl: Due to his/her habitual want, the poor tends to exploit fully the chance he/she has to benefit from food and other opportunities.

337 Yori fe ku.

The dispossessed (or the absent) does not give.

Expl: The proverb may refer to the dispossessed person, who cannot give, as he/she has nothing, or to the absent one, who equally cannot give, as he/she is not around to do so.

338 Odikodi kpo 'i oloo fe ru.

The odikodi leans itself on the sycamore tree.

Expl: The parasitical dependence of the odikodi plant (*Ficus species*) on the sycamore (*Ficus gnaphalocarpa*) typifies a precarious and unreliable condition that should be avoided.

339 Ma mani ru yereo le mbee ya?

I for myself, do I drink the milk of the kob?

Expl: Why do you deprive me of everything? A kob [antelope] does not give milk for human consumption.

340 Alio ma ti ni lario bi nya.

The cow of the poor eats the leaf of the bark cloth tree.

Expl: The leaves of the bark cloth tree (*Ficus natalensis*) give vitality. The property of the poor will eventually grow and multiply.

3 Theft

341 Oguo ma dri ezuuru.

The arms of a thief are long.

Expl: Constant attention against theft is needed as thieves are able to reach anywhere.

342 Oguo ma drileba yo.

No luck for a thief.

Expl: The activities of a thief do not pay, even when they may appear profitable at first.

343 Oguo ma pa aliaru.

The legs of a thief are short.

Expl: A thief cannot run very far. He/she will soon be caught.

344 Gbuluku 'ba odroo 'ba azi ma afa si odro odro.

The ground-hornbill chases people for the property of others.

Expl: The ground-hornbill stands for authority. When things are stolen, the authorities inevitably look for the thief.

345 Adra jo bi Yangi ni ra.

The shrine of adra caught Yangi.

Expl: Adra is a power that defends against thieves and that caught also a person called Yangi, confirming once again the uselessness of theft.³²

346 'Ba ugu ma afa nya ari tro si a.

A person eats stolen things with blood on his/her teeth.

Expl: Blood on the teeth indicates anxiety and fear. A thief cannot relish what he/she has stolen.

347 Oguo ma wa'di eni ni.

The relative of the thief is the night.

Expl: Vigilance against theft is particularly necessary at night.

348 Emve ni uguo ma enyata ni.

Light is the poison of thieves.

Expl: Thieves operate in darkness. Light reveals them.

349 Mumua ni 'ba fe adre uguo ru.

³² See footnote to proverb no. 319.

Doing things secretly makes people thieves.

Expl: Lack of transparency encourages people to steal.

350 Oguo ta ru 'i jezu.

A thief humbles himself/herself to become acceptable.

Expl: A thief behaves obsequiously to be more effective in his/her stealing.



Proverb 347: The hour of the thief

351 Obalako pa ca abi rua ku.

The fox does not reach the wall.

Expl: In its thievery, the fox does not approach the walls of the home to avoid making itself heard. All thieves are equally stealthy.

352 Oguo ma onyofi ezuuru.

The thief's fingernails are long.

Expl: Long fingernails imply evil. One, for instance, could hide poison under them. "Long nails are the blade of death" (537).

353 Ogu pi enyanya pie amvi azi.

Theft and poison are sisters.

Expl: Theft and poison are equally detested as indicated by the violent reaction of people against thieves and poisoners when these are discovered.³³

³³ Poison is generally extracted from snakes, the euphorbia tree and some organs of the digestive system in animals. It is administered in food and drink, through skin contact and by magic. One cannot obtain all the facts about poison as everything related to it tends to be kept secret.

354 Mi osu ma ogu 'bi si ku.

Do not dress me with the feathers of theft.

Expl: Nobody wants to be involved in a situation of theft. Even the mere suspicion of it is feared and avoided.

355 Obau ma cere vu yo.

The hyena has no cere.

Expl: Cere is a shrill call used as an alarm cry. A hyena does not sound it as nobody would go to the rescue of a thief.

356 Zitaa ovuni onzi ku; onziri ogu ni.

Asking is not bad; what is bad is stealing.

Expl: A polite request for things is correct. One should not feel ashamed to request or be irritated by the requests of others. It is taking without asking which is bad.

357 Elifiri adra ka ku.

Covetousness does not provoke the adra.

Expl: Adra is a power protecting against thieves.³⁴ Covetousness does not draw the punishing effects of the adra, because it is not as bad as theft.

4 Greed

358 "Ca-ku" api ku la ni.

"Not-enough" is never satisfied.

Expl: Caku, meaning "Not-enough", has become the personal name given to the greedy person to indicate his/her character.

359 Ca ku ca ku si, 'ba pa ni oro oro.

Not enough not enough, a person's legs become stiff.

Expl: The greedy person, in his/her insatiable roaming around to look for things, develops sore legs.

360 E ji si 'ba azi afa si ku.

Do not sharpen your teeth for the things of others.

Expl: Do not eagerly long for the things of others.

361 Elifiri ko 'ba ma aza ku.

³⁴ See footnote to proverb no. 319.

Covetousness helps no one.

Expl: The greedy person helps neither himself/herself nor the others by parasitically longing for the things of others.

362 Elifiri ni 'ba dro aci a.

Covetousness drives a person into fire.

Expl: The one who gives in to greed, lands himself/herself in serious trouble.

363 Atiliko aci ve elifiri 'i.

The fire of the hearth burned the covetous.

Expl: The person greedily seeking in the cooking pot for food ended up being burned by the fire of the hearth.

364 Elifiri si ba ni ocoo ki.

To look for something greedily befits dogs.

Expl: Covetousness is typical of dogs and unbecoming to human beings.

365 Dria dria odroo ni o'bokoa oli ya?

One after another, is it the rat taking the cucumber?

Expl: A rat returns repeatedly to the cucumber (*Cucumis melo*) of which it is very fond. Some people eagerly exploit an opportunity even when there is no real need for it.

366 Gudi gudi a si, Alioa mbe a'u-ze.

By returning again, Alioa licked the droppings of a hen.

Expl: Seeking advantages from the same persons time and again may lead to humiliating consequences.

367 Oye la si, i nya andra ma ndri.

You once ate my goat for nothing.

Expl: Having already freely benefited from a person, one should not return to beg from him/her again.

368 Mifi api ku la ni.

The eye is never satisfied.

Expl: People, instead, should reach a point when they rest satisfied with what they have.

369 A'di ni dra mi enyata si ni ya?

Who can die of your poison?

Expl: What you give is so little that, if it were poison, it would not be enough to cause death.

370 'Ba 'di su omvule si.

People push this through the nose.

Expl: What is being offered is too little in comparison to what is expected.

371 Za si mbaza.

Meat burst an elder.

Expl: An uncontrolled greed for food can have disastrous effects also on elders.



Proverb 372: The eager hyena

372 Elifiri si etu vee obau ni kai.

Because of greed, the sun scorched the hyena.

Expl: Greed kept the hyena under a scorching sun, waiting for the lion to finish its meal so as to have the leftovers.

373 Etu fu obau ni ori ti.

The sun scourged the hyena near the ancestral shrine.

Expl: Greed kept the hyena under the scorching sun waiting around the ancestral shrine for the remnants of the communal meal shared at it.³⁵

³⁵ Ori are the ancestral spirits and their shrines. Offerings are made at their shrines on particular occasions, which every member of the clan makes a point of being present at. The main part of the offering is an animal sacrificed for this purpose. Some parts of it are placed at the shrine and the rest is consumed at a communal meal on the spot. The ceremony usually takes the whole day.

374 Obau ga gombere uma ku.

The hyena does not refuse the rotten hide.

Expl: The greedy one takes anything, no matter how mean, to satisfy his/her greed.

375 Obau ti opaku ni.

The hyena swallowed the **opaku**.

Expl: The **opaku** is a round piece of quartz used for grinding. Greed for food made the hyena swallow the **opaku** as well.

376 Nyaa lii ojii ra.

Eating got the baboon right.

Expl: Urged by gluttony, the baboon reached out for a fruit on the extreme end of a branch, but fell from the tree to its death.

377 Ta ma pa yo; ta njuu ku.

Food has no legs; food cannot escape.

Expl: Greedy people eat hastily as if the food were about to flee from them.

378 Eri anya mbee njenje le.

He/she eats millet like a grasshopper.

Expl: Grasshoppers are observed to devour voraciously the young millet.

379 'Ba azia ta si, mi ti ombe rali rali.

You lick your mouth for the food of others all the time.

Expl: One should not nourish an incessant desire for the food of others.

380 Ma eya nga yamanaka si.

I got only the content of the stomach.

Expl: I was left with a meagre part of the animal due to the greed of others.

V PROBLEMS

Proverbs arise from a life experience that has being wisely pondered upon in its problematic aspects. The problem is a question and the proverb attempts an answer. The most serious problems are those affecting the community, and specifically those that undermine its

cohesion. There are, however, personal problems too, but it is actually difficult to distinguish between communal and personal problems. Both have their term of reference in the person who is intensely social and who can say, "I am because we are and, since we are, therefore I am".³⁶ Proverbs help people to understand that problems are a natural component of life and that everyone has a way to overcome them.

1 Community Problems

381 Aci were ve jo ndulu.

A small fire burned the entire house.

Expl: Limited or personal issues can develop into community problems, if they are not controlled in time.

382 Alaka ni baka ku.

The **alaka** grass does not know the string.

Expl: The fire burns both the **alaka** grass (*Hyperhenia rufa*) and the string that ties it in a bundle. A burning problem may extend to involve friends and foes alike.

383 "Awa-ru-'bo" ma si ekaru.

"Already-divided" has red teeth.

Expl: **Awa-ru-'bo**, meaning "Already-divided", has become the name of the person who has destroyed harmony in the community. Such person is as unwanted as red teeth.

384 Odrukudru aluri ini yi mifi woro.

A single frog dirties the entire surface of the water.

Expl: A single person can be enough to soil the whole community, bringing about confusion in it.

385 Omurumu ze ngu iri.

Many faeces together smell badly.

Expl: When misunderstandings and misdeeds accumulate in a community, the result is disgusting.

386 E'yo nde ku ni 'ba-'bu-a ki.

³⁶ J.S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London, Heinemann, 1990 (II Ed.), p. 209.

Issues do not overcome people in the grave.

Expl: Those who are alive, on the other hand, need to be prepared to face the problems of life.



Proverb 382: A bundle and its string

387 Drimu si, 'ba ni kolikolia agori ku.

When together, people do not know the male pied wagtail.

Expl: When people mix casually, it is difficult to distinguish the good and the bad among them.

388 Alibo pa eka ni emi 'alea 'dia ci ya?

Is there a red-legged partridge among you?

Expl: A red-legged partridge is rare and it refers to the presence of a stranger in the family. The proverb asks quarrelling brothers whether a stranger has meddled in their midst causing the present disagreement.

389 'Ba o'a oce andresi, adreni ti andresi ku.

People stay with a mother-dog, not with a mother-cow.

Expl: However, it should not be like this. People should associate with the good (mother-cow), not with the bad (mother-dog).

390 Mi abindu 'ba ri ku 'dini; mi andru ni ya?

People do not sit under your verandah; are you a deserted home (**andru**)?

Expl: Visitors avoid the home of unsociable people. **Andru** is the name of a home that people have abandoned to move to a new site.

391 **'Ba azi ma rua ri eri onya efifi ni.**

What is found on other people are numerous termites.

Expl: Some people are fond of picking on the shortcomings of others, as they would do with scattering termites.

392 **Onya si 'ima 'biko vulea.**

Termites cast their wings behind.

Expl: People lose their good name "behind", namely through backbiting.

393 **Zee ni onyu ma ta.**

Faeces is the food of flies.

Expl: Some people like to dwell on the defects of others like flies resting on faeces.

394 **Onyukunyu ni lulu gaa afa maza si.**

The fly gives the alarm on finding waste.

Expl: The alarm is the result of a joyful discovery. Some people rejoice when coming across the shortcomings of others.

395 **Olulua si, nyaa ni 'ba wi nje nje.**

Because of reporting, the ferocious beast takes off people's arms.

Expl: The ferocious beast is a bugbear to discourage unwarranted reporting about others.

396 **O'duo onyofi ku 'ba ku.**

The claws of a leopard do not spare people.

Expl: One needs to be on guard against the cruelty of some people who will have no pity for those whom they clasp.

397 **Oleeo ni bolo imve su agui ma dra a.**

The sorcerer dances with a white whisk at his/her friend's funeral.

Expl: The white whisk is a sign of joy and dancing with it at a funeral is unbecoming. It is only the sorcerer who rejoices over the misfortunes of others.

398 **Otu 'di nga Ombaki ayizo be.**

This sun is still dividing the Omba clan.

Expl: The Omba clan is numerous and a quarrel with it takes long to settle. The existing division indicates that there is an unsettled quarrel somewhere.

399 Angu-aza oji 'baki lurudri woro.

The world recession has taken people anywhere.

Expl: Major disasters force people to migrate at random, without the possibility of planning ahead.

2 Personal Problems

400 E'yo 'de ku la a'u ma rua.

Problems do not affect a chicken.

Expl: A person, on the other hand, should be concerned about the issues of life.

401 Eri nga mini Eti nguku aja le 'di.

It is still moving around Mount Eti for you.

Expl: Although the problem seems to have disappeared, it will eventually affect you again.

402 Alutuku ni enga o'di o'di.

The *alutuku* germinates anew.

Expl: The *alutuku* (*Phaseolus lunatus*), a creeping bean plant, withers during the dry season to sprout again with the coming of the wet season. Unless problems are solved once and for all, they will keep reappearing time and again.

403 E'yo ni mi ji kpere Ebio ma rua tia.

The problem will take you up to Ebio's body.

Expl: A small problem may develop to gigantic proportions. Ebio is the name of the giant in Lugbara stories.

404 Ali tu fe ku; ali tu 'ba 'i oo piri.

Trouble does not climb a tree; trouble climbs the person causing it.

Expl: Troubles are found with troublemakers themselves, nowhere else.

405 Anu ni esekeleti ku.

The bee does not know boundaries.

Expl: Bees fly anywhere and they sting anybody. Problems affect everybody, everywhere.

406 E'yo mbe ma tibi woro.

The issue has eaten up my sauce.

Expl: The sauce (**tibi**) is the best part of the meal. The problem in question has consumed the best of one's substance.

407 E'yo mbe ma ti woro.

The issue has eaten up all my cows.

Expl: The problem being considered has depleted the entire wealth of a person.

408 Ewa onyo eja 'i ozozu.

The elephant broke firewood to roast itself.

Expl: A person has brought about his/her own misfortune.

409 A'uata iriri ovu ni aku aluri ma ti a ku.

Two cocks do not stay in one home.

Expl: Two strong characters cannot live together in the same community.

410 Ndri koki o'doo be koro a alu ku.

Goats do not sleep with leopards in the same shed.

Expl: Incompatible characters cannot abide in the same community.

411 Acika ni mifi ma ari'bo.

Smoke is the enemy of the eye.

Expl: Some persons are incompatible with one another, as smoke is to the eyes.

412 Eri ye uu mi ndua ra.

It will resound on your buttocks.

Expl: People who pretend to avoid problems will eventually be affected by them in a humiliating manner.

413 Mi nga ondi ama ngukua 'do mbe ra.

You will lick the dirt on my back.

Expl: You will have your share of sorrow and humiliation one day.

414 Onji ni nga mi pamvo bi ra.

The evil you have done follows your footsteps.

Expl: The effects of one's evil are going to be felt later on in one's life.

415 E'yo onji ni 'ii ma pamvu obi.

Evil follows the footsteps of the owner.

Expl: The consequences of evil endure in the life of its perpetrator.



Proverb 411: Smoke in the eyes

416 Olulua ni 'ba ti mbe mbe.

The accusation gnaws the mouth of the person.

Expl: Accusations backfire against the accuser.

417 Dri ondi ma azi onzi.

A dirty hand does a bad work.

Expl: A person with a dirty record cannot be counted upon to perform a clean job.

418 Eji ma orodri ewa yi ni.

The result of the light, second beer is watery beer.

Expl: From the leftovers of the genuine beer, a lighter type of beer is derived. A further extraction from the latter would merely give watery beer. The behaviour of a person can never be better than he/she actually is.

419 Odia ni nga mi ze ebi eji ra.

The umber bird will bring back your faeces.

Expl: The evil you have done will rebound on you.

420 Oso ni ti nyaku a ra.

Fat can spill on the ground.

Expl: Precious things can be wasted. One should not make a problem of it.

421 Ajufe gba eri ni.

The spear-shaft knocked him/her.

Expl: It was not the iron point of the spear but the shaft that hit him/her, namely the injury or the problem was slight.

422 Mi 'de onyukunyu ni o'de lesu a rile 'dini a'dosi ya?

Why do you come in as a fly falls into the milk?

Expl: Why do you enter suddenly and uninvited into our conversation or company?

423 Omve ru ceni onyukunyu ni.

The self-invited is a fly.

Expl: One should be satisfied with attending the occasions to which one is invited or properly expected to attend, avoiding intruding like a fly.

424 Ali ndandari abe ose.

Looking for troubles is a big club.

Expl: Seeking troubles is like bringing the blows of a club upon oneself.

425 Ali ndandari si ta ocoo ki.

Looking for troubles befits dogs.

Expl: Roaming dogs end up fighting among themselves and causing trouble.

426 Ali angu owi ti.

The place of trouble dawns in vain.

Expl: A person vexed by persistent problems waits in vain for the dawn to come and put an end to them.

3 Mastering Problems

427 **Cilocilo so aku a.**

The limping one reached home.

Expl: As a lame person reaches home step by step, people will overcome their problems one by one.

428 **Ovaa ni 'i pa ongu si.**

The dikdik gazelle saves itself by fleeing.

Expl: Everyone has a way to extricate himself/herself from difficult situations.



Proverb 429: The grasshopper's escape

429 **Puruo pa ru cuke si.**

The grasshopper saved itself by its claws.

Expl: Each person has his/her own means by which to solve problems and to overcome difficulties.

430 **Bura ma 'ee ocuke.**

The arrows of the cat are its claws.

Expl: Cats have claws for attack and defence as people have their arrows to do so. Every person has his/her own manner to master problematic situations.

431 Obalako ni tu si molo a ra.

The fox knows how to climb up to the poultry-pen.

Expl: A person manages to overcome difficulties when he/she has an interest in doing so.

432 Ti fe 'ii ni dra ali a ku.

The mouth does not allow its owner to die in trouble.

Expl: By speaking and relating to others, a person is able to overcome his/her problems.

433 O'du kali su ni nga ca ra.

The fortieth day will arrive.

Expl: Lugbara Moslems mourn their dead for forty days. The fortieth day concludes the period of grief and it is, at the same time, a reminder that sorrows and difficulties come to an end.

434 Angu owiza eri katoa ni.

The dawn is a katoa.

Expl: The dawn keeps producing new days and, with the passing of time, problems will fade. **Katoa** is a female animal that breeds frequently.

435 Ega ti asi ru ni.

It is only the edge of the calabash that has cracked.

Expl: The mishap is insignificant and one should not worry about it.

436 Yabi aluri si, jo ra ku.

For one blade of the yabi grass, the house does not leak.

Expl: A single blade of yabi grass (*Imparata cylindricum*) missing from the roof does not cause it to leak. Not all is lost because something has gone amiss.

437 Obi fu ru ku.

The pot is not broken.

Expl: Following some accident involving household effects, one comes to discover that the main pot is still intact. Hence, not everything is lost.

438 Yi adadri vule ku ni.

It is flowing water that does not return.

Expl: People, on the other hand, can return to past situations and change, if necessary.

439 Odru na aju 'i mva rua.

The buffalo dodged its spear into its offspring.

Expl: The buffalo avoided the spear which hit its offspring. Some people avoid problems but at the expense of their children.

440 Ojoo ku dra 'ivele aku a mu koyo ya 'ba azi veleri a.

The doctor left sickness in his/her home and went to shake the rattle in another home.

Expl: The rattle is used by the traditional doctor to diagnose illness and to cure it. But the doctor as well as any other person should be concerned about his/her domestic problems before attending to those of others.

441 Bile mi rua ri azo ma rua ku.

The wound on you does not pain me.

Expl: A person does not feel the sufferings and problems of another unless the other person manifests them.

442 Ei emi ti se elaki si.

They shall fence you with the **elaki** shrub.

Expl: Your evildoing needs to be fenced with the thorny **elaki** shrub (*Zizyphus abyssinica*), namely it needs to be effectively contained.³⁷

443 Oye la Ko'bo 'i.

Nothing, it was Ko'bo's case.

Expl: The problem of a person called Ko'bo went unattended, but the present case will have the reaction it deserves.

444 Ali akori nya wangi.

Without troubles, one eats the year.

Expl: The person who does not seek or cause troubles enjoys a long life.

³⁷ Instead of the **elaki** shrub, a variant of this proverb has the **asaro** tree (*Acacia sieberiana/tortilis*), a tree with long thorns used for fencing.

VI THE HUMAN CONDITION

In pondering over the life situation, one of the first aspects of which a person becomes aware is its diversity, particularly in people. People differ in their specific character as every cock has its specific crow, every bird its song, every fox its cry and every butterfly its colour. People should be known and accepted for what each of them is in his/her emotions, fears, joys, and general ways of acting and reacting. Proverbs emphasize the need to accept the facts of life with realism.

The most challenging aspect of life is its end, namely death. The phenomenon is inevitable and indiscriminatory. There is no immediate answer to this challenge, except, as proverbs suggest, to let death come the manner it does, gathering courage to face it. After all, when "One person dies, all persons are not finished" (542).

1 Personal Characteristics

445 A'uata aiki kokoru ni yo.

There is no cock without a comb.

Expl: Every person has specific traits that constitute his/her personal identity.

446 A'uata ma cere a'uata ma obi.

The crow of the cock is its characteristic.

Expl: Everyone has certain characteristics that indicate his/her personality.³⁸

447 Aria ma a'anga ayia le ndundu.

The voice of birds in the wilderness varies.

Expl: People differ in their words and ideas. Variety, rather than uniformity, is the rule here.

448 Obalako ma cere ayia le ndundu.

The cry of foxes in the wilderness varies.

Expl: Each person has his/her characteristic ways of communicating that distinguish him/her from others.

³⁸ Instead of cere (crow), a variant of this proverb has *pirikici* (spur).

449 Alapapa pia obi ndundu tre.

There are different types of butterflies.

Expl: As the variety of butterflies adds to the beauty of nature, so does that of people, which therefore should be accepted.

450 Odoo ma gbete ndo yo.

The colour of the *odoo* plant never changes.

Expl: As the *odoo* (*Vitex, doniana*) keeps fundamentally the same colour, so do people. One should not expect radical changes in them.



Proverb 449: Varied butterflies

451 I'bii niipi yi wesi ku ni yo.

There is no fish that does not know how to swim.

Expl: All fish are able to swim. All human beings are the same and have the same fundamental abilities.

452 Aria oja 'i jo obi ku.

A bird does not change the way it builds its nest.

Expl: People do not change their basic behaviour and habits.

453 Endrekendre 'i gbete oja angu vusi.

A chameleon changes its colour according to the place.

Expl: People, on the other hand, should maintain a stable character and stick to principles.

454 Oce ci 'ima so'bi ceni ku.

A dog does not bite its own tail.

Expl: A person cannot harm himself/herself or accept to be hurt by others.

455 Ocoo nyaa 'i zee ceni ku.

A dog does not eat its faeces.

Expl: People do not like to return to or to be reminded of their shortcomings.

456 Obalako aji ngu 'ini ceni ku.

A fox does not feel its own smell.

Expl: People are not aware of their defects and they do not easily acknowledge them.

457 Tile nya afa onzi ku.

The mouth does not eat what is bad.

Expl: A person refuses whatever is nasty, particularly pains and sorrows.

458 'Ba ti osu oku ma dria ku.

One does not place a bow in the hands of a woman.

Expl: The differentiation of roles in society demands that men and women be entrusted with their specific tasks.

459 Rua eri anya ma tibi.

The body is the sauce of the millet.

Expl: The body of the person is his/her essential component of life.

460 Rua ni laro ni.

The body is the bark cloth tree.

Expl: The bark cloth tree (*Ficus natalensis*) shoots anew every time it is cut. The human body has the same vitality, recovering whenever it is wounded.

2 Human Emotions

461 Ali aci ni anuu 'i si.

The fire of the **ali** shrub extinguishes by itself.

Expl: The **ali** (*Acacia hockii/gerrardii*) catches fire very quickly. The fire then dies out equally fast. The anger of some persons flares up easily but it soon subsides.

462 Omba dra ni.

Anger is death.

Expl: Anger leads to tragic consequences, including death itself.

463 Omba ma 'ee alu.

Anger has one arrow only.

Expl: Anger subsides quickly leaving one harmless, as if one had shot one's only arrow.

464 Aooko si, a'u ze ze molo a.

Through anger the fowl defecated in the poultry-pen.

Expl: A chicken remained in the poultry-pen, brooding over its grievances.³⁹ It ended up by defecating in it, thus making its condition more miserable.

465 Aooko so ti andrapi.

Anger killed a mother cow.

Expl: Anger may blind a person to the absurd extent of killing a mother cow.

466 Ori ni oku ma ibibiku ni.

Fear is the dress of women.

Expl: Fear is considered to be typical of women.

Expl: The coward turns his/her back to danger looking at it "with the back of the head", so to speak.

467 Orio apa 'i indrelendre si.

The coward fled from his/her shadow.

Expl: This is an ironic consideration of what fear can do to the coward.

468 Orio dra ajiko aci si.

The coward died from the heat of the cooking pot.

Expl: The coward seeks security near the fireplace, considered to be the spot where women and feeble old men usually stay.

³⁹ Instead of **aooko** (anger), variants of this proverb have **aza** (stupidity) and **omoko** (grudge).



Proverb 466: Fearing a caterpillar

469 Orio dra yi egbe si.

The coward died because of cold water.

Expl: A harmless element like cold water is enough to scare a coward to death.

470 Orio ndre opako si.

The coward sees with the back of the head.

471 Opasi ni vuleri ndree ni.

The back of the head sees behind.

Expl: The back of the head has no eyes by which to see. Yet - the ironic remark goes - the coward sees the danger behind, as he/she flees from it.

472 Ombaa vule, orio dria.

The fighter behind, the coward ahead.

Expl: The fighter stays behind to face danger, while the coward is ahead in his/her flight from it.

473 Asi mbaza ari adaza ni; orio dria ondi ga ni.

The courageous sheds blood; the coward sweats.

Expl: The courageous person who stands his/her ground and fights may be killed. The coward who runs away sweats in the flight. The

latter however survives, indicating that escape may sometimes be the better choice.⁴⁰

474 Mile ni orio ni.

The eye is a coward.

Expl: Anxiety is motivated by what the eye sees, namely by appearance. Such an impression should not be taken seriously.

475 I fe mi nya ndri ago si ku.

Do not give yourself to be eaten because of a he-goat.

Expl: A person should not fear and surrender to difficulties which could actually be a mere illusion.

476 Edria ni ci opasia be ya?

Does a blade sharpen behind one's back?

Expl: A blade cannot be sharpened while keeping it behind. A person who turns his/her back to a situation cannot know what is happening.

477 Drinja nya onde.

Shyness eats the nerve.

Expl: At a meal, the shy person may end up eating the nerve instead of the meat.

478 Drinja ri boroko dria.

Shyness sits in a miniature house (boroko).

Expl: The home of the shy person resembles the boroko, a very small and weakly built house.

479 Drinja si, okuku dra o'bo a.

Through shyness, the tortoise died in its own shell.

Expl: If the tortoise had overcome its shyness, it could have stuck its head and legs out of its shell and gone into the water to live there.

480 Drinja si ope dri si ra.

Through shyness the head of the guinea-fowl turned bald.

⁴⁰ This proverb has the following variant: Omba dria otu nguru; orio dria acika luru, namely "Above the courageous, a high grave mound; above the coward, a puffy column of smoke". The person who bravely fights, dies and is buried under a high mound while the coward survives to continue his/her peaceful life, symbolised by the column of smoke arising from the hearth at his/her home.

Expl: The guinea-fowl developed its baldness because it allowed itself to be overcome by shyness.

481 Opasi mifi yo.

The back of the head has no eyes.

Expl: As one cannot see behind one's back, one cannot subsequently feel guilty or ashamed over what one has not been aware of.

482 Opasi ma drinza yo.

The back of the head has no shame.

Expl: One is not ashamed of what one is not aware, since one cannot see behind one's back.

483 A'be ce 'ba dri fu ra.

Honey can tire people.

Expl: There is a limit to joys and pleasures.⁴¹

484 Arisi amgba aringa ayiko yo.

There is no joy in forced laughter.

Expl: A bereaved person cannot sincerely share the joys of others.

485 Drajo ma si mve agoi si.

The teeth of Drajo whiten because of his friends.

Expl: Drajo (a name meaning "House-of-death" because all his brothers and sisters are dead) is happy since his friends are around to console him.

3 Life Situations

486 Angu 'bu a ri yuku ani.

The heights are for kites.

Expl: Human beings should not aim at lofty conditions which they cannot achieve.

487 'Ba se rerea ope ocezari ni ku.

One does not set the trap for a tamed guinea-fowl.

Expl: One does not try to obtain what has already been achieved.

488 Mi adre wayio ka, mi obau 'di ndo.

First be a strong man, then you will kill the hyena.

⁴¹ Instead of a'be (honey) a variant of this proverb has ose (fat).

Expl: Before undertaking arduous tasks, one needs to prepare oneself for them very seriously.

489 Odrukudru ni atu yi dria ni.

It is only the frog that squats on water.

Expl: People should not try to imitate or to do what is impossible for them.

490 Ti alu 'bi okelea iri ku.

One mouth does not drink from two calabashes at once.

Expl: A person does not try to do two things at the same time.



Proverb 489: The frog's seat

491 Onyukunyu kini, "Ese la, e nga mi 'i".

The fly said, "Dear grasshopper, you fly".

Expl: The grasshopper insisted on teaching the fly how to fly. The fly cut things short by dismissing the grasshopper. Some people are overbearing.

492 Alapapa ji fura ku.

The butterfly does not yield flour.

Expl: One does not attempt to collect the powder from the wings of a butterfly as if it were flour. One should not try to do what is impossible.

493 Andrali ka sawa azia si ku.

It does not dew at midday.

Expl: The issue at stake is impossible, just like having dew at midday.

494 A sa do mani ari ndu.

I beat the bottom of the drum.

Expl: It was a useless attempt; the drum is beaten on the top.

495 E ka afa 'di de ra, dere edroo ci okuku.

If you finish this thing, then the rat has perhaps bitten the tortoise.

Expl: As a rat does not bite the shell of a tortoise, likewise what is being undertaken is not going to be accomplished.

496 Ma ga e'yo 'di ma so'bi ra.

Let the tail of this affair be cut.

Expl: Let the affair be concluded once and for all.

497 Ope dri potoko ni.

The head of the guinea-fowl is **potoko**.

Expl: **Potoko** is a hard patch of soil. What is being undertaken is hard, demanding time and energy to solve.

498 Paale tu ku ni 'bu ni.

A foot cannot climb the sky.

Expl: The sky may not be reached but the envisaged goal can instead be achieved.

499 Yere ma mva pa ni mba amve ni.

The legs of the baby kob are strong outside.

Expl: A young kob [antelope] stands on its legs shortly after birth. For a human being, on the other hand, this is impossible.

500 Yi ni raa ango daliari si.

Water flows along the depression.

Expl: The laws of nature have an unchanging continuity and determinism.

501 'Di ndri afu ni.

This is a goat's fight.

Expl: The event or issue at stake is irrelevant.

502 'Di si, ama si mve ku.

By this, my teeth do not whiten.

Expl: It is an undesirable event.

503 'Diri ocoo avita ni.

This is the playing of dogs.

Expl: The occurrence is unbecoming for human beings.

504 Emi avanga o'doo avanga.

Your playing is the playing of a leopard.

Expl: Your behaviour is rough and violent.

505 Ocoo ma avita onzi.

The playing of dogs is bad.

Expl: The conduct of some people resembles that of dogs that usually ends in a fight.

506 Onji ocogo Paracari.

The bad one is the dog of Paraca.

Expl: The dogs from the Paraca clan are believed to be useless in their function, like guarding property or hunting game. On the other hand, the person or action referred to by the proverb is valuable and appreciated.

507 Ovaa mva ndre 'i vule ku ni.

It is the young of the dikdik gazelle that does not look back.

Expl: The young dikdik gazelle has its mother to guard it. Human beings, on the other hand, should look after themselves.

508 De ma omba alu.

Old age has one month.

Expl: People become old very fast.

509 Ocuke asari dra ma goli ni.

Long nails are the blade of death.

Expl: Poisoners are believed to be hiding poison under their long nails (352).⁴²

510 **'Ba enakina be ri ma edre 'i'dia anyaki.**

The tongue of the poisoner is his/her bait.

Expl: The affable words of the poisoner attract the person whom he/she then poisons.

511 **Enakina ni gala'ba ma anyaki.**

Poison is the bait of the poisoner.

Expl: The poisoner uses poison with the same dexterity with which fishermen operate their bait.

512 **Enakina'ba ni o'du ku.**

A poisoner does not know sleep.

Expl: The pernicious activity of the poisoner does not give him/her rest.

513 **Enakina ni wa'di ku.**

Poison does not know relatives.

Expl: The deadly effects of poison spare not even one's relatives.

514 **Enakina ma gaa yo.**

Poison has no smallness.

Expl: No matter how small a portion of poison can be, it is always deadly.

515 **Enakina ma yiki yo.**

Poison has no mercy.

Expl: Poison acts on everyone pitilessly.

4 Death

516 **'Ba mokeri draa ni.**

It is the good man who dies.

Expl: Death seems to be taking the good people and sparing the bad ones.

517 **'Bile ga 'ba ku.**

⁴² See footnote to proverb no. 353 for a clarification on poison mentioned in proverbs 509-515.

The grave does not refuse people.

Expl: Death takes everybody.

518 Dra ma agui yo.

Death has no friends.

Expl: Death has no special considerations for some people. It treats everybody the same.

519 Dra ku 'ba azi ku.

Death does not leave anyone.

Expl: The persistent phenomenon of death does not spare anybody.

520 Dra mifi yo.

Death has no eyes.

Expl: Death does not distinguish; it takes everybody.

521 Dra ni opi ku.

Death does not know a chief.

Expl: Human beings are all the same when facing death.

522 Dra si 'ba ku.

Death does not exclude anyone.

Expl: Death does not discriminate. It treats everybody the same.

523 Nyaku ni ti nji 'ba piri si.

The earth opens its mouth for all.

Expl: Everybody will have his/her grave dug into the earth. Death is for all.

524 E dra ku, mi ye awu awu ya?

You do not die, will you metamorphosize?

Expl: The person who pretends to avoid death is ironically asked whether he/she can, instead, rejuvenate his/her life.

525 "Dra-ku" si mve agui si.

The teeth of "Not-dead" whiten because of his/her friend.

Expl: The person alive rejoices over the death of others, forgetting that he/she will meet the same fate.

526 Dra si aciru.

The teeth of death are sharp.

Expl: The bite of death is effective for everyone, sparing nobody.

527 Dra ni e'yo ku.

Death does not know problems.

Expl: Death has no difficulties in reaching everybody. All problems disappear in the face of death.

528 Oleo ni dra indi.

The sorcerer dies too.

Expl: The sorcerer, who causes the death of others, will also die one day. Death does not exclude anyone.

529 "Dra-ku" ni ari co "Dra-'bo" ma dra a.

"Not-dead" is beating the drum at the funeral of "Already-dead".

Expl: The one beating the death-drum will die too. Nobody is exempted from the ordeal of death.

530 Imirio idri fu ra.

The spy's life has gone out.

Expl: The life of a delinquent also comes to a close, after all.⁴³

531 'Ba nyaku nya ojazu ru nyakuru.

A person eats soil to return into soil.

Expl: One feeds from the earth, to which one returns after death. The final destiny of everyone is death.

532 Dra ma pa eri alu.

Death has only one leg.

Expl: Death has only one leg with which to come. It has no second leg with which to depart. Thus, a person dies only once.

533 Agupi ni dra vusi alu.

A man dies once.

Expl: A person should not be scared by death as it is experienced only once, after all.

534 Dra le asi okpo.

Death needs a strong heart.

Expl: Death cannot be faced lightheartedly. It needs courage to stand up to it.

535 Dra ma aza tu.

⁴³ Instead of imirio (spy) a variant of this proverb has o^oguo (thief).

The pain of death is very great.

Expl: The distress of death cannot be met merrily.⁴⁴



Proverb 535: The distress of death

536 Dra atiliko aci si.

He/she died because of the fire of the hearth.

Expl: Death was caused by some domestic problem.

537 A dra otakua ti.

I died on the mouth of the pot.

Expl: The cause of death originated within the family.

538 Avu ci 'ba ku.

A corpse does not bite people.

Expl: A dead person is not dangerous.

539 Avu nde kesi ku.

A corpse does not win a judicial case.

Expl: A dead person poses no threats.

540 Avu ti yo.

A corpse has no tongue.

Expl: A dead person can neither defend himself/herself nor attack others.

541 'Ba-'bu-a esu afa ku ni.

It is only people in the grave who do not achieve anything.

⁴⁴ Instead of *aza* (pain), a variant of this proverb has *ewa* (power).

Expl: The one who is alive, on the other hand, can always attain something, for which one should never give up trying.

542 'Ba alu dri drani, 'ba angu dria ri oko ki ku.

One person dies, all persons are not finished.

Expl: The death of a person does not mark the end of life. One should continue to hope beyond the death of any person.

543 Kani ku ni 'ba pa 'ba dra dri.

It is only death that a person cannot escape.

Expl: As long as there is life, a person can always find a way out of problems.

VII BEHAVIOUR

In their ordinary and natural assessment of human behaviour, people express evaluations that may lead to social tensions. Proverbs tend to solve such situations in a peaceful way. By using a proverb, offensive and provocative points are conveyed in an impersonal manner, keeping negative reactions in check. In this way, everyone can speak in an atmosphere of acceptance, avoiding direct confrontation and contributing to an improvement in behaviour.

1 Commitment

544 'Ba alu alu ma 'bile ndundu.

Everyone has a separate grave.

Expl: As there is no sharing of graves, likewise there is no sharing of personal responsibility for whatever one has done.

545 Etu ece o'du ku.

The sun does not miss a day.

Expl: A person has to attend to his/her duties as faithfully as the course of the sun.

546 Ewa si nde ewa ku.

The elephant's tusk does not overwhelm the elephant.

Expl: The duties that a person naturally has are not beyond his/her possibilities.

547 Ewa si ni ewa ni nde.

The elephant's tusk weighs the elephant down.

Expl: People should shoulder their burdens and fulfil their responsibilities.

548 Obalako ku 'i saki vule ku.

The fox does not leave its tail behind.

Expl: A person should not forget what is essential to him/her, particularly in the field of responsibilities.

549 Okuku ku 'i o'bo vule ku.

The tortoise does not leave its shell behind.

Expl: The tortoise is one with its shell. The same unity ought to exist between a person and his/her responsibilities.

550 'Ba dri avi 'a si ku.

People do not neglect the stomach.

Expl: As one never forgets to eat, one should likewise never forget other duties that are equally essential to life.

551 Ti avi ku.

The mouth does not get lost.

Expl: When it comes to food, one cannot forget where one's mouth is. Similarly, one should not forget other important needs and duties.

552 Kajia owu nga oni 'i mva si.

The young cow learns to bellow because of its calf.

Expl: Necessity prompts a person to take up his/her responsibility and act accordingly.

553 Eri nga nii 'i 'aa ni azaa ri si.

He/she will know when his/her stomach pains.

Expl: A person will be brought to reflect on his/her responsibilities by some painful experience.

554 Mi rii eri la ari si ra.

You will eventually hear it by the drum.

Expl: You will be shaken into considering your duties by the drum announcing some death.

555 Mi nga eri ani.

You will hear, then.

Expl: You will be moved to ponder on your responsibilities by some negative experience.

556 Onzivu si 'ii ni.

Ugliness befits its owner.

Expl: As ugliness belongs to the ugly, likewise evil pertains to the evildoer.

557 Onjivu omve mi ru si, mi a'i, "Ee".

Ugliness has called you by name, you answer, "Yes".

Expl: Moral ugliness points to you who are guilty of it. You should agree and accept responsibility for it.

558 Onya nga ku, oli.

The termites do not swarm, it is the wind.

Expl: Termites blame their failure to swarm on the wind. Some people bring fake excuses for failing in their duties.

559 Alaka piri alaka.

All **alaka** grass is the same.

Expl: All **alaka** grass (*Hyperhenia, rufa*) serves equally well to catch termites. Differences in the results should be blamed on the people using it, not on the grass.

560 'Ba ope ku ni andre.

What people do not select is the mother.

Expl: There are other choices, on the other hand, that people can and should make.

561 Onyukunyu ma ta amaka ni.

The food of the fly consists of waste.

Expl: People, on the other hand, should make better choices concerning their needs.

562 'Ba anyu omba beri nze aci si.

A person extracts honey from angry bees by fire.

Expl: When persuasion fails, force may be the only alternative needed.

563 A'de angu njoza si.

He/she fell because of the slippery ground.

Expl: The fall or failure was unintentional.

564 'Ba veleri je oku ku.

The last man will not marry a wife.

Expl: The last brother who has difficulties in securing the bride-wealth to marry should provide for it in time. Taking it easy may result in failure to marry.



Proverb 562: The honey harvest

565 Velevele asii su si.

The last man remains with the soup.

Expl: Being late for a meal, one is left with the less substantial part of it.

566 Velevele 'du otaku 'ba.

The last one collected the pots.

Expl: The person who comes late to a meal finds only the pots, namely nothing to eat.

567 Velevele ndi kulu.

The last one gets big lumps.

Expl: The late comer to a meal makes up by helping himself/herself to larger lumps of food and by eating faster, which would not be necessary if he/she arrived earlier.

568 Velevele mvu eji.

The last one drank the watery beer.

Expl: Arriving later, one is left with the leftovers. Watery beer (eji) is the lowest type of beer.

569 Velevele gbi ndire.

The last one shoots the duiker.

Expl: The last hunter is left with a small animal as the big game has already gone to the earlier hunters.

570 Odru vele ma saki ari.

The last buffalo has blood on its tail.

Expl: It is the last buffalo in the herd that hunters try to kill. Lagging behind has tragic consequences.

571 Ngaka ngaka si, Orubadra avi 'i ndri dri.

By delaying, Orubadra lost the head of his goat.

Expl: The head of a goat is a delicacy which one may miss through procrastination.

572 Ndondo di yo.

Afterwards does not exist.

Expl: It is the present moment that one should exploit. The future does not exist.

573 Ndondo ni andreli.

Postponing is dew.

Expl: What is deferred vanishes quickly like the dew.

574 Ndondo ni aza ni.

Postponing is foolishness.

Expl: Procrastination shows lack of wisdom.

575 Ndondori si 'ba api ani ku; curu'dori nya ni.

The "after" does not fill the stomach; it is the "now" that one eats.

Expl: Postponing does not appease hunger. It is what one eats here and now that satisfies one.

2 Discipline

576 Afa a'da ku ri, a'do ni ya?

What is it that is not criticized?

Expl: Anything and anybody is open to appraisal and consequently to approval or disapproval.

577 A'da ku si, ozoo si fu zaramataru.

For lack of criticism, the teeth of the warthog grew disproportionately.

Expl: Timely correction prevents a person from developing improper dispositions.

578 A'da ku si, ewa dri zo doo do.

For lack of criticism, the trunk of the elephant grew very long.

Expl: A prompt amendment helps one to avoid acquiring adverse tendencies in one's character.

579 A'da mi e'yo ku, mi apeleko mva ya?

Uncriticized, are you the son of the senior wife?

Expl: Except for the son of the senior wife (*apeleko*), everybody else should expect advice and correction.⁴⁵

580 A'da ku a'da ku, 'bandre ri era palea ya?

Uncriticized uncriticized, is it the senior mother (*'bandre*) seated under the granary?

Expl: The *'bandre* ("mother of men") is the highly respected mother who has a central place of honour in the home. She is considered to be above criticism. Everybody else, however, should be open to admonition.⁴⁶

581 A'da ku a'da ku, yuku 'du idrika ni ya?

Uncriticized uncriticized, has the kite taken the mushroom?

Expl: As a kite does not feed on mushrooms, likewise there cannot be anybody immune to criticism.

582 "A'da-ku" ri 'ba ru ni.

"Uncriticized" is the name of a person only.

Expl: It is useless to criticize the name of a person as such a name cannot be changed. Apart from this case, everybody should censure.

583 'Ba a'da kula 'a e'yo.

What people do not criticize are matters related to the stomach.

Expl: Apart from food, anything and anybody else is liable to be reproached.

⁴⁵ A senior or first wife (*apeleko*) has an authoritative and respected position in the family and in society. She is not generally criticized, and her children benefit from the esteem attributed to her.

⁴⁶ See footnote to proverb no. 300.

584 'Ba a'da ku, mi O'baapiri ya?

Uncriticized by people, are you the Creator?

Expl: Are you as perfect as the Creator to be above censure?

585 'Ba a'da ku, angu owii midri ya?

Uncriticized by people, does it dawn for you?

Expl: Are you so perfect as to expect that the new day comes because of you?

586 E'yo a'da ku si, 'ba ni kolikolia agori ku.

For lack of criticism, people do not know the male pied wagtail bird.

Expl: People who do not accept corrections are unable to perceive important differences in life.

587 'Ba azi anyu suuru ni yo.

Nobody is as sweet as honey.

Expl: No person is entirely perfect.

588 'Ba azi yamanaka ako ni yo.

There is nobody without stomach content.

Expl: Everybody carries some uncleanness or defect.

589 Ewa zeki ako ni yo.

There is no beer without residue.

Expl: Everything has a negative side and everybody has defects.

590 Zaa azi ma gu zaa azi ma ali si ku.

No girl should laugh at another girl's fault.

Expl: Nobody is so perfect as to be justified in mocking others over their faults.

591 Oku azi oku aziri ndu aju ra.

A woman insults the private parts of another woman.

Expl: A person should not abuse another over weaknesses which both of them share.

592 Arau aziri gu arau aziri ma so'bi si.

A monkey laughs at the tail of another monkey.

Expl: It makes no sense for someone to scorn another over a shortcoming common to both of them.

593 'Ba ka eri bile si ku, ma eri geri ndu si ka.

If a person does not understand with the ears, let him/her understand another way.

Expl: When normal and gentle arguments fail, exceptional and forceful ones may be needed.

594 Bile ako a'u ni.

It is the hen that is without ears.

Expl: People, on the other hand, have ears and they ought to listen.

595 Bile ako ma ari ni nga raa ra.

The blood of the one without ears will pour out.

Expl: A person who does not heed advice will encounter deadly adversities.

596 Ka mu fu tata ma cere ru ku.

That it may not become all the time my cere.

Expl: A person may have to repeat his/her advice so many times as to resemble the cere, namely the typical shrill call repeatedly uttered to convey a message. Advice should be promptly listened to.

3 Misbehaviour



Proverb 597: Mischief's wages

597 Aparaka ni aci ko 'baru koko.

Mischief sets fire to the house.

Expl: Silly behaviour can have disastrous consequences.

598 Aparaka si, aci ni 'ba ve ve.

Because of mischief, the fire scorches people.

Expl: Excessive nonsense ends by hurting people.

599 Mileaci si Eto ma lico ve ra.

Due to his/her sharp eyes, the house of the hare caught fire.

Expl: The inquisitive person who meddles in the affairs of others brings disaster on his/her home.

600 Ire la aci ku 'ba ru.

Mischief hurls fire on people.

Expl: Irresponsible behaviour scatters burning problems around.

601 Aparaka si, mifi kpelu.

Because of mischief, he/she lost his/her eyes.

Expl: Immoderate fun may have tragic results.

602 Aparaka tibi agobi.

Pumpkin leaves are the sauce of mischief.

Expl: If one hurriedly eats pumpkin leaves as soon as they are cooked, one burns one's mouth. Mischief carries other mischief.

603 Aparaka ti mva agupi.

Mischief has generated a male child.

Expl: Frivolous behaviour may have serious consequences, like the birth of an illegitimate son.

604 Aparaka ti mva odrujo a.

Mischief begot a child in the common dormitory.

Expl: Exaggerated merriment between boys and girls may lead to some unwanted outcome like a pregnancy.

605 E ka 'ba aparaka ru, mi nga emu ondi ma ngukua ri mbe ra.

If you take it lightly, you will lick the dirt on my back.

Expl: Lack of seriousness leads to humiliation.

606 Avita ni ta fuu lugba zeru.

Playing turns into the faeces of the **lugba** fruit.

Expl: The fruit of the **lugba** tree (*Balanites aegyptiaca*) has a sweet and edible outer part with a bitter stone inside. Exaggerated or dubious fun may have bitter and unbecoming results.

607 Aringa turi si nga amgba ra.

The teeth of the one who laughs too much will turn brown.

Expl: Excessive rejoicing has unpleasant consequences shown by the teeth turning brown.

608 Aringa ari aku a.

The drum of laughter is at home.

Expl: Exaggerated amusement leads to disastrous consequences indicated by the sounding of the death drum at home.

609 Emi avanga 'di 'do fuu Cuku omvu ru.

Your playing is going to result into Cuku's nose.

Expl: Joking with the short-tempered Cuku about his/her ugly nose provoked a fight. The present fun will have the same result.

610 Ocoo eco ni avizu agii ma dra si ku.

A dog cannot play over the death of its friend.

Expl: Even more so with human beings who should not take serious matters lightly.

611 Ocoo nda 'bile ku ni.

It is a dog that does not look for a hole.

Expl: A dog defecates anywhere. This and similar behaviour is unbecoming for a person.

612 Culuculu midriri lii mi ra.

Your restlessness got you right.

Expl: Restlessness leads people into troubles.

613 'Daaka 'daaka 'de lu.

"Here and there" sinks one low.

Expl: Roaming around lowers oneself in the esteem of people.

614 'Daaka 'daaka li Gbakilia 'i.

"Here and there" got Gbakilia right.

Expl: Drifting from place to place brought trouble to Gbakilia.

615 Dria dria 'ini obelea ni.

"Again again" is the obelea bird.

Expl: The drifter resembles the ubiquitous obelea bird characterized by its incessant twitter.

616 Endika endika ni 'ba fe a'de yi ndu.

"Also also" causes people to fall into the water.

Expl: Trying to be here and also there, namely everywhere, leads people into troubles.

617 Endika endika si, mi Orivu ni ya?

"Also also", are you an Orivu?

Expl: It is only the numerous clan of Orivu that has its people everywhere; for anybody else, trying to emulate this ubiquitous presence is unrealistic.

618 Endika endika si, mi nga dra ra.

"Also also", you will die.

Expl: The person who wants to be everywhere is going to encounter some tragic end.

619 Endika endika si, mi olufe ni ya?

"Also also", are you the stirring stick?

Expl: It is only the stirring stick which is found to be everywhere in the kitchen. People should not emulate this ubiquitous presence.

620 Endika endika si, mi ori bii ya?

"Also also", are you sacrificing to the ori?

Expl: The eagerness to be present everywhere could be understood with regard to the sacrificial gatherings of the ori, in which all participate.⁴⁷

621 E'yo si mi ku; mi ori ni ya?

Not to be left out! Are you the ori?

Expl: The person who is eager to be present on every occasion should know that it is only the ori shrine which is never forgotten at gatherings.⁴⁸

622 Mileaci oyonga yo.

From the restless, no service.

Expl: A person easily excited and anxiously moving around is of no avail to anyone.

623 Mileaci ti njuru ni raa ni.

⁴⁷ See footnote to proverb no. 373.

⁴⁸ See footnote to proverb no. 373.

From the mouth of the restless, a sequence of jeers.

Expl: People who talk a lot in an uncontrollable manner do not offer a guarantee of seriousness. Their many words draw mocking remarks.

VIII VALUES

As traditional Lugbara society had no centralized authority and families were frequently re-arranging their mutual alliances, the resulting social situation was varied and complex. That demanded an intense education through an abundant transmission of values to help knit the complex fabric of relations and interests pertaining to social life. Proverbs proved to be among the most qualified instruments for that exercise. The values were derived from pondering upon experience and distilling them from it, obtaining ideal traits of behaviour such as sincerity, prudence, moderation and modesty, that could be inculcated and practised. At times, the emphasis was on the negative traits, such as deception, carelessness, unrestraint and pride, for the purpose of avoiding them in order to acquire the corresponding values. Hence, proverbs are not merely descriptive, they are prescriptive. In other words, they do not merely report experiences but they convey values.

1 Sincerity

624 E'yo ociza ko ni ba aza ku, e'yo mgbari dri fu ni.

Concealment does not help. Truthfulness satisfies.

Expl: Secrecy inhibits communications. Transparency encourages them.

625 Enzo obi ru 'ii vo.

Lying turns against its owner.

Expl: Lying ends up betraying the liar.

626 Ti enjo inakina ni.

Lies are poison.

Expl: Lies have the same deadly effect as poison.⁴⁹

627 Ti enjo ma pa aliaru.

Lies have short legs.

Expl: Lies do not take the liar very far.

628 Ti enjo pa 'ba vusi iri ku.

Lies do not save one twice.

Expl: Telling lies gets one out of trouble only once, as a liar is soon discovered.

629 Ti enjo ma mva ali.

The child of deceit is trouble.

Expl: Falsehood can only bear problems.

630 Ope ma gbe angu ndundu tre.

The guinea-fowl has eggs in many different places.

Expl: Some persons are deceitful and inconsistent giving different versions of the same fact.

631 Dridriru coti, vule coti ni eleleti.

Instantly forward, instantly backward, it is the *eleleti* snake.

Expl: It is difficult to tell which way the bluntly shaped *eleleti* snake is going to move. The behavior of some people is ambiguous and untrustworthy.

632 Eleleti dri 'ba ni ku.

One does not make out the head of the *eleleti* snake.

Expl: It is difficult to distinguish the head from the tail of the bluntly shaped *eleleti* snake. It is equally difficult to tell the mind of some inconsistent and deceitful people.

633 Odrukudru ma aku yi ki angu be.

The home of the frog is both on the water and on the land.

Expl: People cannot hold two different positions at the same time.

634 Mi osu ma alio 'bi si ku.

Do not dress me with the feathers of poverty.

Expl: Do not treat me like a person who can be easily be deceived.

⁴⁹ See footnote to proverb no. 353.

635 E 'ba 'di mi edra dri ya?

Have you kept this for your mother-in-law?

Expl: Some people hide away food for their mother-in-law. Items that are needed immediately should not be hoarded.

636 Anyu efi du 'ba vusi iri ku.

A single bee does not sting twice.

Expl: The harm a person inflicts is limited, as he/she is quickly discovered.

637 Ayi ci mi rua acofaru.

It has sprouted on your body as growth.

Expl: Facts cannot be hidden or denied. They are as evident as growth on one's body.

638 Zee mini zee yi nduri, anga yi dria ra.

The faeces you defecate under water will rise above it.

Expl: Things done in secret, particularly evil deeds, will come to be known.

639 Ezoo si fu la nga.

The teeth of the warthog have grown out completely.

Expl: The issue at stake is too evident for it to be concealed.

640 Okporovu dri 'ba atri oluku si ku.

Pregnancy cannot be covered under a basket.

Expl: What is prominent cannot be easily concealed.⁵⁰

641 E'yo oloza osu 'ba ku; a le ndre ma mile si ka.

Being told is not adequate; I want to see with my eyes.

Expl: Simple oral testimony may not always be enough. One may have to verify statements.

642 Oli rua 'ba ndre ku la 'i.

It is the body of the wind that people do not see.

Expl: Persons, on the other hand, can always be seen, even when they attempt to hide themselves.

643 Adro ne Alia ni ra.

God sees Alia.

⁵⁰ The oluku is a small basket made from palm leaves or the outer part of sorghum stalks and used to cover the heads of babies when they are carried on their mother's back.

Expl: Alia is renowned for his secretive life, and yet God sees him. There is a limit to one's covert behaviour.

644 'Ba ope mva eci ope ma awu si.

One deceives the young guinea-fowl by the cry of the guinea-fowl.

Expl: An inexperienced person, particularly a young one, can easily be deceived.

645 Mi kani aparaka 'ba odroo si, labadio dri, imi nguko ni 'i owii 'bongo ra.

You can play tricks with the rat, but if with the lizard, your back will become scaly.

Expl: You can deceive a simple rat, not a shrewd lizard. One needs to be careful with whom one is dealing.

646 Izinaka ta ru 'i jezu.

The bride is submissive in order to marry.

Expl: A person may assume attractive behaviour to achieve his/her ends.

647 Ocoo uguori saki ndro ndro.

A thieving dog lowers its tail.

Expl: People cover up their evil intentions by simulating submissive behaviour.

2 Prudence

648 Opasi ndree angu ku ni.

The back of the head does not see.

Expl: A person cannot see behind, hence he/she needs to be vigilant.

649 Opasi dra a angu.

The back of the head is the spot of death.

Expl: A person can be hit from behind, a reminder never to be off guard.

650 'Ba nze e'yo muri a ku.

People do not speak while moving.

Expl: People should not talk about important issues while moving around, as they can be easily overheard.

651 Anyikinyi si, aci ni 'ba ve ve.

By drawing nearer and nearer, the fire burns people.

Expl: People need to keep away from any potentially dangerous situation.

652 Mi andru oka sobi tu di.

Today you will step on the anvil's tail end.

Expl: Through your carelessness, you are going to step on the red hot part of the anvil.

653 'Ba bi aci dri si ku.

People do not catch fire with the hand.

Expl: People should avoid involving themselves in burning problems.

654 O'doo onyofi ku 'ba ku.

The claws of a leopard do not leave a person.

Expl: One should avoid the hold of the wicked as it is subsequently impossible to deliver oneself from it.

655 Abi ma bi ci.

Walls have ears.

Expl: People need to be prudent also at home, as their conversations may be overheard even within its walls.

656 Angu eni ni, rudu ni.

The dark place is the thicket.

Expl: It is only in a thicket, where light does not penetrate, that humans do not live. Anywhere else, they can be found and over-hear you.

657 Eni bi aria dri si.

The night catches a bird with the hand.

Expl: One needs to be alert during the night to avoid being caught unawares.

658 Eni ndre angu ku.

Night does not see the ground.

Expl: When moving in the dark, one needs to be particularly alert.

659 Ovaa gu vele, ovaa gu dra dria.

The dikdik gazelle returned, it returned to its death.

Expl: The dikdik gazelle tends to return to the same place, thus exposing itself to ambushes. People should avoid returning to the same dangerous situations.

660 Ovaa goli a ri otaku a.

The dikdik gazelle in the abode is in the pot.

Expl: In the safety of its abode, the gazelle may be caught off guard and killed. Security should not dispense one from vigilance.

661 Elaki oci ni 'ba oji oji.

The thorn of the **elaki** shrub hooks people.

Expl: Some wrong characters are like the **elaki** shrub (*Zizyphus abyssinica*). One coming close to them may easily be caught in the thorns of their evil designs.



Proverb 662: The ungrateful dog

662 Ocoo mini oceeri mi ci ni.

The dog you have raised bites you.

Expl: The person who has been benefited may turn against his/her benefactor. Ingratitude should not catch anybody by surprise.

663 O'boa leleri 'ba zaa ni.

It is the loved ant that stings.

Expl: Even when loved, an ant does not change its nature. One needs precaution in dealing with dangerous characters.

664 Obi leleri 'ba ti nya nya.

The preferred beer pot irritates the lips.

Expl: At times, problems may come from friends too.

665 Leta tu ri si mi agui ni mi ze yi a ra.

Because of too much love, your friend will push you into the water.

Expl: One's relationship with a friend has its limits. Exaggerated attention to him/her could cause problems.

666 Asi ndriza si, ope dri si ra.

Through kindness, the head of the guinea-fowl turned bald.

Expl: Too much benevolence may backfire against the person bestowing it.

667 A'u fe ei tamba 'ba azi dri, obalako de ei ra.

The hens entrusted themselves to someone else, the fox finished them off.

Expl: Prudence suggests that people do not delegate their safety to others. In case this has to be done, it should be to trusted friends.

668 Oleo tu ku.

The sorcerer does not dance.

Expl: People should not be entirely taken up by a dance, losing sight of the bystanders. Among them there could be the sorcerer with his/her evil schemes.

669 Oleo si mi dra mi rua ni gu.

Laughing at the sorcerer, you laugh at your own death.

Expl: One should avoid mocking people who can possibly take revenge.

670 Orivu tu pa runju.

The Orivu stand up many.

Expl: People avoid picking a quarrel with the Orivu people as they are a widespread force to reckon with. Smaller and weaker groups should act with caution.

671 Esurugo kini mile ma so oyo ni.

Esurugo said that the eyes should make promises.

Expl: Esurugo was reprimanded by people who subsequently misbehaved as he had done. Esurugo reacted by saying that people should not use their "mouths", namely speak, but rather their "eyes", namely observe, when faced with instances of misbehaviour.

672 Edro ci 'ba rio coti ku.

A rat does not bite people deep at once.

Expl: When biting people in their sleep, the rat allegedly blows air on the wound to prevent the victim waking up. People should be approached tactfully.

3 Restraint**673 E'yere nya ni, kpakpa nje fa.**

The patient eats, the impatient gets the bone.

Expl: At a meal, the unrestrained person may be picking up a bone instead of the meat.

674 Mi o'yo 'dini, a'u ga mi ti kodra dria?

You talk like this, is it the chicken pecking on your mouth as on a papyrus mat?

Expl: The fast and continuous pecking of a chicken on a papyrus mat recalls the insistent and annoying talk of some persons.

675 Ti aci eri onzi ni fo.

A hot mouth is bad.

Expl: Uttering spiteful and ironic words is bad.

676 Ti mbili ni aju soo 'baru.

The pointed mouth thrusts a spear into the home.

Expl: Sharp words inflict damage to one's own home and family.

677 E su adra mi omvu a.

Push the tongue into your nose.

Expl: One should control one's words.

678 Mi andru amba odu asu 'di

Today you are going to spill the oil of the elder.

Expl: The oil of the elder indicates a secret, and spilling it implies revealing it. Secrets must be kept.

679 Ewa ma drinja yo.

Beer has no shame.

Expl: A drunk person does and says things of which he/she would normally be ashamed.

680 Ewa ji mbaza ezo a.

Beer takes an old man to a girl.

Expl: Once drunk, an old man is not ashamed to seduce a girl.



Proverb 680: The drunken elder

681 Ewa la 'i andri si ku.

Beer does not lie with its mother.

Expl: No matter how drunk one is, one retains enough sense not to sleep with one's mother. There are certain things one never does.

682 Okporovu ni apii ti ni.

It is the pregnant woman who is hardly satiated.

Expl: During pregnancy, a woman "grows" visibly, thus giving the impression that she is insatiable. In any other case, however, people should control their desire for food.

683 Yilemvu ni mvu 'i 'a vusi.

The water-pot drinks according to its size.

Expl: A person should eat or drink what is enough for him/her.

684 Ewa mvu yi efufua dri.

The elephant drank water on a small termite.

Expl: An elephant, served with a very light meal, took it graciously, ate and then aptly concluded by drinking some water over it. People should be satisfied with whatever they are given.

685 Ajaroo la ru onyukunyu adripi ma saki si.

The squirrel lies on the tail of the brother of the fly.

Expl: The squirrel accepts to rest on the tiny spot represented by the tail of a fly. One should gracefully make do with what is available.

686 Odrukudru mbe orete endi.

The frog licked the mire too.

Expl: Having nothing else to feed on, the frog licked the mire. A person should manage with whatever is at hand.

687 Yori ma ako si, yuku nya ofufua.

There being nothing else, the kite ate the tiny termites.

Expl: People should be satisfied with what is obtainable, even though it be very little.

688 Ocoo idriri ga fa ku.

A live dog does not refuse a bone.

Expl: A person should gracefully accept what is given him/her freely.

689 Yori ako si, 'ba iribi nya.

There being nothing else, people eat greens.

Expl: When first-class choices are not possible, people should be satisfied with second-rate ones.

690 Anya ma tibi zoo osu pi ku.

The sauce of millet does not grow to the size of beans.

Expl: The millet sauce is small in quantity, yet it is enough to accompany the other food like beans. One should be satisfied with whatever is being offered.

691 Ti da 'i anya si ku.

The mouth cannot avoid millet.

Expl: Though the millet is little, it is accepted wholeheartedly. Any other offer should be equally graciously accepted.

692 A fe 'di mini, ocoo 'a aza ku si.

I give you this, since the stomach of the dog does not pain.

Expl: A dog accepts anything to eat as it has no stomach problems. Whatever is being offered should likewise be well accepted.

693 Azaapi ri ki ru kumara awa si.

The Azaapi clan survived on the raw fruits of the shea tree (kumara).

Expl: One should be grateful for whatever is available, as the Azaapi people survived on unripe **kumara** fruit (*Butyrospermum paradoxum/parkii*), after all.

694 Obalako ni 'i otoo odolo si.

The fox survives on the sausage-tree fruit (**odolo**).

Expl: In case of need, there is always a way out of it, even though it may not be the best. The fruit of the sausage-tree (*Kigelia aetio-pica*) is not edible, yet the fox survives on it.

695 Angundru 'bii 'i ma anzipi ma ugu aji.

Angundru tasted the sweetness of his children's liver.

Expl: Angundru tasted human liver and subsequently killed his children to have more of it. One should control one's curiosity and desires as they first arise.

696 Obalako ni enya ru 'ima so'bi si.

The fox boasts of its own tail.

Expl: People should rest satisfied with whatever they have, even if it be humble or insignificant.⁵¹

697 E'yo dru dru 'di di ma 'bo.

The same matters every day have made me tired.

Expl: One should be satisfied with one's position and avoid vexing people with the same issues time and again.

698 Yi vico oga 'ba ni andre owu ko si.

The craving for water has stopped a person from weeping for his/her mother.

Expl: A pressing need may force people to do things they would not do in normal circumstances.

699 Yori ako si, Ayania fi okporovu be.

There being nothing else, Ayania sleeps with a pregnant woman.

Expl: People in dire need may be led to seek things they would normally avoid.

700 Ecikili 'du oti ma avu.

The ant took the corpse of its brother-in-law.

Expl: In-laws do not take an active part in burial ceremonies, but an urgent need may require that certain traditions and rules be waived.

⁵¹ Instead of **obalako** (fox), a variant of this proverb has **oce** (dog).

701 Amba azi oyo ki ru amba azi be.

An elder can employ another elder.

Expl: Elders engage the services of young people. When the young are not available, elders seek help from each other.

4 Pride

702 Afu eri ngule abe ni.

Pride is the handle of the slasher.

Expl: The proud person places in the hands of others the tool that is going to be eventually used against him/her.

703 Afu ma onyi'bi yo.

Pride has no beauty.

Expl: Pride raises the same repulsion that people feel for ugliness.⁵²

704 Ani ari opasi a.

Pride's blood is on the occiput.

Expl: The back of the head does not see. The proud is equally blind. He/she will be caught unawares with disastrous effects.

705 Godri pa nyu afu si.

The leg of Godri broke through pride.

Expl: Godri suffered a broken leg because of his/her pride. Pride can cause serious accidents to people.

706 Afu si ndalaka vee aci a.

Through pride the hawk burned itself in the fire.

Expl: The proud person can bring injuries and also death upon himself/herself.⁵³

707 Afu si ope ma dri si ra.

Through pride the guinea-fowl's head turned bald.

Expl: The presumptuous behaviour of some people leads eventually to their humiliation, exemplified here by baldness.

708 Odrukudru hwe afo si.

The frog burst through pride.

⁵² Instead of *afu* (pride), a variant of this proverb has *ani* (irony).

⁵³ Instead of *afu* (pride), a variant of this proverb has *ani* (irony).

Expl: Pride caused the frog to inflate itself to a size bigger than its natural one until it burst. Pride leads to self-destruction.

709 Edro ni afu 'ba 'ba azi ma olaa si.

The rat brags about the cassava of others.

Expl: The behaviour of the rat, priding itself on the property and activity of others, ridicules the person who advances himself/herself through the success of others.

710 'Ba mi yamanaka mbe ra ya?

Can people lick the content of your stomach?

Expl: Do you consider yourself so unique that even the content of your stomach could be used as food?

711 'Ba kulikulia pa ga ogara si ka eri nyu ndo.

Unless a person cuts the leg of the pied wagtail with an axe, it will not break.

Expl: The empty threats of the proud person draw the ironic comment that one does not need an axe to cut the thin leg of a bird.

712 Naa azi naa azi 'di na ra.

A ferocious beast devours another ferocious.

Expl: Proud and powerful people can destroy each other.

713 "A-ni-'bo" ma ndu ore.

The buttocks of "I-already-know" are wet.

Expl: Priding oneself on one's knowledge leads to one's humiliation.

714 "A-ni-ra" ni odru fu ra fo.

"I-know" was killed by a buffalo.

Expl: The conceited person falls a victim to his/her alleged knowledge and experience.

715 Drionjiri 'ba ori ku.

A stubborn person does not establish a seed.

Expl: Stubbornness prevents a person from marrying and rearing children.

716 Etu ni ndri dri aruu ni.

The sun tames the goat.

Expl: As the scorching sun subdues a rebellious goat, a stubborn person may be brought under control by some trying experience.

717 Andrali ni ka aramba dri.

Dew softens the hard patch.

Expl: Stubborn characters may be mollified through a kind and persevering action.



Proverb 716: The sun tames the goat

718 Edematara si ari aku a balala.

Through spite for others, blood was shed all over the home.

Expl: Despising others causes bloodshed even in one's own home.

719 Edematara 'di 'ba ndulu.

Despising others killed a man altogether.

Expl: Spite is so serious that it may lead to murder.

720 Edematara ari aku a.

The drum of spite is at home.

Expl: Spite can bring the death drum, namely tragedy, into one's home and family.

IX WISDOM

Traditionally, a wise person is one who speaks moderately. Wisdom is associated with few words chosen properly and spoken at the right time. The pithy language of proverbs is a typical expression of such wisdom. Proverbial wisdom brings the experience

of the past into the present, it goes beyond their apparent and fallacious aspect, it discerns their reasons, and it draws from this exercise a teaching for the future. Wisdom is thus ultimately foresight.

As they carry wisdom, proverbs require that they be employed wisely. Lugbara proverbs may be used on any occasion and by any person. However, their actual application needs competence and sagacity. Perceiving the full expressiveness of a proverb within its proper context so as to be able to use the appropriate proverb at the appropriate time needs a judicious combination of knowledge and experience that not everybody can afford. It is usually the elder who normally has the capability and the credibility to operate proverbs and their wisdom.

1 Being Wise

721 **Fu ma driari mi dria.**

The grey hair on my head is on your head.

Expl: Grey hair signifies wisdom. An elder wishes a young person to be wise.

722 **Ozo-foro mva dria yo.**

No grey hair on a child.

Expl: A child has not yet attained wisdom, signified by grey hair.

723 **Acikale jo ijijiri ma lotre a yo.**

No soot in a house with an unthatched ceiling.

Expl: An unthatched roof lets the smoke through, so that soot cannot gather against it. An immature person cannot retain wisdom.

724 **Embapi ni dra oko.**

The teacher dies first.

Expl: One who does not live up to what one teaches may be the first to suffer what one had cautioned other people against.

725 **Onyukunyu ri ze okuri ma dria ku.**

The fly does not rest on the old faeces.

Expl: People should not return to unbecoming situations.

726 **Onyukunyu ma pa ovu ni alaru ku.**

The legs of a fly are not clean.

Expl: Some people, unable to distinguish good from evil, pass from one to the other with the easiness of a fly passing from clean to dirty matters.



Proverb 726: The fly's dirty legs

727 Embiriti su ku ni oci.

What one does not wear on one's bottom are thorns.

Expl: There are things that are not done because they are obviously harmful, like sitting on thorns. A person should be able to recognise them.

728 Ti mi mile a edro ari ni ya?

Have they dripped rat's blood into your eyes?

Expl: Having rat's blood in one's eyes means seeing things as a rat does, namely being unable to distinguish between good and evil and consequently misbehaving.

729 'Ba dra aza ama dra 'baruri aza si.

People know sickness by their sickness.

Expl: The way people come to know the real nature of certain problems is by experiencing them.

730 O'dia o'dia na puruo ibi.

The new one has eaten uncooked grasshoppers.

Expl: An unexperienced person can be made to do anything.

731 Aniako 'di 'i wa'di ndulu.

Ignorance killed his/her relative.

Expl: Ignorance leads to disastrous consequences.

732 Aniaiko ma oje 'boro.

The horns of ignorance are large.

Expl: Ignorance manifests itself as conspicuously as large horns do on the head of cattle.

733 Mi Anyara ayi a rii ya?

Are you the Anyara in the wilderness?

Expl: One should be wise, not like the Anyara people who are allegedly backward.

734 Drileba nde ondoa ra.

Good luck beats intelligence.

Expl: In many cases, intelligence needs a supplement of good luck.

735 Api tre ni e'yo njee eri ti a ni.

The full stomach speaks through his/her mouth.

Expl: The words being said are not the result of thoughtful considerations but of a full stomach. There is little substance in them.

736 Rua ala nya puruo ebi.

The healthy body ate the uncooked **puruo**.

Expl: Though the grasshopper **puruo** is not generally eaten, much less uncooked, a healthy person would eat it if conditions were to demand it. A healthy mind can assess any situation and act accordingly.

2 The Reasons of Events

737 Abi ondi 'i ceni ku.

A wall does not crumble without a reason.

Expl: One cannot appeal to chance in order to explain events. Each of them has its reasons.

738 Acika nyi aci akoru ku.

Smoke does not smoulder without fire.

Expl: There is a reason for everything and one should be able to detect it.

739 Angu api ceni ku.

The soil does not swell up by itself.

Expl: The soil swells up because there is a seed sprouting up below it. Every event has its cause.

740 'Ba edio ni obalako ze si.

People know of the **edio** tree from the faeces of the fox.

Expl: People know the **edio** fruits (*Combretum nigricans*) are ripe by the faeces of the fox that has eaten them. Facts are known and explained through the relation between cause and effect.



Proverb 738: Smoke and fire

741 Edro nya angu oye ku.

The rat does not dig the ground for nothing.

Expl: One has a purpose for whatever one is undertaking.

742 Esako ndu lo ru ceni ku.

The bottom of the **esako** pot does not perforate itself.

Expl: A happening indicates that there is someone who must have brought it about.⁵⁴

743 Ojoo ati 'ba tokoru ku.

A doctor does not cure a person without a reason.

Expl: A doctor does not cure people randomly. Likewise, any other person acts with specific reasons.

⁵⁴ The **esako** is a pot with perforated bottom used to obtain salty water.

744 Ojoo ma ibiko mvuu yi toko ku.

The leaves of the doctor do not absorb water without a reason.

Expl: The traditional doctor soaks leaves in water for therapeutic purposes. Any activity is undertaken for a purpose.

745 Ojoo ma jufu onyi yo.

The ornaments of the doctor have no beauty.

Expl: The doctor wears his/her ornaments for a professional purpose, not for beauty. The function of dress goes beyond mere aesthetic reasons.

746 Acife ci e'yo kokoru ku.

The divination stick does not stop without a cause.

Expl: The divination stick is used to reveal evildoers. It is operated by sliding it in a loop of grass while mentioning the names of suspects. When the stick gets stuck inside the loop, the person mentioned at that moment is considered the culprit. Innocent people should not fear this exercise as the divination stick stops only when there is a reason, namely it indicates only the guilty.

747 Egaga aluri; masete si ni ya?

One side; is it the edge of a machet?

3 Deceptive Appearance**748 Aria gaari ti anya ose.**

A small bird picked a big ear of millet.

Expl: An insignificant person may accomplish impressive tasks.

749 Etukana ni ewa ici.

The **etukana** bird deceives the elephant.

Expl: The **etukana** bird, though very small, can confuse an elephant to the point of making it succumb. Weak people have ways to overcome the strong ones.

750 Ewa dra 'i dri si.

The elephant died because of its trunk.

Expl: An insect in the trunk of the elephant made the latter panic and die. Small issues can have tragic consequences.

751 Anu wereri zaa wata 'de ra.

A small bee stung an elephant fatally.

Expl: A weak person can overcome a powerful one.

752 Erindikü ni ewa eli endi

The **erindikü** grass made also the elephant stumble and fall.

Expl: A minor issue can cause the downfall of important and powerful people. The **erindikü** (*Cynodon dactylon*) is a grass creeping on the ground.



Proverb 748: The greedy little bird

753 Eji ni emvo ezo ra.

Second-rate beer can rear an orphan.

Expl: What appears to be worth discarding, like second-rate beer, may still be of some use.

754 Ewa zeki ce adre a'u taru ra.

The beer residue can feed the chickens.

Expl: What is considered menial and to be disposed of may still serve some useful purpose.

755 'Ba ce yamanaka nji taru ra.

People squeeze the content of the stomach for food.

Expl: Benefits may be drawn from what appears useless.

756 A'be duu 'ba ku, te eri 'ba ci ra.

The bumblebee does not sting, nevertheless it bites.

Expl: Powerless people should not be underestimated as they, too, have a way to attack and defend themselves.

757 Anya-'biko ni ti anyaru.

Millet chaff generates millet.

Expl: The chaff contains seeds that can eventually germinate. What is apparently worthless can render profitable service.

758 Maku ndua, afa yo afa yo.

Beneath the potatoes, there is nothing nothing.

Expl: As under a potato mound covered with lush leaves there may be no yield, likewise beautiful words or striking appearances could hold no substance.

759 Otoko ambori efii kokoru.

The big termitehill has nothing inside.

Expl: One can be deceived by the external and impressive appearance of things which in fact are worthless.

760 Onya fe ru aci ni ceni.

The termites surrendered themselves to the fire.

Expl: Persons should resist deceptive inducements that lead to tragic consequences.

761 'Ba fi 'ba ni dri'bi nyiri si ku.

Support is not given because of thin hairs.

Expl: An attractive appearance, exemplified by a person's thin hair, is not a reason for backing him/her.

762 A ndre ku la onyi.

What I do not see is beauty.

Expl: There is more to beauty than meets the eye.

763 'A ma ombe alu.

The stomach has one oesophagus.

Expl: The stomach has only a narrow entrance to it. Small things can have important functions.

4 Foresight

764 Angu ma nde nga driaie.

Most of the world is still ahead.

Expl: People should avoid acting rashly as if there were no future.⁵⁵

765 Afa dri daapi vule ku ri yi ni.

The thing that does not return is water.

Expl: Except for water that flows away and never returns, other events repeat themselves. Life offers more than one chance as opportunities return.

766 Edro nya angu owii si ku.

A rat does not eat at dawn.

Expl: When the day dawns, rats withdraw into their burrows to resume feeding on the following night.

767 'Ba ca oluku mva 'aa ri si ku.

A person does not make the oluku when the child is inside.

Expl: People should not feel over confident about events before they happen. The oluku is the apparatus for carrying a baby on one's back.⁵⁶

768 E'yo amale ku ri si, ozoo ma si fu kala.

Through lack of foresight, the teeth of the warthog grew out sideways.

Expl: Lack of foresight has unpleasant consequences.

769 N'danika Ogunu.

N'danika is an Ogunu.

Expl: Through lack of foresight, N'danika of the Ogunu clan lost his life and brought about misfortune on his people.

770 Ne paale ra, ku ni dria le.

He/she looked at the feet, not ahead.

Expl: A person should not only consider his/her immediate interests but also look ahead at his/her future needs.

⁵⁵ Instead of *driaie* (ahead), a variant of this proverb has *vule* (behind). The meaning of the proverb remains the same: it refers to what has yet to come, namely to the future.

⁵⁶ See footnote to proverb no. 640. A variant of this proverb is 'Ba li ni o'buka mva 'alea ri si ku, "A person does not cut the o'buka when the child is inside". For the o'buka, the apparatus for carrying a baby on one's back, see footnote to proverb no. 8. Instead of *li* (to cut), variants of this proverb have *je* (to buy) and *so* (to sew), which reflect the new manner of preparing the o'buka from a piece of cloth rather than a hide.

771 E 'ba 'dii drusi a'buo 'bezu.

Put this aside, to throw to a dove tomorrow.

Expl: Sparing some food with which to catch a dove on the following day implies being foresighted.

772 'Ba 'be ta osu okuri te ku.

One would not throw away the old bow.

Expl: One does not set aside old things too hastily. They could still come in useful.⁵⁷

773 E'bu okuri nga kiri agui ni.

The old hoe is still a friend.

⁵⁷ Instead of *osu* (bow), a variant of this proverb has *aco* (hoe).

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