

THE PROVERB AS A TOOL FOR ADDRESSING SOCIAL CHALLENGES: THE CASE OF DANGME YOUTH

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Abstract

This paper closely looks at selected proverbs of Dangme used in addressing social vices among the youth of Dangme. Data were drawn from both primary and secondary sources: family meetings, traditional court of arbitrations at the senior divisional chief's court in Ada, funerals, marriages, and naming ceremonies as well as a documented book on proverbs. The respondents provided the context in which these proverbs were used. The data were cast within Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) Politeness Theory. The findings indicate that proverbs among the Dangme can be categorized into those used to address issues regarding virtues that need to be upheld, vices that must be discouraged, and those used to show the consequences of disobedience. It should be noted that the correct use of proverbs by the youth in the Dangme communities resolves contemporary social challenges and brings sanity and peace among all classes of people.

Keywords: Dangme, proverbs, virtue, social vices, politeness, Ada, Krobo.

1. Introduction

Proverbs are often said among the elderly in Ghanaian culture as they state facts and history, as asserted by Kudadjie (1999). Because proverbs are normally said by the elderly, young people are not conversant with proverbs. Their speech hardly contained proverbs, and they could not use them to advise others. Therefore, young couples lack the use of proverbs, which sometimes aid in nurturing children in the community. Proverbs are employed to save face, warn, caution, and encourage society. The use of proverbs among themselves hardly occurs, although it is important for the people in the community to employ these proverbs to serve as a tool for addressing the challenges faced by youth in the community. Agyekum defines a proverb as 'a time-tested, brief and witty saying, usually symbolic, that expresses a truth or recognized observation about practical lives which is based on traditional experiences and has been transmitted from generation to generation, and withstood the test of time (Agyekum, 2013: 254). This study, therefore, seeks to investigate Dangme proverbs that address the social vices the youth indulge in. It also examines proverbs that reinforce societal virtues that are geared towards the molding of upright lifestyles among the youth of Dangme and possible implications when the youth fail to heed the wisdom and moral lessons expressed in these proverbs.

Like any other ethnic group in Ghana, the chiefs and people of Dangme Land are known to use proverbs. Proverbs are often used to shape the general behavior of an individual

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through all stages of life. This is geared towards making them responsible and morally upright citizens. Therefore, it is expected that when they have become accomplished and morally upright individuals in society, they become role models for others to look up to and emulate. When a person shows a lifestyle worthy of emulation, proverbs are used to exhort, praise, and encourage them. On the other hand, proverbs are used to warn, correct, rebuke, and punish wayward individuals with the objective of molding them for positive and socially accepted behaviors in life as well as to serve as a deterrent to others. In doing so, they eschew social vices.

The Dangme believe in the values of proverbs as having the potential to either make or unmake their citizenry. The proverbs so used have positive effects on the addressees, those that address the challenges of the youth – social vices, and those that encourage them to continue to behave socially well in society. For instance, it is very common for the Krobo, one of the subgroups of the Dangme, to precede inflicting corporal punishment on a defiant child by saying, as in (1), implying that no matter the love and value a parent places on his child, disciplining him to become a responsible person in society cannot be overlooked. Similarly, (2) is used to stress that no parent intends to kill the child when he or she punishes him or her for wrongdoing.

- (1). *Tsapi kungwɔ lo ngɔɔmi he nɛ ke o wu kungwɔ fi nɛ o be tsue* (Huber, 1993:83)
'The sweetness of the chicken does not prevent you from cleaning its droppings'.
- (2). *Kungwɔ bi nyɛ nane gbi e bi*
'The foot of the hen does not kill the chicken.'

Proverbs, portrayed as reserves for the elderly, are not usually permitted for use by children. The statement in illustration (3) confirms this.

- (3). *Jokuɛ lɛɛ, ahua toto e tsoɔ se pi kolue se mi*
'The child cracks the shell of a snail and not that of the tortoise.'

(3) suggests that the young are to listen as proverbs are used and to learn them for future use; the use of proverbs in language illustrates communicative competence (Agyekum, 2012). Agyekum (2000:2) opines that 'it is possible for the citizens of society to acquire knowledge about culture to preserve it for the sake of cultural continuity through oral literature.' In the bid to preserve this oral genre among the Akan to gain communicative competence, as postulated by Agyekum (2012), Peace FM, a private radio station based in Accra, introduced the Akan Proverb Competition between 7.00 pm and 8.00 pm every Sunday for the youth. The objective was to transmit the use of proverbs from radio to catchment areas as a means of preserving their use. By doing so, 'the historical notions inculcate naturalistic and patriotic ideologies in the new generation' (Agyekum, 2000) and such ideas are embodied in the oral literature practiced daily in the form of proverbs, songs, praise poetry, narrative, etc. (Okpewho 1992:115).

The introduction of Western Cultural practices among the Dangme and the cosmopolitan nature of family life today have taken many youths away from the elders. This distance between the youth and the elderly makes contact with proverbs, listening, learning, and usage a challenge. This effect sets the pace to breed social vices in the youth since they

appear to be uncontrolled. The advent of technology and the continuously increasing use of time on social media platforms have overtaken the youth so much that they take less part in traditional gatherings where these proverbs are used. Consequently, the lessons embodied in these proverbs are hardly transferred to the younger generation. The study of Dangme proverbs as a tool for addressing the challenges of youth fills this gap appropriately.

The Dangme /dánmè/ language is cited in earlier literature as *Adangme* or *Adangbe* (Puplampu, 1953; Dakubu, 1987) and is a Kwa language spoken in south-eastern Ghana by over 1,020,000 speakers (Ethnologue online). It is very close to Ga, and together, they form the Ga-Dangme sub-family under the Nyo family languages under the Kwa languages in Ghana. It has received educational status since 1966 and is being studied across all education levels in Ghana (Adi 1997). Linguistically, the Guan, Ga, Ewe, and Akan share boundaries with the Dangme (Dakubu 1987:1). Native speakers are mainly found along the coast of Ada, Nugo, Gbugblaa, and Kpone and inland of Dodowa, Osudoku, Somanya, and Odumase (Krobo), and these constitute the dialects of the language. According to Dakubu (1987:2), "The basic distinction seems to be between the coast and inland, Ada being the most extreme coast and Krobo (Klo) having the most extreme inland dialect." However, a few Dangme speakers are found in Ewe-speaking communities, dating back to the eighteenth century. These are Agortime Afegame (Agortsom) in the east of the Volta region, Essé Zogbedji (Sekodzie), Cercle du Tsevié, and Ngotsie in the Federal Republic of Togo (Dakubu, 1987:2). Dangme, which is a three-tone language, has seven oral vowels, five nasal correlates and twenty-three consonantal sounds (Apronti 1967, Adi 1997).

1.1 Data strategy

The data for this study were collected from primary and secondary sources. The sampling sites were Ada, representing the coastal dialect, and Odumase Krobo, representing the inland dialect, both of which constitute the extreme ends of the dialect continuum of Dangme. We gathered data from the chief's palace at Ada during traditional arbitration proceedings where we were present as observers, from family meetings, funerals, naming ceremonies, marriages, festivals, and so on. We also gathered data through personal conversations with the participants. Most of these are native adult speakers between 45 and 80 years of age. This spanned over five years (2014-2019). In addition, some proverbs in Dangme Abe (Accam 1972) also serve as secondary sources of data. As one of the researchers was a native speaker, his intuition was used to verify some of the proverbs. From the data, 51 proverbs were employed out of the total proverbs of 812 gathered. The 812 proverbs included 445 from Accam (1972) while the rest were from the primary sources that were visited.

2. Related works

One of the earliest definitions of a proverb is attributed to Whiting (1932), as cited in Yankah (1989) who describes a proverb as 'a short saying of philosophic nature, of great antiquity, the product of the masses rather than of the classes, constantly applicable, and appealing because it bears a semblance of universal truth.' Whiting (1932) acknowledges that the collective ownership of proverbs is real, and each time in any generation a proverb is used, it not only fits into the situation but also becomes applicable in addressing the concern for which it is used. In a similar manner, Finnegan (1970:380) considers the proverb as a 'rich source of imagery and succinct expressions on which more elaborate forms can draw.' The African proverb has some metaphors used in its expression and, in some cases, similes and

hyperbole. The imagery creates a mental picture, which is sometimes compared with animals, from which one draws moral lessons to transform his life. In discussing the value of proverbs, Nketia (1958:21), as cited in Finnegan (1970:379), expresses the value of proverbs in modern Ghana as one that does not lie only in what it reveals of the thoughts in the past. However, for the poet or the speaker, who is some sort of artist in the use of words, the proverb is a clear model of compressed or forceful language. This requires an in-depth analysis of the context in which it is expressed to enable the listener to decipher the message or morals from it. Finnegan (2012:387-388) asserts that knowledge of the situations in which proverbs are cited may also be an essential part of understanding their implications, and this is complicated further by the fact that the same proverb may often be used, according to the context, to suggest a variety of different truths, or different facets of the same truth, or even its opposite. Bennett (2000) affirms this and discloses that the occasion of use provides the framework within which one draws meaning and messages from it. Further, Agyekum (2012) opines that Akan proverbs are based on their cosmology and environment, which can be cast within different spheres of human life, and that their interpretations may differ across languages. It must also be noted that apart from proverbs, maxims, aphorisms, and wellerisms also function as proverbs in the Ghanaian community. In explaining maxims, Agyekum (2012) argues that it is an expression of general truth or principle. The general truths are based on people's past experiences, mindset, philosophy, religion, and culture. Sometimes, these maxims are interchanged with each other, as reported by Nsoh et al., (2010:51-52) as they seem to express the same ideologies, forms, and functions when used. It is challenging to distinguish between them during their usage, except in the case of wellerisms that are clearly attributed to fictional sources such as trees, stones, ghosts, rivers/streams, wind, and moon, or from animals. Yankah (1989:36) states that the use of the proverb is often not premeditated; it is impulsive and extemporaneous. Performance in the proverb thrives more on readiness, discretion, and appropriateness than on the display of innovative discourse. He adds that 'the proverb may be used by the same speaker in more than one rhetorical situation, so long as the speaker considers the relevant viewpoints classifiable under the same logical domain.' The above-named scholars did not investigate the challenges faced by the young people specifically and how the use of proverbs can serve as a tool to curb some of these problems among the youth. The study therefore seeks to specifically examine the Dangme young people and how proverbs can be a tool to solve some challenges faced by them.

Proverbs are said to have a purpose as a study by Ababila (2006) posits that among the Farefare people of northern Ghana, Gurene proverbs have the ultimate purpose of teaching wisdom and moral lessons to the society. He suggests that Gurene proverbs address a wide range of topical issues including wealth and poverty, health and sickness, joy and sorrow, and occupations like farming, hunting, marriage, childbearing, and upbringing. As a community is embodied with all kinds of people, people found to live undesirable lifestyles such as anger, backbiting, greed, ingratitude, laziness, lying, pride, procrastination, desperation, selfishness, and stealing are equally addressed with proverbs on those themes. This implies that those who live lives worthy of emulation, promoting peace, progress and coexistence such as circumspection (one at a time), cooperation, gratitude, humility, patience, perseverance, prudence (modesty), respect for authority and each other and unity, there are proverbs which are used to encourage them (Ababila, 2006:69). However, Gyekye (1996) underscores the value of proverbs in the entire life of humans and draws from Akan culture a wide range of proverbs to address the needs of man. He attributes proverbs to provide

sociological and anthropological accounts of beliefs, practices, and institutions in any society (pg. xiii). He provides for topics including religion, humanity, communal and individual values, the family, chieftaincy, knowledge, wisdom, etc., and proverbs that address many of the social vices and virtues witnessed in this generation. For example, on knowledge and wisdom, Gyekye (1996:137) uses the proverb *the freedom that comes from ignorance enslaves the one who entertains it* to illustrate the need for everyone to become knowledgeable in one thing or the other in order to become useful in society. He urges the youth to embrace wisdom as it creates well-being; *it comes to a problem that lasts for a long time and does not reside in the head of only one person*. In contrast, he also considers *the fool as the one to whom a proverb is explained, one whose own tomatoes are sold to him* and also *one who says his scales are out of order when he is squandering his gold* (pp. 241/2).

In a similar manner to explaining proverbs, Bennett (2000), studying some West African proverbs, noted that only a fool needs a proverb to be explained. This suggests that the addressee must think critically to unravel the morale and message embedded in the proverb for him to make good use of it in life – as to whether he is being warned, corrected, rebuked or praised, exhorted, or encouraged. Though Gyekye (1996) discussed the youth, his aim was not only them but also other ways in which proverbs can be used in society, unlike this study which focuses only on young people.

Apart from proverbs serving as tools for controlling the social well-being of society, their effective use also fosters peaceful coexistence. Proverbs sum up situations, pass judgment, reprimand, recommend a course for action, serve as past precedents for present actions, praise, caution, speak the unspeakable, persuade hearers *Seitel, 1977 as cited in Obeng 1996:254), Yankah (1989), Agyekum (2000, 2012, 2013), and Owu-Ewie (2019). Among Africans, proverbs are used to address the issues that confront them in life and this is what this study aims to study, focusing on addressing challenges faced by young people. For instance, Bennett (2000) asserts about wisdom that *other people's wisdom frequently prevents the chief from being called a fool* and argues that a well-aimed proverb saves a thousand words of explanation and settles disputes.

Both Agyekum (2012) and Owu-Ewie (2019) consider the specific roles that proverbs play in the marriages of the Akan. Owu-Ewie (2019) argues that proverbs play a counseling role in the lives of newly married couples and suggests that contemporary marriage counselors and priests exploit the Akan proverbs on marriage to benefit their young and inexperienced clients. Traditionally, during marriage ceremonies among the Akan, elders from both sides contracting the marriage offer the opportunity to offer pieces of advice to newly married couples. Most often, the proverbs used in this endeavor are centered on issues that are likely to arise in the marriage, leading to either a more productive marriage or a chaotic and collapsing marriage. Furthermore, he identified proverbs that address themes such as patience, cooperation, respect, sex, and hard work in the lives of married couples. Other thematic issues that have also been addressed with proverbs include loyalty, humility, childbearing, caring, and love. The focus of Bennet (2000) did not delve into how the use of proverbs can solve young persons' problems in society without threatening their faces and the research aims to fill that gap that was not considered. Therefore, it follows that proverbs can serve as tools for addressing the challenges of the youth of a community, and Dangme is no exception as this study also aims to investigate, though Owu-Ewie (2019) discussed in detail proverbs only found in marriage ceremonies.

In discussing the appropriate usage of proverbs, Obeng (1996), for instance, asserts that the appropriate use of proverbs recognizes the presence and significance of the

participants in the discourse. He argues that the participants and the time of discourse, paying particular attention to the situation within the discourse, determine whether one has to issue a proverb in declarative, inverted, or command form. To this end, Nsoh et. al. (2010) maintain that when a proverb is introduced, it changes the face of the discourse. Participants in the speech act become alert, think twice, consider deeper meanings, and think over diverse outcomes before making final decisions on the issue at hand.

Citing how language is used to portray the culture of the Akan people in his Akan Marriage, Agyekum (2012) makes a strong argument on the interface between the culture of people and their language. The culture of a group of people is spelled out through the use of their language. The way people practice outdoorings and child naming, youthful transitional rites, marriage, and funerals is seen in the language used for these rites. This is what Foley (1993) cited in Agyekum (2012) as anthropological linguistics that deals with what language must do in the cultural practices of a group of people. The choice of words, expressions, and oral art forms (folklore) all function as reservoirs to preserve the culture of people. The choice of lexical forms and expressions in the Dangme proverbs can therefore serve as a tool to solve problems among the young people which will in the long run help in the preservation of the culture. A research of this nature in the end contributes to the preservation of the culture of the Dangme and the language as the youth listens to the proverbs used to address their challenges are indirectly transmitted to them from the elderly in the society.

Competency in language use is not restricted to oratory, the art of articulation, and clarity alone but also encapsulates the speaker's ability to use language embellishments such as proverbs and idiomatic expressions appropriately. The correct usage of the proverb(s) in the right context illustrates one who is knowledgeable in its use and competent in the culture of the people. Among the Akan of Ghana, culture abhors the use of direct speech on sensitive issues, including sex and taboos. As a result, most elders employ proverbs as an indirection to guard the self-esteem of the addressee in any speech act. Proverbs also act as persuasive devices by which competent speakers manipulate and convince their audiences (Agyekum, 2012).

Dangme proverbs abound in the oral art forms of sociocultural activities. They are mostly expressed during rites of passage, festivals, libations, funerals, arbitrations, speeches, and in the lyrics of traditional songs and digits. Klama, the traditional dance for the Dangme people, has many songs worded with proverbs and idiomatic expressions. The literature on proverbs in Dangme is limited. Accam (1972), a compilation of only 445 Dangme proverbs, is available in the literature. Another collection on the 'Klama language' by Accam (1972) is on idiomatic expressions with some proverbs in Klama. Dakubu edited this unpublished piece and added an annotated index of the terminologies used in Klama songs. Aborchie (2006, 37-42) provides a chapter on proverbs in his book, 'Akpanya Masu Hwo Gbaku.' He classified a few proverbs into themes and stated the characteristics and functions of proverbs for students and teachers in the literature of Dangme. However, with all the Dangme compilation, an in-depth study of the proverbs to serve as an advisory tool for young people in times of problems has not been researched into and this is the gap that the paper seeks to fill.

Kudadjie (1999) works on 'using Ga and Dangme proverbs for preaching and teaching.' He asserted that proverbs contain the experiences and wisdom of the people of the old. He argues that people who are observant, experienced, thoughtful, and creative can compose new proverbs in recent times. He shares in the views of earlier ethnographers and

African philosophers such as Huber 1993 and Finnegan 1970 that the Dangme proverbs are the result of experiences and wise counsel derived from observations made about nature, behavior of human beings, fauna, and flora. Kudadjie (1999) affirms that they state facts from the history, philosophical thoughts, religious beliefs and values, customs, and practices of the Ga and Dangme people. In addition, Dangme proverbs, like other African traditional proverbial sayings, relate completely to human life with the ultimate purpose of teaching wisdom and moral lessons. They contain good counsel against undesirable vices such as anger, pride, backbiting, procrastination, selfishness, stealing, greed, ingratitude, laziness (sloth), and lying. They are used to confirm, reinforce, heighten a situation, cool down passion and tension, attract attention, call to order, re-emphasize a point, summarize, state fact(s), or opinions that might be impolite, likely to offend someone, and may be interpreted as being rude, disrespectful, or not caring. Others praise and advise people to cultivate virtues that promote progress and ensure societal well-being, such as circumspection, cooperation, gratitude, humility, patience, perseverance, prudence, respect, unity, love, and peace. Though Kudadjie (1991) assents to the fact that the proverbs serve as good counsel against undesirable social vices, he specifically did not focus on the youth but the society in general, unlike this study which focuses on the youth.

3. Theoretical framework

This study is cast within the framework of Brown and Levinson's (1987) Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and Face-Saving Acts (FSAs). The model translates into politeness and impoliteness, as also highlighted by Akpanglo-Nartey (2017), Brown (2015), Huang (2014), Agyekum (2002), Culpeper (2011), Obeng (1996), Leech (1983), and Ho (1976).

Huang (2014:142) defines politeness as any behavior, including the verbal behavior of an interlocutor to maintain his or her face and that of the individuals he or she is interacting with. The model argues that face 'is the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself' (Brown & Levinson, 1987:61). Proponents suggest that a positive face represents an individual's desire to be approved of, accepted, admired, liked, and validated by others. Therefore, positive politeness includes all expressions that save the self-image and self-esteem of the addressee, as well as all other participants in the communication discourse. Conversely, expressions that seek to attack the self-image and self-esteem of the addressee amount to negative politeness. Self-esteem and self-image can be preserved through indirection and this could be through the use of proverbs. Since self-esteem and self-image are part of human desires, not excluding Dangme people, elders in the Dangme land are aware of this and therefore address both youth and their elders in order not to affect their self-esteem and self-image. What these expressions seek to achieve is to opt for speech strategies that dissociate the addresser from the addressee, causing the addressee to feel conventional indirectness, hedge on illocutionary force, and apologies (Brown & Levinson, 1987:130). This emphasizes that every individual, irrespective of gender, race, status, or religion, ideally requires positive politeness and that participants in any discourse employ the positive politeness model to save the face of the addressee and the other members in the social discourse. Brown and Levinson's (1987) and Leech's (1983) politeness model is a very important tool in language usage. Leech (1983) explained that the concept of politeness borders the use of language to enhance harmony in relationships. This suggests that in any speech act, the interlocutors need to consider social distance and maintain the face of each other for social well-being and peaceful coexistence.

When one uses a proverb within this model, it serves as indirection, which prevents acts that are likely to threaten the face of the addressee, such as insult, insolence, and anger. The proverb ‘softens’ the force of face threat and maintains the face of the addressee as the utterance is not seen as being rude or insensitive (Obeng, 1996). Brown (2015), as cited in Akpanglo-Nartey (2017), opines that being polite implies considering the feelings and actions of other people and saying things less straightforwardly. This means that one has to be indirect in presenting one’s view, be it a statement, request, command, or whatever. The model indicates that an FTA threatens the addressee’s positive face. Conversely, the FSA saves the negative face of the addressee. For example, a Dangme proverb that says *A fieɔ ogbetee ɔ loko ji a buɔ to ɔ fɔ* ‘We drive the wolf away before we rebuke the goat’ is a proverb the Dangme use in the context of saving the face of a disobedient boy who is caught doing something wrong and brought to the parents for punishment to be meted out to him. The elders would use this mechanism to calm the one who brought the boy, and then after he was sent away, the FTA was used to threaten the positive face of the boy. Another Dangme proverb like *Lo ne jee sã a, kuadaa ne nya wa ne a ke yeɔ le* ‘The fish that smells requires hot pepper in eating it’ is used before flogging him for taking his disobedience outside. Additionally, another elder in the same context advises the parents by saying the Dangme proverb *Dɔ ne be nuulɔ ɔ ne poɔ blɔ mi* ‘The stream that has no one to stop it crosses the road’, suggesting that the parents should endeavor to keep the recalcitrant boy under checks. These help to maintain societal well-being in check.

4. Findings and discussion

The findings are presented thematically as follows:

4.1 Parental protection

In Ghanaian culture, parents protect their children from harm, and vice versa. They guided them from infancy in their speech and actions as children. For instance, in (4) below, the Dangme proverb is used to protect a child.

- (4). *Kungwɔ bi ne e ke e nye pɛli sisi nge fu jee ɔ, a naa le nge kayo nya he nge leno nɔ.*
‘The chick that says, the mother’s armpit smells, finds itself in the beak of a hawk on a baobab tree.’
- (5). *Lohwe nui kpotoo bi nge e nye mi si.*
‘The beast does not catch the piglet in front of the mother.’

The context of the proverb in (4) is where a child disregards the advice of the parent, does not adhere to the dictates of staying close to the parents for parental care, joins a company of bad friends, and the child is found in trouble as the situation in which this proverb was said was specifically to a male child during our data collection. He then resorts to the parents for intervention and rescues him from the grips of the police. This proverb does not threaten the face of the child, but rather, it is directed at him to cause him to realize his disobedience, express remorse, and resolve not to repeat it. The proverb suggests that as a result of the child’s disobedience—that is, disregard for advice—the long arm of the law signifies the beak of the hawk, which pounces on him. The baobab tree signifies a counter back. The advice is

meant to safeguard him from joining bad company, which would keep him from indulging in social vices. The proverb advises that regardless of ‘the pungent smell of one’s mother’s armpit,’ anyone who comports to stay there will eventually escape getting into trouble. Parental discipline involves confinement. The limitless freedom to indulge in everything has several consequences. The proverb advises children and youth to listen to parental advice and hears the dictates of older citizens within the community.

On the other hand, in (5), unlike (4) the proverb was employed to save the face of a youth from the vices that existed in the community unlike in (4) where the child is being protected from the trouble gotten into because of leaving the protection of the parents.

Proverb (5) above demonstrates the protection of the self-esteem of young and upcoming children. The context was a parent advising her child against joining bad companies and indulging in social vice. This happened when the mother observed that the child was becoming insolent; as a result, he began to move out of the city. When the piglet remains under the abdomen (care) of the mother, will, by all means, enjoy the best parental security. Subsequently, the protective mother will not in any way allow a devourer to come near it, let alone to surrender its child to it without any meaningful defense, and therefore decides to save the child’s face. The mother or parent will engage its adversary in a fierce battle until the mother is probably overpowered before the young/child can be taken away. This suggests that parents are the best defense children have, and in the absence of legitimate parents, the elderly in society assume this responsibility. Therefore, no elderly person in any Dangme society will allow a devourer or adversary to befall a younger one under his or her very watch. The exception is only possible in an environment where insolence and disrespect for authority are exhibited by younger people in any society among the Dangme people. The proverb in (5) encourages the young to stay under parental guidance and control until they are fully mature and become independent to defend themselves in any situation. Let us examine the illustration in 6.

- (6). *Kungwɔ bi nɛ hiɔ e nyɛ bɛbɛ mi nɛ yɛɔ apa fiɔ.*
‘The chick that stays close to the mother eats the grasshopper’s hunch.’

The context of the proverb in (6) was a situation in which a child from a village who became wealthy later in life rejected the father. It was used during the time for sharing the father’s cattle, where those who took care of their fathers had larger portions. It encourages other participants in the speech act to support the needy and vulnerable. The chick refers to a servant boy who lived with his father and took care of him. As a result, he deserves to enjoy his toil, which is a better portion of the estate the family elders gave to him from the share of his father’s properties. The grasshopper hunch is undeniably the fattest portion of the insect. This suggests that laborers’ toils are always rewarded positively. Dangme cultural settings abhor the neglect of human beings irrespective of their status in society. Even relatives of the insane still take care of them until they are no more. The proverb, therefore, encourages young and upcoming youth to endeavor to offer their support to their parents when they are weak and incapacitated due to aging or ailment later in life stages.

4.2 Warning of an imminent consequence

In the Dangme community, the youth are advised about the consequences of actions taken in life. These warning messages can be in the form of sermons in churches and proverbs. In

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(7), the Dangme proverb was employed by a mother to a daughter during the preparation of marriage rites.

- (7). *Kɔɔhiɔ yobu nɛ fiaa he nɛ ke madaa gba a, a piɔ lɛ tso.*
'Because of the 'bad' storm, that can destroy the plantain, when the plantain is fruiting, it is supported with a stick.'

Every action taken has implications. This will either bring positive or negative consequences to the person who takes the act. In (7), the proverb saves the addressee's face, encouraging her to maintain self-esteem. The context was a parent advising the daughter to take humility and service to her marital home to prevent the husband from engaging with another woman. The proverb means that for whatever choice or decision one makes in life, there is always a need to plan for uncertainty and prevent any unforeseen calamity or circumstances. The 'bad' storm symbolizes uncertainty, and the plantain fruit-bearing signifies situations of success or the start of success in the life of every young and upcoming youth. The stick or pole used to support the plant tree illustrates the planned preventive mechanism(s) against uncertainty. The proverb seeks to encourage youth to always consider future uncertainty in their planning as they begin to become successful in their endeavors. It further educates the addressee that misfortune can befall any upcoming entrepreneur. Subsequently, in order not to fall completely into the uncertainty, there is the need for effective preventive planning against the 'bad' storm. It is expected that the youth who adhere to such advice will benefit from uncertainty.

Another proverb in Dangme, which also depicts a warning, is shown in illustration 8. In Dangme society, it is believed that you do not delimit yourself, or when you joke with issues that must be taken seriously or must say something but refuse to voice out; the outcome may affect you at the end of the day. See the proverb that illustrates this in the 8.

- (8). *Ke o ke gbe bi nge fieɔ, e lɔɔ o nya he.*
'When you play with a puppy, it licks your mouth.'

The proverb (8) warns the addressee ahead of time to save his face. The context was a parent cautioning the child of the company she joined in Ashaiman, a town in Greater Accra. The proverb seeks to suggest that there is always the need to set boundaries with other people, especially younger ones, to prevent them from taking advantage of you and insulting you or causing your disrepute or despise. It has the equivalence of 'familiarity breeds contempt.' The parent advised his young girl to be cautious of engaging girls; she was older than as they could draw her into a disreputable business in the city. Let us examine the Dangme proverb below in 9, which shows that bad character influences a person. The legs made up of two on the human being move together affect each other as steps are taken; therefore, literary feces on the leg may unintentionally smear on the other leg.

- (9). *Nane yaya nɛ wuɔ fi ke ba haa nane kpakpa he.*
'The bad leg picks up the feces with which it soils the good leg.'

As in (8), the proverb in (9) seeks to inform the addressee that the behavior of members of a bad company joins is transferable and can bring one into a state of disrepute. The

equivalent was ‘show me your friend, and I will show you your character.’ It seeks to suggest to the youth of Dangme that one needs to be cautious in selecting friends of a company, as the conduct affects all members.

4.3 Managing one’s anger

One of the challenges faced by the youth is anger. This emotional challenge gives the elders in the Dangme Community the chance to advise the youth about the need to control their anger at all times. Proverbs serve as tools employed in instances of anger. See the proverb in 10 below, which admonishes one about the control of anger in order to save face.

- (10). *Abui ne dɔɔ la a, e sãã kpã.*
‘Hot needle burns thread.’

Example (10) above occurred in the context of an angry mother responding reluctantly to a request from his boy to go on an illegal gold mining expedition in the Western region. This follows a heated argument. Upon approving this request, an elder drew the woman’s attention to her throwing the boy’s life into a lottery. When the needle became hot, it burned the thread. Metaphorically, the contributions made by humans in any endeavor, such as socio-cultural, socio-religious, socio-political, and socio-economically, among others, have become very useful when rendered in an atmosphere of peace and tranquility. This context is represented by the concept of coldness. Hotness, on the other hand, signifies a hostile and chaotic environment, and decisions taken within such a context, no matter how useful they are, may not be profitable to anybody. This means that the proverb suggests that one does not decide in the mood of anger as it will yield nothing. In (11), because the mind is not in the right frame, and actions or decisions taken during anger may be in haste, most often may not solve the situation at stake. Because throwing a stone normally is targeted at something, you need to be in the right mood so that the target is achieved; otherwise, not much will be realized from the effort. Proverb (11) can be expressed as follows:

- (11). *Abofu te yé tsitsaa.*
‘A stone thrown in anger covers no distance.’

The proverb in (11) implies that when one makes any effort to improve or develop anger, no matter how brilliant the idea is, it does not travel far. It encourages youth not to hasten making decisions concerning life and the future in chaotic circumstances. In contrast, it also addresses those who suffer the consequences of decisions they have taken when they are angry. This means that in order not to be embarrassed or feel that your face is threatened, when you have this emotional challenge especially during your youth days, the proverb alerts you to be mindful not to take a decision when you are angry. Another proverb that deals with anger management is found in (12).

- (12). *Lohwe pelitse mi mi fu we tso.*
‘A bird does not get angry with a tree.’

The relationship between a bird and a tree is that of a symbiotic or mutual endeavor, with the tree (or its branch) functioning as the host, parent, or guardian. The bird always comes back to take rest, build its nest, lay eggs, brood over them, and hatch the young ones until they are

old enough to fly away and become independent on the tree. As such, if the bird becomes angry with its host, it becomes evident that it has nowhere to seek refuge. This suggests that when one becomes angry with his source of livelihood, he breaks his chain of sustenance and survival. The proverb seeks to admonish the youth to endeavor to uphold the relationship they have with their sources of sustenance and livelihood regardless of the challenges that may come along with coexistence. It also reminds those who, for their inability to exercise patience, have broken the relationship and have had their face threatened, are suffering the effect of the anger thereof to seek reconciliation and restoration. In most cases, the elders of Dangme would save the face of suffering victims of such impatience with the proverb, the tongue, and the teeth. Although they are housed in the mouth, they quarrel and resolve their issues daily.

4.4 Envy

Another challenge faced by the Dangme youth is envy. This issue sometimes results naturally, and the proverb in (13) is employed to address the challenge among youth.

- (13). *Ke o ke o nyemi ne ko po nee ɔ, mohu o be nyɔngma a poe.*
'When you prevent your neighbor from getting the ninth, you also do not get the tenth.'

Life is full of order. Within one generation, no one is equal to another. A natural phenomenon is that of one getting something ahead of the other, and this does not in any way undermine the chances of the latter also getting due in life. This suggests that the exercise of patience for one turn cannot be overemphasized. The proverb in (13) suggests that one must take turns to receive something in nature. This encourages the youth of Dangme to patiently accept the natural order of turns such that they do not prevent their peers from receiving what is due to them in life. Again, it teaches an envious one to learn to accommodate turns in life as a natural order, which was given to a young gentleman during an arbitration session. The proverb in (14) is also given during arbitration at the chief palace. The situation was such that it came to light that the action taken by one of the offenders was due to his hatred of his young friend. Elders used the proverb in (14) to finalize the case.

- (14). *Ke o ke nɔ ko to bi ne gbo ɔ, ke o hye we ne hi ɔ, mo mohu o na bi le ma gbo.*
'When you pray for the death of someone's nanny goat, you lose your calf.'

In (14), the proverb addresses the consequence of wishing evil for others as realized among some youths of today. Ethnocentrism (selfish ambition/parochial interests) gives rise to selective justice. The proverb represents nanny and calf metaphorically with the value of wealth, with the former being less weighty and suggesting that one who out of envy wishes the loss of the less valuable wealth rather loses a more valuable wealth. This indicates that when one allows the other to have his value of wealth, his chance of getting better wealth of higher value becomes imminent. The proverb teaches youth to allow their colleagues to have their turns and patiently wait for them to come when due. A negative politeness approach to its use is to cause an envious youth to battle with his act of preventing his colleague from receiving his due to learn that patience is a virtue and envy is vice. Proverb (14) was said to a daughter who was envious of a lady friend who was married, and therefore hatched a plan

to bring trouble into the marriage as her marriage was almost on the rocks. The mother heard her discussion with the people she was planning the evil intention with and stated this proverb to her.

4.5 Selfishness

Selfishness was one of the vices that proverbs were used to solve the youth in the Dangme community.

(15). *Kpeletse tso wui yiblii.*
'The tree of a miser does not bear fruit.'

(16). *Kpeletse mamu ɔ, to le yeɔ.*
'The goat eats the flour of a miser.'

Among the Dangme, it is believed that one virtue that opens the channel of blessings for any individual is generosity, and this is tagged with the maxim 'givers never lack.' In (15), the tree-bearing fruit metaphorically signifies the miser's efforts. In (16), goat represents destroyer, flour, and food. A generous person has others to take care of his belongings. Conversely, the miser has an adversary at his/her disposal. These proverbs espouse the significance of generosity among the Dangme people and encourage youth to emulate acts of kindness from members of society. However, when any youth exhibits such a vice, the elders would use these proverbs to caution them ahead of the likely consequence of their actions. The proverbs were said by elders to a youth gathering when discussing community issues.

4.6 Ingratitude

During the marriage ceremony of one Dangme youth, the elders said the proverb in (17) to the youth in the advice section. The advice was to admonish the youth as they realized that they are ungrateful to their friends who have helped them sometime before marriage. They were encouraged not to exhibit this so that their self-image was not threatened, and neither threatened the face of their friends because they were now married.

(17). *A li nɔ piani ne a suɔ kane gbɔkue ke hyeɔ e he mi.*
'One is not known in the afternoon and a light lit to look at his face in the evening.'

Once a person is known, there is no need for a light source to identify that person. This can only happen when one pretends not to identify him. The message of this proverb is to encourage youth to continue to adhere to cordial relationships even after they have been offered some help. This suggests that gratitude to humanity is always needed. Ingratitude among the people of Dangme is gravely condemned. This proverb advises youth to refrain from ingratitude.

4.7 Determination

Youth are also faced with challenges, and it is only with determination that they can overcome them. The illustration in (18) was said due to the community in which they live.

- (18). *A nuɔ gugwɔ loko a huɔ fi ngmɔ.*
'One has to hold his nose in farming a land full of fecal matter.'

Due to the farming activities that most youth found themselves in, there are many challenges that sometimes frustrate them. The import of this proverb in (18) is that no good thing comes easily as it came up during youth gatherings. It takes the determined youth to endure challenges and overcome them to be successful. Hence, just as a determined farmer would have to endeavor to disregard the difficulties that accompany the entire farming process, so that the youth would have to ignore the pains that accompany working hard at success, that is, to hold one's nose in plowing a piece of land filled with fecal matter. This proverb confirms the popular maxim 'no cross, no crown' and 'no test, no testimony. '. The strong stench from fecal matter and its sour sight is associated with the pains of cultivating a piece of land.

4.8 Mercy

The proverbs in (19) indicate the virtue of mercy, as do the proverbs in (20). In contemporary times, it is not easy to show mercy when one offends you, especially a relative. The proverbs were used to calm the situation at hand; otherwise, it would have been disastrous.

- (19). *Ke bi nya pue o te nɔ ɔ, a ke ha hlɔɛ. Pe a fɔɔ le ke nyu (a tsuɔ ke puseɛ).*
'When a child defecates onto your lap, you use water to wash it and not cut with knife.'

- (20). *Pa yalɔ ne ywiaa pa yami bue.*
'It is the one who fetches water with the pot that breaks it.'

The proverb in (19) is thrown at someone whose close relationship has caused harm to him or damage to his property. The context was a young man who could not manage his uncle's poultry farm well, and brought it to a halt. He runs into debt, causing the collapse of the farm. Inasmuch as he is the same who brings in huge returns, this time he loses the project. Considering the gravity of the act, the uncle is likely to become vindictive. The uncle had summoned the nephew before the elders to charge him by collapsing the farm, and if possible, retrieved some cost from him. The elders of the Dangme people would teach the uncle to have mercy on his nephew and not to take revenge, but to be considerate and forgive. The proverb suggests that such acts are often likely to occur from close relations, and forgiveness is the remedy.

This proverb in (20) is parallel to *Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown*. Pot refers to the tools used to accomplish the task. The one embarking on the task becomes the one who fetches water. As he breaks the pot, there is no longer a means of completing the task. The Dangme encourages the offended (the uncle) to be considerate, as such acts are natural rather than intentional.

4.9 Punishment, fairness and justice

To serve as a deterrent to others, Dangme ensures that when someone is found culpable of an offense charged against him, a befitting punitive measure is administered to him. There is sometimes a need to punish the youth. Although forgiveness is also required, sometimes

there is a need to punish certain bad behaviors found in the community, especially among youth, such as robbery, adultery, or murder. In giving out this punishment, the person is to learn from it but not necessarily to dehumanize him. In issues such as traditional courts, the elders say:

- (21). *Kungwɔ bi nye nane gbi e bi*
'The foot of the hen does not kill the chicken'

to indicate that one's parent could not be so wicked or insane to mete out a punishment that would kill the child. Punishments are meant to instill discipline in children. The proverb seeks to admonish that the punishment is to correct the wrongdoing and straighten the child towards uprightness. Similarly, the elderly say,

- (22). *Tsapi kungwɔ lo ngɔɔmi he ne ke o wu kungwɔ fi ne o be tsue* (Huber, 1993:83)
'The sweetness of the chicken does not prevent you from cleaning its droppings'.

In (22), the proverb suggests that when there is a need for correction, it must be done irrespective of the level of love a parent has for his child. However, the Dangme elders would use (23) to show that one deserves punishment, following a consensus from a council that interrogated the issue brought before them.

- (23). *Ke apletsi tu e he mi hu a pɔɔ e kue si.*
'When the goat frowns, its throat is still slit.''

(23) indicates that regardless of the plea from the culprit, punishment should be meted out to account for fairness and justice. These are the core values of all societies. For the recalcitrant, they added (24) to deal with him among the Dangme. This proverb in (24) is used in addition to the traditional court to determine the level of punishment to be met to a recalcitrant. This means that the severity of punishment is dependent on the degree of offense. The use of the proverbs makes the culprit to understand the need for the punishment in order to feel that no face threatening is intended but the well-being is what is being sought for.

- (24). *Lo ne jee saa a, kuadaa ne nya wa le a ke yeɔ le* 'for the stinking fish, one needs very hot pepper to eat it. '

5.0 Conclusion

One way of saving the face of people who have been found culpable in situations brought to the Council of Elders is to employ indirection and politeness strategies. Being blunt during council meetings is only in extreme cases where a person who is not expected to exhibit a certain bad behavior does so. The proponents of politeness theory argue that politeness maintains face and ensures harmony among the citizenry. Dangme uses proverbs in doing this. Their use forestalls; otherwise, a relationship that will break following the use of proverbs in discourse among people. When a proverb is used, it often calms nerves, ignites healthy discourse, and brings sanctity and conclusions to issues.

This study examined ways in which Dangme proverbs can be used to address challenging issues among youth. It discusses how proverbs are used to encourage youth to continue to practice virtue, society's accepted norms, and values. It also examined how

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proverbs can be used to discourage those who engage in social services. Thematically, proverbs include parental protection, warning ahead of challenges, anger, envy, selfishness, ingratitude, determination, mercy and punishment, fairness, and justice.

It should be noted that the effective use of these proverbs will curb the emerging falling standards of morals among societies. In addition, youth can be encouraged through the use of these proverbs to continue to live lifestyles that are worthy and conform to the cherished socio-cultural norms and values. This ensures family unity, social cohesion, and national development.

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Appendix

List of selected proverbs used to address social services of the youth of Dangme.

1. *A fieɔ ogbetee ɔ loko ji a buɔ to ɔ fɔ*
'We drive the wolf away before we rebuke the goat'.
2. *Lo ne jee sã a, kuadaa ne nya wa ne a ke yeɔ le*
'The fish that smells require hot pepper to eat it.'
3. *Dɔ ne be nuulo ɔ ne poɔ blɔ mi*
'The stream that has no one to stop it crosses the road.'
4. *Kungwɔ bi ne e ke e nye peli sisi nge fu jee ɔ, a naa le nge kayo nya he nge leno no.*
'The chick that says, the mother's armpit smells find itself in the beak of a hawk on a baobab tree.'
5. *Kungwɔ bi ne hii e nye bebe mi ne yeɔ apa fiɔ*
'The chick that stays close to the mother eats the grasshopper's haunch'.
6. *Lohwe nui kpotoo bi nge e nye mi si*
'the beast (wild animal) cannot catch the young in front of the mother'.
7. *Kɔɔhiɔ yobu ne fiaa he je ne ke madaa gba a, a piɔ le tso*
'Because of the thought that the bad storm can destroy the plantain, that is why it is staked/supported when it bears fruits.'
8. *Ke o ke gbe bi nge fiɛ ɔ, e loɔ o nya he*
'When you play with a puppy, it licks your mouth.'
9. *Nane yaya ne wuɔ fi ke ba haa nane kpakpa he (Muɔ nane ne wuɔ fi ke ba haa hiɔ nane he)*
'The bad leg picks up faeces and soils the good leg. In another rendition, it is the left leg that soils the right leg with fecal matter.'
10. *Mue tsɔ we nge ma he mi ne e laa*
'Threaded bead does not get missing in the full glare of the public.'
11. *E hi nya mi ne e laa lile*
'An item cannot be in the mouth and still sbe hidden from the tongue.'
12. *Abui ne dɔɔ la a, e sãã kpã*
'A hot needle burns a thread'.
13. *Abofu te ye tsitsaa*
'A stone thrown in anger covers no distance'.

14. *Lohwe pelitse mi mi fu we tso*
'The bird does not get angry with the tree.'
15. *Ke o ke o nyemi ne ko po nee ɔ, mohu o be nyɔngma a poe*
'When you prevent your neighbor from getting to the ninth, you also would not get to the tenth.'
16. *Ke o ke nɔ ko to bi ne gbo ɔ, ke o hye we ne hi ɔ, mo mohu o na bi le ma gbo*
'When you pray for the death of someone's nanny goat, you lose your calf'.
17. *Kpeletse mamu ɔ, to le yeɔ*
'The goat eats the flour of the miser.'
18. *Kpeletse tso wui yiblii*
'The tree of a miser does not bear fruit.'
19. *Ke jata ya jua nɔ ɔ, a heɔ le adufude*
'When the lion gets to the market, it is bought cheap.'
20. *Matse ne wo we e nimeli a ga womi ɔ, e bo nya wuɔ fi*
'The chief who ignores the wise counsel of his counsellors has the edge of his cloth collecting fecal matter.'
21. *A li nɔ piani ne a suɔ kane gbɔkue ke hyeɔ e he mi*
'The lantern is not lightened to watch the face of a known person at night.'
22. *A fo we nɔ bo tako he nge ma he mi*
'One does not wash his dirty clothes in public.'
23. *A nui gbe ku ke foɛ gbe yo nɔ*
'We do not sire a dog on top of the bitch (do not add insult to injury).'
24. *A pã we lohwe mi ni nge je he nɔ*
'We do not cut open the intestines of a fish in public'.
25. *A nui nɔ nya ne a nuu nɔ gugwɔ hulɔ*
'We do not shut both the mouth and nostril of a person'.
26. *Agaja (kaawi) du we nyu la ke e du ɔ, e ma kplɔ ngue*
'The crab does not bath hot water. Should it attempt it, it will lose its limbs'.
27. *Angmale bi ne foɔ ya nge nɔ kpã kã he*
'It is the son of a naughty parent who cries over the food plate of others'.
28. *Apletsi ke, e nge nɔ ko tita nɔ puɛ se e li kaa le nitse e hlemi nya ne e nge puɛ*
'The goat says, it is making the compound of another person filthy but does not realizes that its soiling its own buttocks.

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29. *Ke apletsi tu e he mi hu a poɔ e kuɛ si (a taa lɛ)*
'Even when the goat frowns, its throat is still slit (castrated).'
30. *Ke e gba we fuu ɔ, a kpɛ we lɛ fuu*
'If it does not tear widely, it is not stitched/sewed as such.'
31. *Lo nɛ jee sã a, kuadaa nɛ nya wa nɛ a kɛ yeɔ lɛ*
'A smelling fish requires hot pepper to eat with.'
32. *Ke o kɛ o gɔleku jɛɔ kpo ɔ, tue mi ma o heɔ*
'When you come out with your thumb, you receive slaps'.
33. *Ke o tsɛ nɔ ko yi kuɔ se mi kɛ wo la mi ɔ, e he la mwɔ ɔ heɔ mo*
'When you push someone into fire, you receive the warmth of the fire'.
34. *Tsapi kungwɔ lo ngɔɔmi he nɛ ke o naa kungwɔ fi mi ngɛ nɛ o be tsue*
'It is not for the sweetness of the chicken that prevents one from wapping his feet should he step into it'.
35. *Loko ji o maa na o supa he se ɔ, ja tslɔ̃ fu mo*
'One recognizes the importance of one's buttocks when one has boil on it.' You see the value and role played by your elders when you get into trouble.
36. *A si we nguɛ gɔleku se nɛ a tsaa kpɔ (nɛ kpɔ hii tsami)*
'The thumb is not left behind in tying a knot'.
37. *A nuɔ gugwɔ loko a huɔ fi ngmɔ (A nuɔ gugwɔ kɛ huɔ fi ngmɔ)*
'One has to hold his nose in farming a land full of fecal matter.'
38. *Ke bi nya pue o tɛ nɔ ɔ, a kɛ ha hlɔɛ. Pe a fɔɔ lɛ kɛ nyu (a tsuɔ kɛ puseɛ)*
'When a child defecates on to your lap, you use water to wash it and not knife to scrap it off.'
39. *Pa yalɔ nɛ ywiaa pa yami bue*
'It is the one who fetches water with the pot that breaks it.' This is parallel to Uneasy, which lies on the head wearing the crown.
40. *Ke o nine gbo we ɔ, o maa ye kpeletsɛ dɛ mi ni*
'If you are not tired of stretching your hand, you will eat from a miser'.
41. *A naa gbogboe hɛ mi loko a fɔɔ ya*
'One must see the corpse before bursting into tears.'
42. *A naa yo loko a ngmɛɔ sa*
'One must see a woman before laying the bed.'

43. *Tsapi kpeni si bwami jua ji he ngme se bwami*
'The beard is not a co-equal to the eyebrow'.
44. *Tsapi ngme jua ji te*
'The coconut is not a co-equal to the stone'.
45. *Te lo nge loko lungu pue*
'The gum exists before the tooth germinated'.
46. *No ko je we e muo nine ngo tsow e tse we blo*
'Nobody uses the left finger to point to the father's house.'
47. *Bi ne e le e de fomi o, e ke nakotoma yeo ni*
'A child who knows how to wash the hands eats with the elderly.'
48. *Boboyoo hi nya mi ne a kpaa nyagba*
'Once there is something little in one's mouth, it becomes difficult to whistle'.
49. *He ne o nya ka ke su o, leje o ma ko ke su o ne*
'You bite according to the size of our mouth.'
50. *Ma ne kpeo loko a woa so te no*
'The collective efforts of the community make the lifting of the forge easy.'
51. *Babahi soo loko a peeo haa*
'The termites gather/conspire before they take an action.'