Abstract

The word “proverb” from Latin “pro-verbium” (“pro” meaning “in front of” and “verbium” meaning “word”), suggests that a proverb takes the place of ordinary words. Proverbs have had a great influence on the lifestyles of many people, mainly through means of religion and culture. They are very common and employed in African societies, particularly in Hausa, a language very rich in this field. In this paper 28 Hausa proverbs, related to 14 human body parts, are quoted and some metaphorical usages of them, found in works listed in References, are given.

In traditional societies proverbs have a relevant position in culture, but have begun attracting interest in modern society. In Africa, this phenomenon is more accentuated nowadays with the disappearance of the old institutions, such as initiation, the role of old men and women, etc. Modern society, everywhere, is based on quick communication and has no room anymore for proverbs that represent the fathers’ culture and even a good use of the language. Hausa is not noticed as an exception, even if it has a very rich and long tradition of proverbs usage.

Pre-Islamic Hausa women were largely dedicated to storytelling activities. It was their domain. Every night, within the confines of their homes, or under the dark sky, they retold age-old stories. Proverbs held a very important place. They encapsulated the people’s history and philosophy of life. This was more so because the people could not read and write. Their history and beliefs were stored and coded in some special mental capacities, and then transmitted orally through various literary genres, including proverbs.
The cultural heritage, ethics, mores, beliefs, traditions and wisdom of the Hausa are all embedded in their proverbs. The acceptance of Islam as a state religion did not in any significant way diminish the status of proverbs in Hausaland. Islam only changed the general animistic belief system found in proverbs by shifting the focus to Allah. The laws governing inter-personal relationships as found in proverbs remained the same. Islam confirmed, to a large extent, the virtues of equity and fairness needed in one’s dealings with others, as taught in Hausa proverbs. Islam broadened the horizons of Hausa proverbs by making use of them as titles of books, newspaper headings and articles, and in works of fiction. The highly moralistic works of fiction by Muslim authors, writers, and poets relied heavily on the adoption of proverbs for easier transmission (Anthonia Yakubu, 2011).

This enormous linguistic heritage has been proved in Hausa by so many bulky collections of proverbs (Kirk-Greene 1966; Merrick 1905; Whitting 1940; Yunusa 1977). Working on this material I have chosen two of them for each body part, which are related to emotion.

Among all the lexical items making up the Hausa anatomical vocabulary (more or less 70), for 35 of them it has been noted to have a metaphorical employment. I have to say that there are a few of them, I found, related strictly to anatomical lexicon. I concentrated my interest, then, on giving some proverbs and some metaphorical usages.

Below are the items selected:

- **Internal**: cikî ‘stomach’, hanjî ‘intestines’, harshè ‘tongue’, zuciyà ‘heart’.

1) \( \text{cik} \) ‘stomach’:

\[
\text{Dùniyà màcè dà cik cē} \quad \text{[RO :54; KG :142]} \quad \text{“The world is a pregnant woman (No one knows what will come of the pregnancy [i.e. a boy, a girl, alive, dead, etc.]”).}
\]

\[
\text{Kôwàcè Jumma’â ta farin cik dà àl’amàřintà} \quad \text{[WH :2; KG :331]} \quad \text{“Every Friday’s rejoicing has its sign (Coming events cast their shadow before”).}
\]

The word \( \text{cik} \) is also used in some metaphorical expressions like:

‘woman spending the last month of pregnancy at home with her parents’

\( \text{gōyôn cik} \) (lit. taking care of stomach) [AH :41]; ‘to make space’

\( \text{yi cik} \) (lit. to make stomach) [AB :143a]; ‘to share the loss’

\( \text{rabâ cik} \) (lit. to share stomach) [AB :143a]; to pump someone’

\( \text{bùgi cik} \) (lit. to beat stomach) e.g. \( \text{yâ bùgi ciknà} \) ‘he “pumped” me’ [AB :143a]; ‘to crawl along’ in \( \text{jâ cik} \) (lit. to pull stomach) [AB :142b]; ‘to eat’

\( \text{gyârâ cik} \) (lit. to repair stomach) [AH :42]; ‘advanced pregnancy’

\( \text{cik tsofô} \) (lit. stomach of old) e.g. \( \text{tanâ dà cik tsofô} \) (lit. she is with old stomach) [AB :142b]; ‘glutton’

\( \text{bâwàn cik} \) (lit. slave of stomach) [AB :142b]; ‘inscrutableness’

\( \text{zurfin cik} \) (lit. depth of stomach) [AB :142b]; ‘energy’

\( \text{wutař cik} \) (lit. fire of stomach) [AB :142b]; ‘happiness’

\( \text{farin cik} \) (lit. of white stomach) [AB :254a]; ‘unhappiness’

\( \text{bakîn cik} \) (lit. black of stomach) [AB :254a]; ‘protection’

\( \text{rufan cik} \) (lit. cover of stomach) [AB :517a]; ‘she is recently pregnant’

\( \text{sâmi cik} \) (lit. to get stomach) [AB :142b].

2) \( \text{hanjî} \) ‘intestines’:

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\text{Ânnûřin huskà kaurin hanjî} \quad \text{[KM :5; KG :47]} \quad \text{“A shining face goes with a full stomach”}.
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1 The meaning of the abbreviations is given in References at the end of each work listed in square brackets.
Kadà kàzà tã yì muñà dòmin tã gã anà jan hanjin ’yaruwà tàtà [KG 253] “The hen should not rejoice because it sees the entrails of its companion being drawn out (There, but for the Grace of God, go I!)”.

The word *hanjì* is also used in some metaphorical expressions like:

‘lamp wick’ *hanjìn fìtilà* (lit. intestines of lamp) [AB :370b] ; ‘beans inters own with corn’ *hanjìn gônà* (lit. intestines of farm) [AB :370b] ;

3) *harshè* ‘tongue’:

*Bà à rabà harshè dà hàkóri* [KM :11; KG :56] “You cannot separate the tongue from the teeth”.

*Harshèn mùtûm zàkìnsà* [RO :124] “A man’s tongue is his lion [if he lets it get loose it will kill him]”.

The word *harshè* is also used in some metaphorical expressions like:

‘language’ [AB :379a] ; ‘fluent speaking’ *kaifìn harshè* (lit. sharpness of tongue) e.g. *kaifìn harshè gàrè shì* ‘he speaks fluently’ [AB :379a];
‘to speak correctly’ *harshè yà fìta sòsài* e.g. *harshànsà bá yà fìta sòsài* (lit. his tongue doesn’t exit well) [AB :379a] ; ‘to rave’ e.g. *harshànsà yà kàraì* ‘he is in the delirium which precedes the death’ [AB :479b] ; ‘to protract’ *yì harshè* (lit. to make tongue) e.g. *dàmunà tã yì harshè* ‘rain season protracted’ [AB :379a] ; ‘to speak loudly’ *daukà harshè* (lit. to carry tongue) [AB :379a] ;
4) zūciyā ‘heart’:

Lābārin zūciyā à tāmbāyi fuskà [K&KG :33] “[For] the news of the heart one should ask the face (One’s face shows what is in one’s heart)”. Proverb stating facts of life.

Zūciyār mùtûm bīrninsà [KG :497] “The heart of a man is his citadel (A man’s home is his castle)”.

The word zūciyā is also used in some metaphorical expressions like:

‘diarrhoea’ gòbañ rā zūciyā (lit. conflagration of heart) [D&M :40];
‘sighing’ àjiyār zūciyā (lit. storing of heart) [AB :977b]; ‘to hold a grudge’ rike à zūciyā (lit. to hold in heart) [N&M :100b]; ‘to sigh’ ajiyē zūciyā (lit. to store heart) [AB :977b];

5) bàkī ‘mouth’:

Kō bà à gwadà ba linzāmī yā fi bàkin kāzā [RO :22; K&KG :53] “Even though no measurement is taken [one can see that] a bridle is too big for the mouth of a chicken (Such-and-such is completely obvious)”.

Kōwā ya ci àlbasà bàkinsà zāy yi wārī [KG :308] “Whoever eats an onion, his mouth will smell (You can’t touch pitch without being defiled)”.

The word bàkī is also used in some metaphorical expression like:

‘mouth’ bàkin wutā (lit. mouth of fire) [B&B :16]; ‘opening of mortar’ bàkin turmī (lit. mouth of mortar) [B&B :15]; ‘beginning of a seam of a mended calabash’ bàkin tsāgā (lit. mouth of incision) [B&B :15]; ‘bank (of river or ocean)’ [N&M :9] e.g. yā jē bàkin tēku ‘he went to the ocean’s bank’ [SU :22]; ‘lobbying’ ban-bàkī (lit. giving of mouth)
[AH :146]; ‘sweet talk’ dādin-bâkī (lit. sweetness of mouth) [AH :148]; ‘sweet talk’ zākin bâkī (lit. sweetness of mouth) [AH :152]; ‘false appetite’ jīn bâkī (lit. feeling of mouth) [AH :149]; ‘to interfere’ sâ bâkī (lit. to put mouth) [AB :63]; ‘to interfere’ tsōmâ bâkī (lit. to dip mouth) [TS :13]; ‘to curse someone’ yi bâkī (lit. to make mouth) [N&M :9]; ‘to show surprise’ rîkê bâkī (lit. to keep mouth) [AB :735b; cf. Dan Goggo and Kano 1969:29]; ‘to conspire’ hadâ bâkī (lit. to join mouth) [MA :50b; cf. Daura, 1990:28]; ‘to conspire’ gamâ bâkī (lit. to combine mouth) [MA :50b]; ‘to pick a quarrel’ jâ bâkī (lit. to pull mouth) [AB :410b]; ‘to abstain from eating in deference to a fast’ kāmâ bâkī (lit. to catch mouth) [N&M :61b]; ‘to speak wheedlingly’ gyârâ bâkī (lit. to repair mouth) [AB :356a];

6) bâyâ ‘back’:

Dà nã sanî kyêyà cê, à bâya a kàn bař tà [KG :112] “If only I had known is like the back of the head, you leave it behind (It’s no use crying over spilt milk)”.

Jà dà bâya gà râgö bà gudù ba nê [KG :242] “For a ram to draw back is not running away”.

The word bâyâ is also used in some metaphorical expressions like:

‘excrement’ bâyan gidā (lit. back of house) [D&M :9]; ‘toilet’ bâyan gidā (lit. back of house) [D&M :9]; ‘latrine’ bâyan dâkî (lit. back of room) [D&M :9]; ‘afterwards’ dâgâ bâyâ e.g. dâgâ bâyâ sai sukâ ki ‘later on they refused’ [AB :93a]; ‘after’ dâgâ bâyâ e.g. dâgâ bâyân nân ‘after that’ [AB :93a]; ‘earlier’ e.g. shêkarùn bâyâ ‘some years ago’ [AB :92b];

7) fuskâ ‘face’:

Ànnûřin huskà kaurin hanjî [KM :5; KG :47] “A shining face goes with a full stomach”.

12
Lābārīn zūciyā à tāmbāyi fuskā [K&KG :33] “[For] the news of the heart one should ask the face (One’s face shows what is in one’s heart)”. Proverb stating facts of life.

The word *fuskā* is also used in some metaphorical expressions like:

‘insult’ *cin fuskā* (lit. eating of face) [AH :146]; ‘welcoming expression’ *ban-fuskā* (lit. giving of face) [AH :146]; ‘to shave’ *gyāran fuskā* (lit. to repair face) [AH :42]; ‘to solve a problem’ *gyāran fuskā* [AH :42]; ‘to humiliate’ *ci fuskā* (lit. to eat face) [AB :275]; ‘to frown’ *hadā fuskā* (lit. to join face) [Dan Goggo and Kano 1969:9]; ‘to frown’ *gamā fuskā* (lit. to lose face) [AB :291]; ‘to look impressive’ *cikà fuskā* (lit. to join face) [AB :141]; ‘to scowl’ *batà fuskā* (lit. to lose face) [AB :88]; ‘to scowl’ *muṟtukë fuskā* (lit. to stir up dust of the face) [MA :236]; ‘to scowl’ *durbuṇā fuskā* (lit. to grimace face) [MA :236]; ‘to show anger’ *daurè fuskā* (lit. to imprison face) [D&M :30]; ‘to face’ *fūskantā* [N&M :38];

8) *gāshi* ‘hair’:

À baṅ kāzā cikin gāshintā [KG :3; K&KG :1] “Leave the chicken in its feathers (Let sleeping dogs lie)”. Proverb exhorting to proper conduct.

The word *gāshi* is also used in some metaphorical expressions like:

‘eyelash’ in *gāshin idō* (lit. hair of eye) [AB :309a]; ‘moustache’ in *gāshin bākī* (lit. hair of mouth’ [N&M :42]; ‘upper layer of cow hide for making the decoration on hide receptacles’ [B&B :63]; ‘red thread
at the edge of deleb-palm (*Hyphaene Thebaica*) (dial. of Katsina)\(^2\)

9) **hannū** ‘hand’:

*Bir̄ à hannun mālāmī ya kàn yi gūdā, à hannun bāmāgujè sai kūkā* [KM :7; KG :94] “A monkey in the hands of a Muslim teacher shrieks with joy, in the hands of a Bamaguje he cries with a fear”.

**Don hannunkā yā yi dōyī, bā kà yankèwā kà yas**

[RO :78; K&KG :28] “Because your hand has become foul smelling, you wouldn’t cut it off and discard it (*One cannot but pardon the faults of one’s dependants*)”.

The word **hannū** is also used in some metaphorical expressions like:

‘handle of flail’ in *hannun bugù* ‘hand of a flail’ (dial. of Zaria) [B&B :218]; ‘stump of maimed arm’ *mugùn hannū* (lit. bad hand) [AB :681a]; ‘channel’ e.g. *hannun tèku* (lit. hand of sea) [AB :371b]; ‘relatives’ e.g. *hannū gārē shè* (lit. he has hand); ‘applying charm to child to cure it of pilfering’ *dāurīn hannū* (lit. imprisonment of hand) [D&M :30]; ‘to help’ *bā dā hannū* (lit. to give hand) [MA :117a]; ‘to help’ *sā hannū* (lit. to put the hand) e.g. *zò kà sâ manà hannū* ‘came and help us’ [AB :751a]; ‘to pay attention’ *sā hannū* (lit. to put hand), e.g. *sarkī yā sâ masà hannū* ‘the Emir has turned his attention to him’ [AB :751a]; ‘to interfere’ *tsōmà hannū* (lit. to dip hand) [MA :117a]; ‘to interfere’ *sā hannū* (lit. to put the hand) e.g. *kادà kà sâ hannū cīkin âl’āmârīnsà* ‘don’t interfere in his affairs’ [AB :751a]; ‘to take part’ *sâ hannū* (lit. to put hand) e.g. *yā sâ masà hannū* ‘he took part in it’ [AB :751a]; ‘to sign’ *sâ hannū* (lit. to put hand) e.g. *yā sâ hannū à takàřdà* ‘he signed the letter’ [AB :751a]; ‘to take a hand in x’ *sâ hannū* (lit. to put hand) e.g. *bàlīsè* in Standard Hausa.
sun sâ hannū gâ rîkon kasañ ‘they’ve begun to administer the country’ [AB :751a]; ‘to consume marriage (with virgin-wife) kāmâ hannû (lit. to catch hand) [AB :371b]; ‘to begin to menstruate’ ga hannû (lit. ‘to see hand’), e.g. tā ga hannuntà ‘she began to menstruate for first time’ [AB :371b];

10) idô ‘eye’:

Idô wà ka rënà? Wandâ na kè ganî yâu dà gôbe [KG :193] “Eye, whom do you despise? The person I see today and tomorrow (Familiarity breeds contempt”).

Idòn dà ya ga Sarkî bâ yà tsòron Gálàdimà [KG :194] “The eye that has seen the Chief will not fear the Galadima”.

The word idô is also used in some metaphorical expressions like:

‘ankle’ idòn kafâ (lit. eye of leg); ‘ankle’ idòn sàu (lit. eye of sole) [N&M :54a]; ‘distal end of the ulna’ idòn hannû (lit. eye of hand) [AB :397a]; ‘hollow’ e.g. idòn itâcê (lit. eye of tree) [BA :473]; ‘water spring’ idòn ruwà (lit. eye of water) [BA :473]; ‘special dish prepared in Kano (ba yarine)’ idòn múzûrû [BA :473]; ‘feminine ornament’ idòn hazbiyà [BA :473]; ‘silver coin used as ornament by women’ idòn môtâ (lit. eye of car) [BA :473]; ‘to learn fast at school’ yi idô (lit. to make eye) [N&M :54a]; ‘the rising or forming of something little’ yi idô (lit. to make eye) e.g. dâwà ta yi idô ‘grains have formed in head of bulrush-millet’ [AB :396]; ‘to look attentively’ zubâ idô (lit. to pour into eye) e.g. sai mukà zubà idô kawài ‘then we looked serenely’ [N&M :54a]; ‘to wait expectantly’ sâ idô (lit. to put eye) [N&M :54a]; ‘to wink’ kashè idô (lit. to kill eye) [N&M :54a]; ‘to dazzle’ dâuki idô (lit. to overcome eye) [AB :201b]; ‘I don’t sleep, I hear’ idònâ… biyu (lit. my eye… two) [D&M :49]; ‘guide’ idòn dâjî (lit. eye of bush) [BA :473]; ‘soldier brave until his army is advancing, but ready to escape when the other part will reply to
attack’ idôn yâkî (lit. eye of war) [BA :474] ; ‘ability of itinerant trader’ idôn safarâ (lit. eye of itinerant trader) [BA :474] ; ‘slack’ e.g. idô gârê shî or yanâ dà idô (lit. he has eye) [AB :395] ; ‘sense of propriety’ e.g. bâ shî dà idô (lit. he doesn’t have eye) [AB :396] ; ‘parsimony’ e.g. yanâ idô (lit. he is eye) [AB :396] ; ‘insolence’ tsaurin idô (lit. hardness of eye) [AB :396b] ; ‘power to see things invisible to other people’ wankìn idô (lit. washing of eye) [BA :396];

11) jinî ‘blood’:

Â nêmi jinî gà fârâ [RO :105; K&KG :58]? “Would one seek blood from a locust? (You can’t get blood from a stone)”. A locust is supposed by the Hausas to be bloodless.

Jinî bâ yà māgànîn kîshîn ruwâ [RO :10; KM :26; KG :245] “Blood is no cure for thirst (Blood does not quench thirst)”.

The word jinî is also used in some metaphorical expressions like:

‘popularity’ farîn jinî (lit. white of blood) [N&M :58b] ; ‘unpopularity’ baîn jinî (lit. black of blood) [N&M :58b] ; ‘to be on guard’ shâ jinîn jîkî (lit. to drink body blood) [AB :430a] ; ‘to become afraid’ shâ jinîn jîkî (lit. to drink body blood) [AB :430a] ;

12) kûnnê ‘ear’:

Àkwiyâ tâ yi wâyô dà yànkakken kûnnê [KG :27] “The goat learns wisdom from a cropped ear (A burnt child fears the fire)”.

Jikî yâ fi kûnnê jî [RO :51; K&KG :51] “The body surpasses the ear in hearing (If one refuses to listen to advice he will be taught by hard knocks)”. 
The word *kûnne* is also used in some metaphorical expressions like:

‘auricular appendices of the heart’ *kûnnan shaitsan* (lit. ear of Satan) [AB :556b] ; ‘handle’ e.g. *kûnnan samfô* ‘handle of bag’ [AB :556b] ; ‘each of the prongs of a forked or not forked object’ e.g. *kûnnan kibiya* (lit. ear of arrow) [AB :556b] ; ‘strap to whip’ *kûnnan bûlalâ* (lit. ear of whip) [AB :556b] ; ‘to cheat someone’ *rûdâ kûnne* (lit. to perplex ear) e.g. *yâ rûdâ kunnuwânsù* ‘he cheated them’ [AB :556b] ; ‘to pay attention’ *kasà kûnne* (lit. to arrange ear) e.g. *yâ kasà kûnne* ‘he paid attention’ [AB :556b];

13) *kafâ* ‘foot, leg’:

*Kafâ bâ tà zama indà bâbù kasâ* [KG :257] “The foot does not stay where there is no ground (*There’s no smoke without fire*).”

*Zûmûntâ à kafatâ ta kê* [RO :52; K&KG :19] “Good relationships [depend upon] feet, [i.e.] (The maintenance of good relationships between people requires frequent visiting). *Blood is thicker than water*”).

The word *kafatâ* is also used in some metaphorical expressions like:

‘handle of a mortar placed close to the bottom’ [B&B :119] ; ‘handle of the frame to build tubes’ [B&B :119] ; ‘edges of a plaited mat’ [B&B :130] ; ‘type of a roof beam’ (dial. of Daura) [B&B :205] ; ‘completed frame of a roof which has to be thatched’ (dial. of Zaria) [B&B :22] ; ‘steps of staircase’ [B&B :156] ; ‘first and last plaited row of fencing mat’ (dial. of Bauchi) [B&B :138] ; ‘to misrepresent’ *daukař kafatâ* (lit. to take up foot) [AB :201b] ; ‘bad luck’ *farař-kafatâ* (lit. white of foot) [AH :152] ;
14) **wuyà** ‘neck’:

In kûnnē yā ji mûgûwař màganà wuyà yâ tsërè [KM :21; KG :217] “If the ear hears bad news, the neck will escape (Forewarned is forearmed)”.

**Kûmê tsawon wuyà kâi nê bisà** [KG :301] “However long the neck, the head is always on top”.

The word **wuyà** is also used in some metaphorical expressions like:

‘wrist’ **wuyàn hannū** (lit. neck of hand) [AB :937] ; ‘upper edge or neck of earthenware receptacles’ (dial. of Zaria, Kano, Bauchi) [B&B :15] ;
‘apex of a round-hut’ e.g. **wuyàn dâkî** (lit. neck of hut) [AB :937b] ;
‘the stitching called **cîn wuyà**’ (lit. eating of neck) [AB :146b] ; ‘to exceed (a little)’ **yî wuyà** (lit. to make neck), e.g. **yâ yî musù wuyà** ‘he exceeds them a little’ [AB :937b] ; ‘dependence’ **â wuyà** (lit. on neck), e.g. **yanâ dà mûtûm gömâ à wuyànsà** ‘he has ten persons dependent on him’ [AB :938a] ;

The metaphorical expressions related to other parts of human body are very frequent in Hausa³ and, going through the large corpus of proverbs collected in the years by scholars working on this language, I find them extremely relevant. Unfortunately no one up to now, except Dr Batic, as I know, has drawn the attention to study systematically the usage of the metaphor in Hausa.

³ Dr Batic has given a very good proof on this topics in his Ph.D. dissertation and in one of his article, recently published.
References


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