

## THE USE OF PROVERBS AS COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES: A CONTRIBUTION TO THE SOCIOCULTURAL VALUES OF THE SONGHAY AND DOGON PEOPLE

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**Abstract:** This study attempts to explore the use of proverbs in the Songhay and Dogon languages as strategies of communication. Proverbs constitute one of the ways of reflecting the Songhoy and Dogon customs, culture, tradition and thoughts. Specifically, the study seeks to identify and collect proverbs containing animal names which abound in the Dogon language and the proverbs in the Songhoy tales by Mahamane Tindirma from the Timbuktu region, and show their social significance. Given the absence of related literature which is currently lacking in the local environment, such an investigation thus appears as an unprecedented project which needs to be supported in order to safeguard the Songhay and Dogon proverbs and to pass them on to future generations. The study uses qualitative method to collect the data from the municipality of Koro in the Dogonland and the Songhoy tales by Mahamane Tindirma. In particular, this research uses documentary sources and audio transcription. In addition, interviews and focus group discussions were also used with participants who are elderly male and female native Dɔ̀gɔ̀sɔ̀ speakers. It is hoped that the results obtained would constitute one more didactic material for the teaching of Songhoy and Dɔ̀gɔ̀sɔ̀. As proverbs are indispensable in oral communication, their use and meaning enrich the language and are contingent upon the age-group. Findings would also contribute to restore cultural heritage and help Songhoy and Dɔ̀gɔ̀sɔ̀ learners get familiar with the use of proverbs.

**Keywords :** Dɔ̀gɔ̀sɔ̀, proverbs, sociocultural values, Songhoy, strategies.

## L'UTILISATION DES PROVERBES COMME STRATEGIES DE COMMUNICATION : UNE CONTRIBUTION AUX VALEURS SOCIOCULTURELLES DES SONGHOY ET DOGON

**Résumé :** La présente étude se propose d'explorer l'utilisation des proverbes en langue Songhoy et Dogon comme stratégies de communication. Les proverbes constituent l'un des moyens de reflet des coutumes, de la culture, de la tradition et des pensées en milieu Songhoy et

Dogon. Cette étude vise à identifier et collecter les proverbes ordinaires et ceux contenant des noms d'animaux qui abondent dans la langue dogon et à recenser les proverbes dans les contes Songhoy de Mahamane Tindirma de la région de Tombouctou en vue de démontrer leur portée sociale. Compte tenu de l'absence de littérature connexe qui fait actuellement défaut dans l'environnement local, une telle recherche apparaît ainsi comme un projet sans précédent qui doit être soutenu afin de sauvegarder les proverbes Songhoy et Dogon et de les transmettre aux générations futures. L'étude a privilégié la méthode qualitative pour la collecte des données dans la région de Tombouctou et dans le cercle de Koro, en milieu Dogon. Plus précisément, en plus des ressources documentaires et la transcription des sons audio, cette recherche a aussi privilégié le guide d'entretien et Focus-groups avec les participants qui sont des personnes âgées (hommes et femmes) locutrices des langues nationales Songhoy et Dɔgɔsɔ. Les résultats obtenus d'une telle étude pourraient constituer un matériel didactique de plus pour l'enseignement du Songhoy et Dɔgɔsɔ. Les proverbes étant indispensables dans la communication orale, leur usage et signification enrichissent la langue et cela dépend selon le groupe d'âge qui les emploie. Les résultats contribueraient également à restaurer le patrimoine culturel et aideraient les apprenants à se familiariser avec l'usage des proverbes en Songhoy et Dɔgɔsɔ.

**Mots clés :** Dɔgɔsɔ, Proverbes, Songhoy, Stratégies, valeurs socioculturelles.

## Introduction

The use of the proverbs, or more generally proverbial phrases, is a very common language practice in various cultures around the world. The proverbial word is general in scope, containing a moral, an expression of popular wisdom or an experiential truth that it is deemed useful to recall. Nowadays, the human sciences in general and paremiology in particular have a special interest in the linguistic analysis of proverbs through its various typologies: saying, maxim, sentence, adage, precept, aphorism, prayer ... and up to the insult. The traditional resolution of conflicts among the Songhoy and Dogon people in Mali has always been based on socio-cultural values and endogenous rules of our traditions lavished by proverbs. The use of proverbs as communication strategies in Malian societies helped maintain social cohesion and guarantee social stability and ensure the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Thus, proverbs and their typologies (saying, maxim, sentence, adage, precept, aphorism, prayer, etc.) were a prerequisite for any judicial resolution. They are part and parcel of the principle of peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms. This article is a study on the paremiology of two Malian peoples who are historically and culturally closely linked, the Songhai and their cousins the Dogons. The problem of the study is the issue of the conservation of this rich cultural heritage, that is to say the collection and the writing down of this diffuse knowledge, more rural than urban and especially transmitted by the old generations. Indeed, the study aims to highlight and preserve the proverbial

Songhai and Dogon lyrics that are gradually disappearing nowadays. The objective of this study is to identify the different typologies of proverbial phases used by these peoples and to analyze the language function of these forms of communication. This study is guided by two research questions: what are the different typologies of proverbs in the conversations of the Dogons and in the Songhai tales of Mahamane Tindirma? What are the language functions of these proverbs?

The main purpose of the study is to show the standardization of the cultures of various civilizations and peoples living in harmony in the same geographical space since the proverbs belong to the linguistic heritage of the same country that these peoples share. The exploration of the use of proverbs in the Songhai and Dogon languages as strategies of communication is of paramount importance. Proverbs constitute one of the ways of reflecting customs, culture, tradition and thoughts, etc. For this reason, the study brings to light the unexplored proverbs which are perceived as cultural heritage of the Malian people. In addition, the study investigates proverb use as communication strategies in two different areas in Mali (Timbuktu in the North and Koro in the East Center). In these areas, proverbs are used to serve strategic expressions for communication that unveil the authentic world values of the users. Most often, proverbs portray people's beliefs and attitudes toward their everyday life realities and environment.

To date, no research has been done on the Dogon proverbs containing animal names which abound in the Dogon language and the proverbs in the Songhay tales by Mahamane Tindirma from the Timbuktu region. There is a growing need to understand what proverbs enshrine and their social significance. Given the lack of interest shown by recent research in dealing with this link between proverbs and animal names on the one hand, and proverbs and the tales by Mahamane Tindirma on the other, sociolinguists find themselves deprived of this branch of Malian culture. This is why, exploring the meaning and the use of the Songhay and Dogon proverbs as communication strategies can be considered as an imperious necessity not only to enrich Malian culture, but also to pave the way for other researchers to carry out other studies in this field.

Research by Archer Taylor (1931) indicates that proverbs include all manner of ideas that characterize human experience. The author defines a proverb in more than 200 pages, and he concludes that it is just not possible to give a meaningful definition of it. He notes "...an incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial and that one is not." In other words, defining a proverb is quite difficult. Mieder (2004) claims a proverb as a concise statement of an apparent truth which has prevalence among the people. However, the wealth of proverbs still leaves us to be desired with many problems. Besides, previous studies have yet to provide evidence of appropriate definitions of proverbs. For example, Tamba (2000a) denotes the lack of a clear definition and the reliance on intuition in proverbial studies for ages. Milner (1969) questions why it is difficult to agree on an adequate definition of the proverb on a global scale and concludes two reasons:

excessive attention to meaning and insufficient attention to structure; attachment to a single restricted language instead of analysis on common properties valid in several languages. Moreover, the distinction between proverb, adage, maxim, sentence, motto, slogan, axiom, precept, aphorism, apophtegma, and epigram is still very vague. For some reason, it is difficult to say when proverbs began to circulate among members of a community. However, the term proverb has a biblical origin. According to Cudjoe (2000), it refers to a book of the Old Testament consisting of maxims ascribed to King Solomon. Proverbs are able, with expressions and in a precise way, to characterize what is meant. By proverb, in its broad sense, we understand short popular phrases having at the same time a figurative scheme, grammatically constituting a complete sentence.

Appearing since antiquity, they accompany people in their history. Proverbs are not just simple sentences; they express the opinion of the people including popular appreciation of life and observations of popular memory. The biggest issue that we are dealing now is that a sentence becomes a proverb when it fits the way of life and the thoughts of several people. Commensurate with this issue, it should be noted that proverbs are not intact; they are dynamic as the men who create them are dynamic. They annoy, upset, joke, and amuse. They also make you cry, moan, and frighten. In addition, they warn, teach, value and devalue. There are so many feelings that the people express through the proverbs. The art of the word has appeared in the language of the peasant, hunter, cook, merchant, shepherd, weaver, blacksmith, the men of the most useful professions on earth. The proverbs are universal: all cultures use them. For instance, the pen is mightier than the sword (English); *Qui vivra verra* (French); *Sigitε mɔgɔ son* (Bamanan proverb). In the light of the forgoing, people in the Northern and center-eastern parts of Mali frequently use proverbs in their everyday life conversations and speech events; proverbs are common and never considered as evidence of old fashioned or dated thinking attitudes. On the contrary, far from being uncreative, people use these ready-made expressions to express values, maintain conservation, and update young generation about the past. In this respect, proverbs are used to connect the past with the present events. In addition, proverbs as means of expression in any culture are also employed pragmatically; that is, what is said is not always what is meant, Paul Grice (1989). Furthermore, proverbs are used: to comment on social conflict situations, to criticize people or events in an indirect and metaphorical way, to counsel when a situation requires it, to criticize unacceptable attitudes, to discipline children and youth, to direct certain human behavior, or to question old or new values. From the research conducted by Salwa Ahmed (2005), it shows that proverbs name social conditions and they are used to make people's opinions and feelings known to others and make people effective in their roles.

Songhay and Dogon proverbs, like all other traditional proverbs, derive from many various sources. Some proverbs are drawn from general facts, like

“Numə lei numə suməje” (Mutual aid; Unity is power). This type of proverb is common in all cultures. Some other proverbs are drawn from the reality of life and day-to-day experiences, like this common proverb: “arusege ebu gə maan la, paana obu gə maan” (Buying animals is not difficult, but the feeding is). That is, it is not difficult to possess animals, but it is difficult to breed them. Such proverbs are used to call attention to good morals and responsibilities. The use of proverbs helps protect much of the cultural heritage of the community. By using proverbs, community people restore their socio-cultural heritage, traditions, history, and moral values and principles. Africans use proverbs to educate children. They are practical means for transmitting culture and knowledge from one generation to another. Finally, the use of proverbs averts the young people from deviating social norms and beliefs. Had not it been proverbs, they would have put their socio-cultural values into oblivion.

## 1. Methodology

Methodologically, the study uses, on the one hand, secondary data collected in two Songhai storybooks by the famous storyteller Mahamane Tindirma, 'Tooya Farru' and 'Faatuma Ardo', and on the other hand, Dogon proverbs containing the names of the animals collected through a conversational interview and a focus group. The interview was administered with ten elderly participants (six men and four women) in Koro. The focus group was organized in four tea 'grins' made up of former retired teachers in Koro. The conversations of the participants were recorded using a Samsung A2core mobile phone and transcribed into Dɔgɔsɔ and then translated into French and English. 27 proverbs containing the names of animals have been identified. All the proverbs collected have been analyzed and classified in a tabula form, and their communicative functions highlighted according to the different typologies.

## 2. Results and discussions

The purpose of the research is to explore and identify proverbs containing animal names which abound in the Dogon language and the proverbs in the Songhoy tales by Mahamane Tindirma from the Timbuktu region, and show their social significance. The most important findings to appear from the data collected is that there is, undoubtedly, a general agreement about the use of proverbs as strategies of communication. Proverbs exist in all human languages; it is difficult to claim that there is a nation without proverbs. People of different cultures have employed them in communication in order to express their understanding, beliefs, values and the realities surrounding their immediate and distant environments. Natives in the African community use them in ordinary daily conversations.

The findings reveal that proverbs are passed on by oral traditional and customary practices as a result of universal experiences. Proverbs are effective means for transmitting human culture and mediating social issues; they help transmit cultural beliefs, way of life, knowledge, and social values. They express the communities' principles and concepts about social norms in that

people use them to express attitudes and behaviors. Most often, the use of proverbs are also associated with the speakers' identity and social backgrounds. To this end, the use of proverbs promotes people's attachment to their language and culture as they are perceived as cultural heritage by the community people. Interestingly, the results show that proverbs are effective tools for social needs. They fill in the function of providing advice about human behavior, action, and life. It is obvious from the above that proverbs are held for truth in the physical environment where they are uttered. The social function of the proverbs can also be extended to educational virtue in that they are used to teach the need for social solidarity and not its deviances. Therefore, proverbs in Africa fill in multidimensional functions. In the ongoing, we present the proverbs explored from the tales by Mahamane Tindirma from Timbuktu on the one hand and the Dogon proverbs containing animal names on the other. More generally, it should be, however, noted that, by animal, we mean the biological sense (vertebrates and invertebrates).

### 2.1 Songhay proverbs from the tales of Mahamane Tindirma

A few words about the author Mahamane Tindirma

- The author, Mahamane Tindirma is a well-known storyteller among the Songhay linguistic communities in Mali, Niger and elsewhere.
- He is said to be famous for his talented ability to communicate in the Songhay language to entertain people at mass gatherings such as weddings or naming ceremonies.
- He has produced around 87 recordings on local Songhay tales, historical events or Islam and traditional beliefs. The selected books were transcribed from the author's original dialect and adapted to the official standard Songhay dialect by Dr Youssouf Mohamed Haidara and Dr Ibrahima Abdoulaye.
- The books are published by EDIS, 2007, 2010, and they are accessible to a large number of Songhay speakers.

The following table displays Songhay proverbs from the tales of Mahamane Tindirma. The translation in English of the proverbs and their interpretations in consistence with appropriate typologies are provided.

Proverbs	Translation in English	Typologies
"Nda n' na fuula day, bong a n' g'adam. Fuulaa hayoo, nda ni n'a ciiri day, nga mo boŋ ra a ga huru; ngi huru dogey ka man' ti affoo".	When you buy a hat it is to put it on your head. If we buy salt with the price of the hat, it is also for the head, only they are not used in the same place.	Saying that establishes a fact
"Boro ma bay haya kaŋ a g'a har sabi, gaakuuru kul, deene ka beerind'a i, sabi a sii kala boro hiŋey nda cere	Be careful of what we say, because the tongue is the most important organ in the human body. It is protected by the teeth which are covered by both lips. But, the tongue can say things which	Adage expressing practical advice

game, jina meekuuru g'a daabu; amma deene ga haya har kaŋ ga basikuuru fattandi waynaa ra.	can be prejudicial to the body itself.	
Nda woy yadda, Irkoy yadda; nda a wanji, ni almaanoo hasara.	What a woman wants, God wants. When a woman doesn't want it, you lose everything you have acquired.	Aphorism
"Buuyan ti alwaazibi me, amma haawi mana ti alwaazibi."	Death is an obligation, but shame is not an obligation.	A precept stating a philosophical teaching.
Gariibu-gidallaa-gariibu kaŋ ga loomataa, ma koy kay windi meega ka nee: "War hoyoo mana kan de, war ciiroo mana maa": woo mana ti gariibu ga alwaazibi.	A beggar who makes a door-to-door begging for alms does not have the right to appreciate the quality of the food offered to him.	Maxim enacting a rule of conduct
Ni nda boro ga yenje, n'g'a kaŋandi hala daw ma huru moŋey ra, ma gar war mana ngolliya dam cere ra fay, bara lakkal ma yenje.	You can fight an enemy and knock him down; you can put dust in his eyes without tying his arms, for intelligence is the best way to fight.	Adage expressing practical advice
Irkoy si boro kul hinoo mongondi a se	God does not place a burden on anyone that they cannot bear.	A precept expressing a teaching of a philosophical nature.
Irkoy mana boro taka kaŋ a mana a noo, borey nooyaney de ma fay.	God did not create anyone without provision, and people do not have the same opportunities.	A precept expressing a teaching of a philosophical nature
"Dangayan ga dayandi, gaarayan ga dayandi, i kul goo yoobu."	The curse can be bought, the blessing can also be bought, they are both in the market.	Precept expressing a moral teaching
Kaŋ war ga maa i ga nee koyra senni ra "Irkoy m'ir waa woy zaari", n'ti woodin no boro g'a har. Boro ma nee, 'Irkoy m'ir noo i ra baani ' ; sabi hundi si hin ka waa ŋaayan zaari. Aru si hin ka waa woy zaari. Woy si hin ka waa aru zaari. Gaakuuru si hin ka mooru alaafiya.	It is often said in Songhaï "May God preserve us from women". Rather, we should say "God grant us peace with them." For, as the human being cannot do without food, so the man cannot do without the woman, and the woman cannot do without the man. The soul cannot do without peace.	Precept stating a philosophical teaching

## 2.2 Dogon proverbs containing animal names

*In the table below, Dogon proverbs containing animal names and their English translation and interpretation in consistence with appropriate typologies are presented.*

Proverbs	The name of the	English translation	Typologies
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	animal		
Iju dɛgɛnu inrinyɛje	Dog	The dog eats in licking	Saying expressing patience and persistence
Iju bɛrɛ gu jinɛ maa selumu sele.	Dog	It is useless to ask if the female dog will give birth to puppies	Saying expressing evidence
Agerɲu ɛɲɛ kɔnrɔn le di nɔɔje	Margouillat and hen	The margouillat drinks thanks to the hen	Saying expressing profits or takings
Agerɲu puu ku bunrun bɛɛɛ	Margouillat	All the margouillats are not red-headed.	Saying expressing wealth, success. Wealth does not mean success.
Dɛgɛ laara omulu anwanhi wɔ gi	Monkey	the monkey says that the tamarind around the village is sour	Saying expressing carefulness, caution, vigilance
Dɛgɛ puu dumɔ bunrin	Monkey	all the monkeys have red buttocks	Saying expressing resemblance, similarity. All the chiefs are alike
Dige gama puu genwi	Cat	All night cats are black	Saying expressing lack of confidence
ɛɲɛ anran dulɔ oɔno sibe go gɛɲɛje	Hen	The hen's tail tilts towards the direction of the wind	Saying expressing allegiance, adherence, obedience, submission. Everybody heads to the right side; everybody looks for better conditions.
ɛɲɛ kusu ɛgɛlu ye, nanwan borii.	Hen	The deaf hen is meat.	Saying expressing stubbornness. the stubborn person is an easy prey.
ɛɲɛ i wona iru sele maa inɛ	Hen	the chick does not know her mother has no breast	Saying expressing dependence, reliance. a child does not know that his parents are poor. No one believes in the poverty of a superior
inɛ iju pɔn lɔɔje, dulɔ baanran goido woi manale	Dog	The person who sews dog pants knows where to fix the exit for the tail.	Adage expressing strategies, subterfuge, craftsmanship.
Iju kinrun manjyɛle	Dog	The dog's nose is always wet.	Aphorism expressing general truth
Jandulu yinwanhi ye, jin dogai:	Donkey	The donkey is dead, farting is over.	Saying expressing evidence
Jegejaga taru baru nanhu: baraa ye una yinwen je; baraalu ye u ba yinwen je.	Jegejaga (mysticalbird)	Jegejaga is an imaginary, mystical bird. If you see his egg and pick it up your father will die, if you don't pick it up your mother will die.	Saying expressing dilemma, difficult situation to overcome
Kaka pana uwai ye, tamu go nɛ aanai	Locust	if locusts are your food, don't grab them by the legs.	Adage expressing carefulness, cautiousness, advice
Kikiju woba bunɔ wo togoje	Bat	it is the bat that takes care of his father's jar of beer.	Maxim expressing responsibility
Ku umɔ kamaa dagaa ti ye, titaa	Hyena	if you don't care about yourself/give yourself	Maxim expressing negligence -

panaai.		importance, you will be the prey of the hyena	if you don't care about yourself / respect yourself nobody will respect you
Dejele keu keu, dinun le kumiyeje	Fly	the fly which is too much in a hurry will drown in hot water	Maxim expressing imprudence, carelessness
Na banjai, nabɔjɔ le kamanu dorii	Cow	No need to stone the cow owner with dung.	Saying expressing charity towards the needy persons
Peju kenɛ piru, punanhu pugɔlu ye ye wo pugɔ	Sheep	The white-mouthed sheep is suspected of having eaten the flour.	Saying expressing suspicion, mistrust. The thief is always suspected of theft in the neighborhood.
Pelegele jin, jege damale	Turtledove	The turtledove's farting does not collapse the wall	Saying expressing power control, authority the poor are not listened to and considered in decision-making
Peru susu perui kayaje	Worm	The cailedrat worm feeds on the cailedrat.	Adage expressing means of subsistence We live within our means.
Sasa kiriyeɲu dɔɔru, kiriye gi ye tebu panai	Bird	the bird that wants to fly before growing wings will be the prey of the hawk.	Adage expressing council, patience. Everything has its time. There is no use to hurry up.
Uwɔ kɔ yuguruna kinrin nɛ pɔnrinyele	Pithon	your nose is like that of the pithon: one cannot blow it.	Saying expressing impossibility
Tata dulɔ aaje le, bɔjɔ liyenai	Hyena	if you take the hyena's tail, don't be afraid of its feces	Adage expressing perseverance, courage
Inɛ ɔgɔɲɔ deneje, ɛnrɛn iyɛle	Camel	Someone who is looking for a camel cannot see a goat	Saying expressing cupidity, exaggerated ambition. A person who is never satisfied, greedy.
Na joo ganu nɛ, na kire gɔnu ye goje	Cow	it is in a herd of cows that we also find a cow with crooked horns.	Saying expressing diversity.

## Conclusion

In this research, we have first made an overview of the theoretical background of proverbs. We have then provided some background of the Songhoy and Dogon proverbs under study, followed by the methodology. Next, we have discussed the results with respect to sociolinguistic explanatory factors relating to Songhoy tales by Mahamane Tindirma and Dogon proverbs containing animal names.

Last but not least, proverbs are traditional systems of education. Incorporating proverbs into curricula and textbooks could serve as an effective means of promoting cultural decolonization. To this end, the educational authorities could use them as a means of instruction at all levels of education. The results show that the two communities use proverbs in their different

communications as strategies to convey their respective socio cultural values. These values include but are not limited to moral values, popular wisdom, education, mutual aid, peace and solidarity, simple advices, etc.

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