

Aesthetic, Communicative and Symbolic Representation of the Philosophical Underpinnings of Akan (Akwapem) Proverbs

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Abstract

Proverbs, as an integral part of African art and culture, are imbued with significant philosophical and communicative values that give meanings to their aesthetic quality as well as enhance their practical application for co-existence. The people of Akan Akwapem are blessed with unique philosophies in terms of proverbs and symbolism that seek to shape the youth and prepare them for a better future. This language of proverbs teaches, guides and, to a large extent, adorns relationships. The study employed a qualitative and visual research methodology. Symbolic communication and interactive activities were used to select 25 proverbs, which have been represented in abstract symbols. The study revealed great interests of the Akwapem youth in the philosophical underpinnings and symbolic communicative dynamics of Akwapem proverbs as the bedrock of Akan culture. In the quest to promote and preserve these opportunities on proverbs and symbolism as a tool for cultural development, there is the need to educate frequently the youth, both formally and informally, on the uses as well as the effects of these proverbs and symbols on society as a whole.

Keywords: Akwapem, aesthetics, philosophical, proverbs, symbolic communication

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs are wise philosophical expressions, generally short and sometimes very funny yet make the language rich, picturesque, and express a hidden or obvious wisdom (Moon, 1998; Addo, 2001; Kquofi, et al, 2013). Proverbs are short well-known sayings that express an obvious truth as well as offer advice. It is believed that proverbs are characterised by "shortness, sense, and salt". They are "pithy, pungent, and popular". Furthermore, proverbs help transmit the wisdom of the years and are thus a source of practical, moral and political guidance (Gabelein, 2008; Gyekye, 1997; Quarcoo, 1972). At all times, wisdom is the product of age and experience; the proverb uses wisdom as a tool to make it simple and appealing to the conscience of youth by "...endowing it with a youthful vigour" (Bullock 1994; Rattray, 1927; Gyekye, 1997).

CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF PROVERBS AND SYMBOLISM

Proverbs are empirical stepping stones that display the nature of oral cultures (Moon, 1998). This reveals the nature of proverbs and identifies our ancestors with regards to the valuable

role they play in daily living in terms of ideology, philosophy, and style. It is important therefore to note that proverbs, as expatiated by Moon, have existed a long time, and not only that, they have been tested empirically and have produced results as wise sayings that caution and guide our people from day to day. Proverbs, again have established an environment of better understanding and morality to its people and the rest of the world. The understanding of local proverbs gives rise to the use of the head, (thinking, reasoning, and valuing patterns of many ethnic people, by going deep into the soul of the culture). According to Moon, proverbs are critical genre to help understand primal religion.

Oral cultures, which are prevalent in Third World Societies, are proverb-oriented... proverbs and myths are significantly helpful in deciphering (Larry & Porter, 1998). Our culture could be learnt through proverbs. The beliefs about the universe and how to live in it are often found in the folktales and the proverbs of the people (Hughes, 2008; Sarpong, 1974; Asare Opoku, 1997). It is therefore critical to note the cultural background, philosophy and ideology of our forefathers that pertains to life. Consequently, these ideologies (proverbs) are enriched with morality, dignity, confidence and self-reliance. It will not be out of place, therefore to appreciate these spices of life as the "backbone" of the African society.

A fair knowledge on proverbs was further explained by Mbiti (1997) as deeply rooted in our African culture, and almost everyone who grows up in a village becomes a living carrier of proverbs. Mbiti is evaluating the identity and foundation of proverbs as the values that form the backbone of Africa and the rest of the world. Indeed, Africa with its entire mouth-watering environment, which includes culture, attests to this fact by showcasing proverbs as one of the tools that is used in shaping society. Mbiti, again cautions everyone by saying "...one can trust neither the sky in the rainy season nor babies' bottoms!" This proverb explains principles and practices of the African as it were and would never compromise those principles. As a matter of fact, there are some traditional people who hardly utter a few dozen sentences without including a proverb or citing a proverbial phrase.

According to Mbiti (1997), this beautifies the African values in terms of language. To Mbiti, the language of proverbs is a whole way of seeing the world, a way of speaking with other people, a way of feeling the atmosphere in the society in which they live. This assertion by Mbiti clearly illustrates the quality and finely laid down structures of our Ancestors, which are handed down from generation to generation. To the African, and for that matter the indigenous Ghanaian, languages are spiced up with wise sayings in terms of proverbs and philosophies. This is what guides and makes us well recognised as one people with a common destiny.

COMMUNICATIVE PROPENSITY OF AKAN PROVERBS

Visual literacy of Akan proverbs, however, has the propensity to decode, interpret, create, challenge and evaluate actions that communicate with visual images in a creative and appropriate way to express meaningful messages (Yankah, 1986). Clearly, Yankah's attempt to highlight the scope of Akan proverbs gives value, meaning and understanding to Moon's (1998) assertions. Indeed, the two scholars' streaming of proverbs seems to synchronise, and emphasise on the valuable role of culture as the tool for shaping society. It is axiomatic that few people recognise the importance of art in daily living, much less analyse it in terms of design or style; nor do they appreciate it fully (Asihene, 1978; Kquofi et al, 2013). This statement clearly emphasises the need to appreciate the communicative roles of our cultural values.

The nature and role of signs and symbols can be mixed up in the process of transmitting information (Dzobo, 2009; Agbo, 2005; Yankah, 1986). The use of symbols supported by

proverbs as a tool for communication and education could have a deep sense of value and continuous productivity that could propagate the unique and principled systems of life and practices, in society put in place by our ancestors to guide us. Symbols and proverbs are objects that communicate myriads of ideas and living facts to the people for a common good. This language of proverbs and symbols has a common identification and understanding of the people, and has been appreciated and passed on from generation to generation.

Symbols are a rich resource that when utilized would guide and direct the youth of Akuapem. In fact, it could shape and leave an imprint with regards to their lifestyle. The history of the people of Akuapem is based on the basic concept of epistemology, which is important and recognised as relevant for the development of the youth.

The Akuapems are endowed with thousands of proverbs, of which their ancestors left for them as a legacy (Balmer, 1969). The researchers selected proverbs based on enquiries made on challenges that confront the youth and parents/guardians in various homes at Aburi, Kitasi, Tutu, Mampong, Aprede and Larteh, all of Akuapem in the Eastern region of Ghana. The effort and contributions of the researchers to create these symbolic, proverbial art forms for interpretation, recognition, appreciation and their relations with the values that they propagate significantly in our cultural setup are aimed at building practices that would in turn build strong principles within the cultural setting of Akuapem. Again, how these symbolic proverbial art forms could be used to some extent in solving challenges that confront the youth of Akuapem. This could promote peace, harmony and understanding among the people for community development. The main objective of this study was to design and compile 25 proverbial symbols to represent selected Akuapem proverbs to be applied as tool for education.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive, direct observation, unstructured interview, arts-based and visual design approaches of qualitative research methodology were employed in executing this research. The researchers chose the qualitative research method to enable them study the life style of the people that is the cultural and social phenomena, since this study require ethnographic explanation and meaning, as well as values of the Akan-Akuapem proverbs which are philosophical in nature. According to Ting-Toomey, (1984), qualitative research design is the study of symbolic discourse that consists of the study of texts and conversations, interpretive principles that people use to make sense in their symbolic activities. Again, this research method enabled the researchers gain illumination on the systems of thought, behavioural patterns, attitudes, concerns and aspirations, value systems, practices, cultural significance and lifestyle with regards to symbols and proverbs. The researchers randomly selected 300 people, which included chiefs, linguists, elders, traditional priests and knowledgeable elite from the target population (Aburi, Kitasi, Konkonuru, Ashwerease and Tutu communities, all in the Eastern region of Ghana.) for the study. These categories of people were selected based upon their knowledge on proverbs. Subsequently, the researchers adopted an approach based on the concept and theory of arts-based research style for the representation of the proverbs into graphic symbols. This was due to the fact that these proverbs were created on concepts based on ideologies and philosophies for easy identification, interpretation, recognition and appreciation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Mbiti (1995), symbols belong to proverbs. Indeed proverbs themselves are symbols of communication condensed into short sentences or even anecdotes and stories,

which are sometimes carved on wood, stone or other material, or even sung or danced or acted. Again they are drawn from the whole society and they refer to all activities of society, natural objects and phenomena.

Based on enquiries made on the youth of Akuapem, the researchers collected a number of proverbs that are targeted at guiding the youth, and with the aid of the Blooms Revised Taxonomy, a principle based on creating, evaluating and analysing, and a principal Chinese adage "I hear I forget, I see I remember and I practise I understand", generated graphic symbols to represent 30 selected proverbs. Below is a discussion on the selected proverbs in Akuapem Twi, literal meanings in the English language, their represented symbols, symbolic meanings and cultural significance as well as the lessons they seek to propagate. Aesthetically, the abstract symbols of the selected proverbs can be likened to the Adinkra or Agama symbols which are opaque in nature and seeks to communicate on societal issues.

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Papaye nyera da.

Literal meaning: Goodness always stands out and is never hidden.

Symbolic meaning: Good works would always triumph over evil no matter how long it takes. This symbol depicts two people facing the opposite direction, one being small and the other bigger. This illustrates that no matter how small your good deeds may appear today, it will be remembered in the future.

Cultural significance: This proverb is used to encourage the youth to continue with their good deeds, and not lose hope. Good works would always triumph over evil, no matter how long it takes. The symbol has the likeness of both the Adinkra and Agama symbols in terms of shape, philosophy and aesthetics. The concept behind this symbol is embedded in Ghanaian culture based on the fact that Goodness is chosen against evil in any civilised society (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Papaye

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Wudi asempa a, wunyin kye

Literal meaning: If you are in the habit of doing what is just (good), you live long.

This is a drum text that is played at the chief's court during an arbitration process. The drummer plays this piece intermittently as a reminder (warning) to all assembled in the courtroom - the chief's elders, plaintiff, defence, and the crowd of on-lookers to ensure fairness.

Symbolic meaning: The pursuit of justice brings long life and peace of mind.

Cultural significance: This proverb is used to advise people in society to be fair and just in life so that they will live long and in turn advise the young ones. The symbol depicts two postures with a balance in the middle as an arbiter. This symbol is representing Justice because justice is given by an independent body, which is expected to be fair and firm (Figure 2).

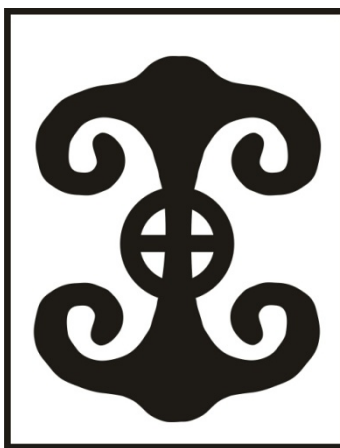


Figure 2. *Asempa*

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Abofra bɔ nnwaw, na ɔnmmɔ akyekyere

Literal Meaning: A child breaks a snail, but does not break a tortoise. It is not beyond the strength of a child to break the shell of a snail which is soft compared to that of a tortoise, which is hard.

Symbolic meaning: Children are not cautioned against attempting difficult tasks; it rather urges that one must know one's strength and not attempt to do what is beyond one's capabilities or strength.

Cultural significance: The proverb is used to advise the youth to measure their strength against their deeds in society, devoid of arrogance. This symbol is illustrative depicting a child with a snail and a tortoise. As such, this symbol is to be used to communicate Initiative (Figure 3).



Figure 3. *Abofra bɔ nnwaw*

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Abofra ye nea ɔpanyin ye a, ohu nea ɔpanyin hu.

Literal Meaning: When a child does what a grown-up person does, the child sees what a grown-up sees. An over forward child suffers for his or her misdeeds.

Symbolic meaning: A child's place in society is to be humble and obedient.

Cultural significance: This proverb is used to guide children from arrogance and misdeeds in order to avoid social vices like teenage pregnancy, criminality, etc. Therefore it is a symbol that advocates for moral uprightness. In Ghanaian traditional indigenous culture, children are

expected to be nurtured or trained especially during initiation rites, so they will grow up to be responsible citizens in society. Therefore, this is a symbol that is to denote Purity (Figure 4).



Figure 4. *Konkron*

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): *Agya, gyae na menka! wokyɪ.*

Literal Meaning: "Father, let me say it!" is forbidden (bad manners).

Symbolic meaning: It is unbecoming (improper) for a child (junior person) to say what should be said by the father (his senior).

Cultural significance: This proverb seeks to guide children to refrain from arrogance in society, hence have respect and honour for the elderly in society. Nurturing is of prime importance to the indigenous Ghanaian society. Therefore, structures are put in place to train up a child during adolescence period, and this is done during initiation rites by most indigenous societies, where moral lessons, etiquette, cleanliness, craft, cooking, act of respect and even fighting skills are thought. Communicatively, this abstract symbol denotes Honour (Figure 5).



Figure 5. *Ntetew*

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): "Me na dea, memfa! M'agya dea memfa!" na ɛde awi ba.

Literal Meaning: "This belongs to my mother, I will take it!" makes the child a thief.

Symbolic Meaning: Children should not be allowed to touch things in the house without permission from parents.

Cultural significance: This proverb is used to advise children to seek permission before they take anything from the house so that they will not be regarded as thieves. This symbol denotes Discipline (Figure 7), which is important in any system of thought and practice in every environment. Ghanaian cultural values strongly emphasise that one is to act responsibly, and not mismanage resources because it belongs to one's father or mother.

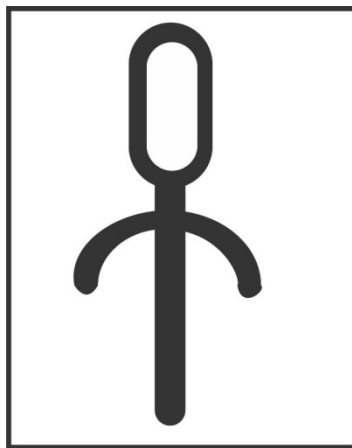


Figure 6. Ahohyeso

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Se agoru ereba w'agya abobow ano no a, wonpe ntem nkohwe.

Literal Meaning: The dance which is being brought to the gates of your mother and father, you do not hurry to go and see.

Symbolic meaning: If a good thing is surely coming into your hands, do not be anxious to get it.

Cultural significance: This proverb is used to caution the youth against impatience in the face of anticipation. In life one must not rush or be seen chasing after riches, properties and power prematurely. Therefore, the cultural value is that it pays to wait for your turn, in order to avoid social vices like theft, greed arrogance etc. that may be tempting. This symbol, however, denotes Patience (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Akumakese

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Mmea-pe mu wo bribia, anka aponkye da apankan mu.

Literal Meaning: If chasing after women were profitable then the he-goat would ride in a palanquin (as a king).

Symbolic Meaning: Kings and chiefs, as a mark of their high status in society, are carried in palanquins on festive occasions. Going after women is not regarded as an achievement that should be rewarded with a ride in a palanquin (to be showered with honour).

Cultural significance: This proverb is used to warn young men, in general, not to pursue women lecherously in society. This symbol is illustrative and derives its inspiration from indecent acts done in society, especially by young men and women. The effects of these acts bring unwanted hardships to society especially young women, who are put in the family way. Human resource naturally goes down and affects productivity. What is more, the status of the young women goes bad due to poverty cycle, especially when they are not taken care of by the men who impregnate them. Therefore this symbol, which denotes Caution, is to sound caution to the youth (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Susubiribi

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Wo ba saw asaw bɔne a, se no sɛ: "W'asaw nyɛ fɛ", na nse no sɛ: "Ɔkra tete gumu".

Literal Meaning: When your child dances clumsily (badly) tell him or her: "You are dancing clumsily"; do not tell them: "Dear one, dance as you please".

Symbolic Meaning: The proverb expresses the need to correct children when they go wrong, and not allow parental love for them to stand in the way.

Cultural significance: Children are expected to respect the elderly in society, and lead a moral life. Aesthetically, this symbol was inspired by the philosophy of the importance of discipline and the need Advice to the youth in our society (Figure 9). The moral lessons this symbol seeks to communicate is about how one must make careful distinction between love and relationship.



Figure 9. Afutu

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Ɔba nyansafo wobu no bɛ, na wonka no asem.

Literal Meaning: A wise person is intelligent and perceptive and therefore understands proverbial language without having it explained to him.

Symbolic Meaning: A wise person refers to a child that has been trained and nurtured therefore he understands proverbial language and acts accordingly.

Cultural significance: This proverb addresses the importance of training a child the way it should, to be a wise person in society. In order to achieve success in the family there is the need to train up the child in terms of wisdom, knowledge and understanding. This is typical of the indigenous Ghanaian society our cultural practices. This symbol is depicting the responsibility for both men and women to train up their children in the appropriate way so they will grow to be responsible citizens. Abstracted from the shape of the traditional African pot, which philosophically denotes wisdom, this symbol communicates Wisdom (Figure 10).

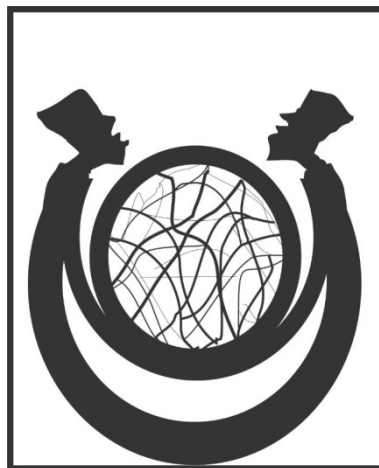


Figure10. Nyansa kutu

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Ɔba nsu ntia, wo mma no nufu?

Literal Meaning: Will you not feed the baby because it is not crying?

Symbolic Meaning: A mother has the responsibility of feeding the baby and must not wait until the baby cries.

Cultural significance: The proverb suggests that a person must fulfil his or her obligation and not wait to be asked. And in the case of a debt, the debtor can be asked, "Will you not pay because your creditor has made no claim?". It is expected that the one who calls the piper must pay for the tune. One should be mindful of his or her responsibilities in order to make headway in life. The abstract symbol is illustrative depicting a child (the white space on the right) and the breast (the white space on the left) that was derived from the proverb. Everyone is expected to play his or her role to build the rich cultural fabric of society, hence the symbol depicting Responsibility (Figure 11).



Figure 11. *Obaatanpa*

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Wokɔ kurow bi mu a, dwom a ɛho mofra to no, wɔn mpanyin na ɛto gyaw wɔn.

Literal Meaning: When you visit a town and hear children singing, they are songs which the elders sang and passed on to them.

Symbolic Meaning: The younger generation learns not only songs but the entire body of traditions of the society from the older generation which preceded it.

Cultural significance: This proverb stresses the passing down of the customs and conventions from one generation to the other which ensures continuity, survival, and identity of a particular group of people or society. Aesthetically, the three circles depict the generations as the projections on the middle circle also depict the heritage won for us by our forefathers. This symbol denotes Heritage (Figure 12).

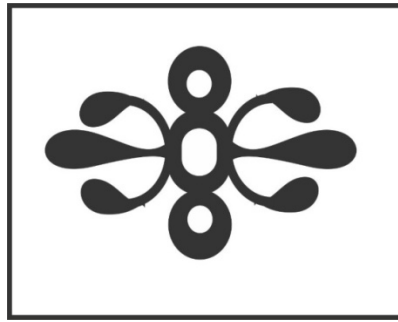


Figure 12. Agyapaye

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): ɔbarima na ɔnum aduru a eyɛ nwene.

Literal Meaning: It is a man who drinks medicine that is bitter.

Symbolic Meaning: The courageous person does not buckle under in the face of adversity.

Cultural significance: This proverb is used as a means of encouragement to people in the face of difficulty that confronts them in society. In indigenous Ghanaian culture it is expected of a man to stand up to the task of leadership in areas like providing for the family, warfare, and kingship, among others. Anything perceived to be a difficult task is the responsibility of men. Therefore, this symbol denotes Bravery (Figure 13).

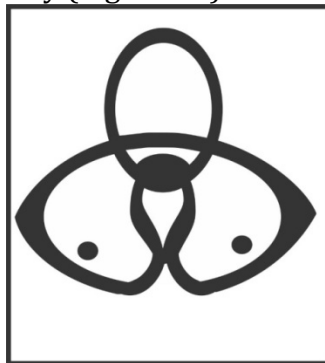


Figure 13. Akukuduru

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Mmerante bo ye sikaa, anka ɔpanyin biara anya bi pen.

Literal Meaning: If youthful arrogance were money every grown-up (old person) would once have been rich.

Symbolic Meaning: Every elderly person has once been a young person, and if youthfulness were wealth, then every adult could be said to have been born rich.

Cultural significance: This proverb cautions against putting too much of a premium on youthfulness but it alludes to wisdom (experience), which comes with age. The proverb is designed based on the philosophy underpinning the proverb, which emphasises on experience as a model for development. In appreciating the design of the symbol, two heads appearing at both the beginning and ends of a ladder can be identified. The ladder depicts experience in life while the heads depict the beginnings of life and end of life respectively, rendering the symbol to denote Life (Figure 14).

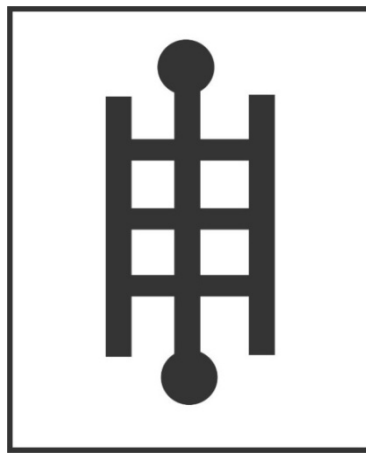


Figure 14. Kwan atwiri

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Wunni panyin a, due.

Literal Meaning: If you do not have an old person (man or woman), pity on you.

Symbolic Meaning: To have an elderly person in your home is to have a source of reference and knowledge based on experience, and the person who does not have this source of reference deserves to be pitied.

Cultural significance: This proverb emphasizes on the role the elderly have played as educators of the youth in the Akan tradition, and the youth turn to them for knowledge about the culture, etiquette, customs, rituals, etc. The elderly therefore have a special place, a place of respect, for the wisdom and experience which guide the young. Aesthetically, this abstract symbol was developed based on the philosophy of the need to have elderly people in every house to guide the young ones, owing to their experience in life (Figure 15).

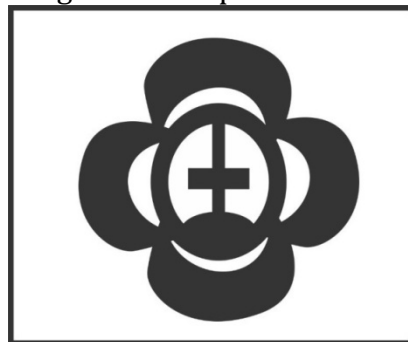


Figure 15. Opeemu

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Ɔpanyin na bi nyee bi da, na abofra de obiara aye bi pen.

Literal Meaning: Everybody has been a child before but not everybody has been an old man or woman.

Symbolic Meaning: This proverb underscores the wisdom and experiences which come with old age and contrasts them with youthfulness and inexperience.

Cultural significance: The proverb reveals that only a few people have reached old age, which confers respect on persons because of the role the elderly play in society. It is of common knowledge by the average Ghanaian that wisdom comes with old age and experience. The aesthetic aspect of this symbol was motivated by the idea of experience that comes with old age. More importantly, it communicate the significant cultural connotations attached to the elderly in our source as the epitome of Wisdom and Experience (Figure 16).

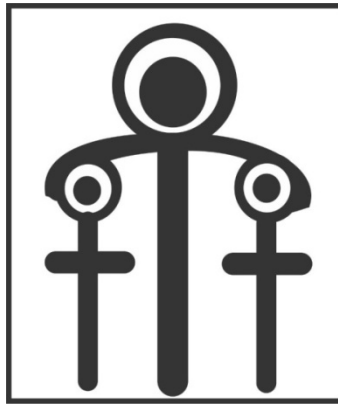


Figure 16. Opayin

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Abofra huruw tra ɔpanyin a, okosiawwɔ ne osawo ne kon hu.

Literal Meaning: When a child jumps over an elder, he gets caught in his or her horns.

Symbolic Meaning: The proverb alludes to the wisdom and experience which comes with age and suggests that because of this a child who attempts to jump over the head of an old man or woman, or a child who tries to cheat an old man or woman will be caught.

Cultural significance: This proverb explains how the older person can see through the tricks of a younger person. Security is important in life and precautions are necessary for security. It is better to operate in a secured environment than to live in an environment of fear or unbelief. This symbol was designed based on the concept to communicate security. Aesthetically, the symbol depicts an elderly woman considered to be well experienced holding an infant on her head (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Banbo

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): ɔpanyin ti mu na wohuan akuma.

Literal Meaning: It is from the head of an elderly person that you remove an axe-head.

Symbolic Meaning: The wisdom and experience of the elderly provides solutions to problems, and when young people consult the elderly about their problems they find solutions which will cut through their difficulties. In this sense the axes (solutions to the problems) are obtained from the head of the elderly.

Cultural significance: This proverb encourages the need to consult with the elders on issues. Apart from the perceived experience that lies in the bosom of the elderly, there is equally an important role that the elderly play in society. The cultural system in Ghana, and for that matter Africa, drums home a message of goodwill to the effect that wisdom comes with old age. There is the strong belief by the African that when there is a stalemate and times are difficult, it is necessary to call on the elderly who are perceived to have wisdom and knowledge to solve

challenges. The aesthetic aspect of this symbol is based on the concept of an axe in a human's head, which is used to communicate the symbol of Solution (Figure 18). In traditional Akan culture, an axe represents wisdom.

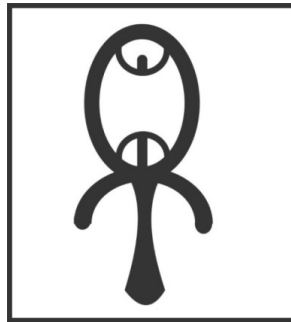


Figure18. Susuka

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Obi hwε wo ma wo se fifi a, wo nso wohwε no ma ne de tutu.

Literal Meaning: If someone else (a parent) takes care of you up to the time you cut your teeth, you take care of them when they lose theirs.

Symbolic Meaning: The mutual obligation of both parents and children to each other and interdependence, which are the basis of societal life as the Akan understand it are emphasised by this proverb.

Cultural significance: The proverb stresses that by fulfilling one's obligation, equilibrium is maintained in social relations and this is brought about through the fulfilment of parental and filial obligations. This symbol stresses on the call to duty as an important phenomenon in life, it is morally right and expected that all would perform creditably in terms of responsibility. Underpinning the aesthetic aspects of this symbol is its communicative tendency of Obligation (Figure 19).

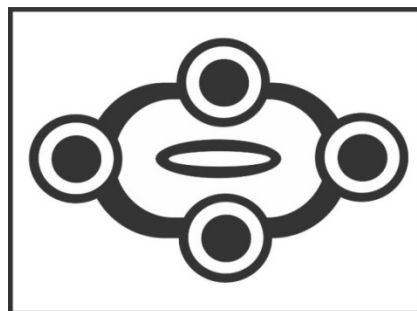


Figure 19. Asede

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Ɔpanyin kyε adi a edwo.

Literal Meaning: When an elder shares things (to his children), there is peace.

Symbolic Meaning: The old person, because of his or her experience and wisdom, is expected to be fair and rise above partisanship.

Cultural significance: This proverb is used to explain a unique situation that when a grown-up shares things among children, he or she does it to the satisfaction of the parties involved, and there is no quarrelling afterwards. Equilibrium and equity are vital factors that bring about peace and harmony in society. In Ghana, every society abhors violence and embraces peace. The great significance of this culture is based on the fact that everyone seems right in his or her own sense and this brings about chaos. Therefore, it is important that experience and maturity must be employed to peddle understanding amongst people. This symbol seeks to communicate the sense of Harmony (Figure 20).

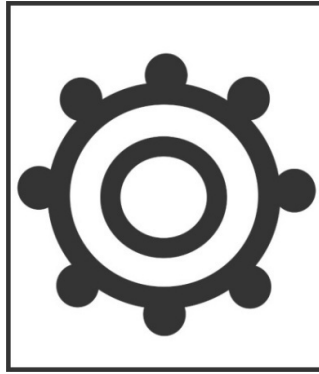


Figure 20. Asomdwee

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Ɔpanyin ne mmofra hu nantew a, wɔsoa n'agua.

Literal Meaning: When the elder learns how to walk with the young ones, they carry his stool.
Symbolic Meaning: Being an elder does not automatically confer privileges on a person, for the person must behave in a responsible way in order to earn the respect, authority and the service due elders.

Cultural significance: This proverb underscores the responsibility of an adult to give respect to the young so that they, in turn, will reciprocate with the honour and service due elders in society. Children are said to confer glory on society, therefore it is needful that the elderly show the way by displaying good attitude for the children to follow. The aesthetics and philosophy of this abstract symbol seek to communicate Good Living (Figure 21) among the youth of Akwapem.

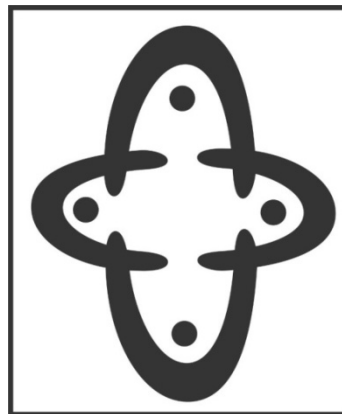


Figure 21 Abrabopa

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Oduru yefo nnom aduru mma ɔyarefo.

Literal Meaning: The healer does not drink medicine for the patient.

Symbolic Meaning: If the patient is to recover, he or she must take the medicine, however bitter.

Cultural significance: The proverb suggests that there are some things (challenges) which we must do (solve) ourselves, for no one can do them for us. This symbol is philosophical and has a significant role it seeks to play in society, based on the fact that responsibility is important in decision making, and one must learn to be bold in taking decisions for himself in the midst of advice and support. This is a call to duty and a fair challenge in the life of the indigenous African cultures. Therefore this symbol seeks to denote the spirit of Challenge (Figure 22).



Figure 22. Nhye

Proverb (Akuapim Twi): Ɔkɔm de woa, womfa wo nsa abien nndidi.

Literal Meaning: Even if you are hungry, you do not eat with both hands.

Symbolic Meaning: A well-bred Akan eats with the right hand, not the left.

Cultural significance: This proverb seeks to advise the youth against greed, condemnation and disgrace. Again, the proverb suggests that a person must not do the wrong thing and that however desperate or pressing the necessity, it must be kept within the bounds of propriety. This symbol portrays greediness in society. There are some people in society who are very greedy and this attitude is judged as backwardness so far as societal growth is concerned. The justification lies in the fact that one must learn to share and care. This is not to say that people should be lazy and not work. The hand that does not work must certainly not eat. The symbol obviously communicates the spirit of Greed (Figure 23).

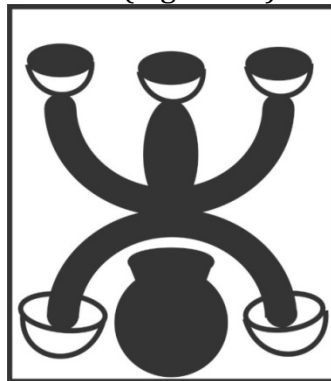


Figure 23. Ammimdi

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Ohiani nni hia daa.

Literal Meaning: The poor person does not experience poverty all the time.

Symbolic Meaning: Fortunes change and a poor person's condition could change for the better.

Cultural significance: The proverb is used as an encouragement to the needy and the destitute, telling them not to give up in their effort to improve their lot. The African has a strong belief that life has its ups and downs. Therefore, moral lessons are taught to guide the youth in their daily livelihood. Again the youth are comforted with wise sayings in order for them to be calm but remain hardworking, for there is hope for the future. The philosophy and aesthetics of this symbol seeks to denote Fortune (Figure 24).



Figure 24. Nhyira

Proverb (Akuapem Twi): Momono tew, na guangan nso tew.

Literal Meaning: The green leaf falls off the tree, and the dried leaf also falls.

Symbolic Meaning: This is used as a warning to young people who may be ignorant and may assume that they have all the time in the world, that death comes to both the young and old.

Cultural significance: This proverb seeks to alert the youth that a person must be prepared for death at any time. This is based on the fact that human beings are mortal and would surely pass on to glory from generation to generation. This symbol states clearly that death is there for all, both young and old thereby denoting the Uncertainty of Life (Figure 25).

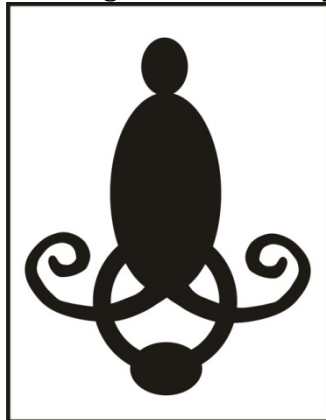


Figure 25. Abrabo

The above illustrations and discussions by no means exhaust the entire realm of proverbs and symbolism among the people of Akuapem in the Eastern region of Ghana. As a matter of fact there are many proverbs and symbols as there are many towns and villages across the Akuapem State. The challenge is that, although there are many proverbs and symbols, very few people really appreciate them in order to know the various meanings and significance attached to them. Again, since culture is dynamic, some of the meanings of the proverbs and symbols keep changing due to acculturation and cross-cultural marriages. There are new forms of proverbs emerging due to emerging challenges in our society.

CONCLUSIONS

Akuapem (Akan) symbols and proverbs have a flamboyant display of their philosophy and culture based on unique structures as well as systems of thought and practices. This culture or way of life are showcased and can be effectively traced through the Akuapem culture that includes their numerous proverbs and symbols. The various symbols and lessons that were created based on the philosophies underpinning those proverbs have significant communicative values that can positively impact the Akuapem youth. Symbolisms, for many years, have existed with the Akuapem people. The representation of these proverbs into aesthetically pleasing abstract symbols, which could be used daily, will go a long way to shape

the youth in diverse ways in terms of morality, purity, dignity, responsibility, patience and hope.

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