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# **Proverbs as an Efficient Communication Strategy Among the Khassonke People of the Khasso: A Socio-Linguistic Study**

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## **Abstract**

This study focuses on the use of proverbs as social communication strategies in Khassonke. In the Khasso area, people use proverbs as a means of acquiring knowledge, learning, and integrating into social life. This study aims at producing a collection of proverbs. In particular, it identifies and analyzes the common proverbial speeches abounding in the Khassonke language in order to demonstrate their social functions. Due to the lack of related literature which is currently lacking, such research thus appears as a key project that must be supported in order to safeguard the Khassonke proverbs and pass them on to future generations. The study used the qualitative method for data collection in the Kayes region. More precisely, interview guide and focus-group discussions were employed with elderly speakers of the Khassonke language. The results obtained from this study constitute documentary and educational materials enriching the teaching of Khassonke.

**Key-words:** Cultural heritage, Khasso, Proverbial speech, social communication strategies, cultural value.

## **Résumé**

La présente étude porte sur l'utilisation des proverbes comme stratégies de communication sociale en langue Khassonke. Au Khasso ou dans le milieu Khassonke, les populations font usage des proverbes comme moyens d'acquisition de savoir, d'apprentissage, et d'intégration à la vie sociale. Cette étude vise à produire un recueil de proverbes. Plus précisément, elle identifie et analyse les paroles proverbiales communes que regorgent la langue Khassonke en vue de démontrer leurs fonctions sociales. En raison de l'absence de littérature connexe qui fait actuellement défaut, une telle recherche apparaît ainsi comme un projet sans précédent qui doit être multiplié afin de sauvegarder les proverbes Khassonke et de les transmettre aux générations futures. L'étude a privilégié la méthode qualitative pour la collecte des données dans la région de Kayes. Plus précisément, le guide d'entretien et le focus-group ont été utilisés auprès des personnes âgées locutrices de la langue Khassonke. Les résultats obtenus de cette étude constituent de supports documentaires et éducatifs enrichissant l'enseignement du Khassonke

**Mots-clés :** héritage culturel, Khasso, Phrases proverbiales, stratégies de communication sociale, valeur culturelle

## Introduction

The use of the proverb is a cultural heritage passed on from one generation to the other. It is a language practice that provides answers to the many challenges facing the world. Through its diversity, the proverbial speech is unprecedented in moral, resolution of problems and peace-making. Proverbs allow communities to live peacefully and in harmony with each other. Nowadays, 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 (Kindié et al. p378). This study focuses on the paremiology of the Khassonke people of Mali, which is historically and culturally linked to other Mandingo peoples.

The problem of the study is the lack of research at the university level in Khasso when talking about the collecting, writing down and conserving intangible cultural heritage which is paremiology. The proverbial speeches are diffuse knowledge which is mainly transmitted by the older generations to the younger ones. In this perspective, the study attempts to highlight and preserve the Khassonke proverbial speeches which are gradually disappearing nowadays.

In reality, since time immemorial, Man has always resorted to sayings, maxims, adage, precept, aphorism, etc. to transmit certain teachings and wisdoms. The creative and didactic value of maxims is not the subject of any debate. In Africa, in some regions, proverbs have a certain sacred character. They are an excellent medium of education which has served men since the ancient world. In Mali in general and in the Khasso in particular, proverbs are frequently used for various reasons. They act as secret codes of information and knowledge. Proverbs are used as a weapon by different parts of society such as the oppressed, destitute, and those discriminated because of age, gender, disability, level of education, economic disadvantage, nationality, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. Proverbs are sound symbols.

Proverbs give weight to the laws, traditions and customs of a society. They are part of everyday conversations. In general, they are much used by the elderly people than the young ones. Young people who use proverbs are considered as people endowed with a kind of elderly wisdom because knowing the proverbs and knowing how to use them properly is a sign of wisdom.

However, proverbs are used less in our societies, even the elderly people use them at a lesser degree now. At the same time, Khassonke young people prefer slangs instead of using a proverbial language of wise. This article, therefore, attempts to recall the different functions of proverbs in the Khasso traditional society. It also explores, lists, and explains them in a manner to prevent loss and safeguard them for future generations. In other words, the study intends to make available adequate literature on the significance of the uses of proverbs and their social functions through the Khassonke language.

The study of proverbs, paremiology, which has recently developed as a sociolinguistic discipline, is a practice long recognized as fundamentals, despite the difficulties associated with the definition of the concept and the various communicative functions of proverbs. Etymologically, the term proverb comes from the Latin *proverbium*. The word *proverbium* is

translated by the word "saying". The "Larousse" dictionary (2020, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition) defines it as a short statement expressing popular advice, a common-sense truth or an empirical finding and which has become in common use.

Philosophers in general define the proverb as a costly and imagined sentence, in common use, which expresses a truth of experience or a word of wisdom and to which the speaker refers. Many other linguists and philosophers have also been interested in paremiology (a discipline which is concerned with proverbs and related expressions. For Archer (1965: 7) the proverb is a "Guide to the problems of life, it sums up a situation, makes a judgment or proposes an action plan." In addition, Gouvard (1996: 48) affirms: "A proverb is a statement having an original (and not universal) truth value, which the reader attributes to an enunciator identifiable with something like voice or wisdom, and with which this reader would not be confused. Besides, Kleiber (2000: 42) defines proverbs as "Phrasal denominations of generic level. "Furthermore, it refers to a book of the Old Testament consisting of maxims ascribed to King Solomon (Cudjoe, 2000). Previous studies have yet to provide evidence of appropriate definitions of proverbs. For example, Tamba (2000a) raises the issue of the lack of a clear definition in paremiology for ages. Milner (1969) also laments about the difficulties arising from an appropriate definition of the proverb on a global scale.

In regard to the problematic and the purpose of the study, the specific objectives of this study are to:

- identify the proverbial speeches and phrases used by the Khassonke people;
- analyze these proverbs to identify their relevance (functions) and their link with ethics during a validation workshop;
- preserve the proverbs and make them available to the whole population and especially to the young people who are increasingly prone to uprootedness in relation to idiomatic knowledge in our national languages.

## **1. Methodology**

In order to achieve the main objective of this study which is that of producing a collection of proverbs in the Khassonke cultural area, we adopted the same method used by Angèle Kolouchè Biao (2015). The study collected the proverbs using interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews were administered with professional Khassonke language journalists and literacy workers. The qualitative method approach has been adopted. Data were collected using the qualitative technique of focus group discussions and interviews, which allowed collecting reliable data from the participants.

The conversations of the participants were recorded using a Samsung Galaxy S10 mobile phone and transcribed in Khassonke and then translated into French and English. 10 proverbial sentences have been identified. The focus group discussions were organized from May 4 -24, 2021 in three public arenas made up of former teachers and elderly people in the municipalities of Logo, Diamou and Hawa Dembaya in Kayes. All the proverbs collected have been analyzed and their language functions are highlighted according to the method adopted by Angèle Kolouchè Biao (2015). To attain the aim of the research, 60 participants from each ethnic group

have purposively selected. The participants of this study are men and women who were sampled according to gender and age.

**Table1: Sample Selection and Gender**

Municipalities	Gender		Age		TOTAL
	Men	Women	Age rank	number	
Logo	10	10	15 to 30 years	9	20
			30.1 to 50 years	7	
			50.1 to 70 years	4	
Diamou	10	10	15 to 30 years	6	20
			30.1 to 50 years	8	
			50.1 to 70 years	6	
Hawa-Dembaya	10	10	15 to 30 years	5	20
			30.1 to 50 years	10	
			50.1 to 70 years	5	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>15 to 70</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>

## 2. Results and Discussion

The different Khassonke proverbs identified from the interviews and the focus group discussions are presented, analyzed, and interpreted in two main parts. The first main part presents and explains the collected proverbs among the Khassonke people of the Khasso. The second provides the social significance of the collected proverbs.

### 2-1-Presentation and Explanations of the Collected Proverbs

This section presents the collected Khassonke proverbs and their explanations. As a matter of fact, the fieldwork permitted to collect 11 Khassonke proverbs which come as follows:

#### 2-1-1-Explanation of Proverb 1 on true Friendship:

The first Khassonke proverb collected is as follows: « *noxon na domo le si suya diaa* ». It means in English: « short reckonings make long friends » (True friendship). There are some people who always like cheating in a society. They come to you, pretending to be your friend or neighbor. Generally, they ended up with your possessions, but never think to share theirs with you. So, we may refer to this proverb « short reckoning makes long friends » as a wise way to open the minds of those people in order to embrace common life in society based on solid and true social bonds instead of hypocrisy for hidden materialistic purposes. We can see in the Khasso, the aim of this proverb according to Mamady Diakité from Diamou, one of our informants is to urge people to be more generous in social life and emphasize the merit of mutual aid to solve social problems. In this case, still according to him, this proverb may be used between two young friends in order to advise them to do and share good or difficult moments together. By doing so, such a proverbial phrase may help them to perfect their relationships in the future. This proverb1 may also concern a young couple who have just married. The use of this proverb may remind them that they have to be together for the best and for the worse as they witnessed in front of the mayor. Once more, it may exhort them to strengthen their couple forever. In short, the Khassonke people use such proverb to wisely socialize and education younger people and couples to adopt values of true relationships, of solidarity and union for the preservation of social cohesion and stability because hypocrisy and only searching for selfish materialistic interests could lead to divisions, tensions and even conflicts.

#### 2-1-2-Explanation of Proverb2 on Forgiveness

The second of Khassonke proverb: « *Dinño si boyi a ta baxo le bulu* », meaning in English: « To err is human »

Sometimes, even with good intentions, things don't turn out the way they should. By wanting to do good, we unconsciously do harm. Sadio Konaté of Logo edifies us on the lessons to be learned from this proverb. He tells us that this proverb teaches forgiveness, tolerance and virtues that our country needs so much today. This means: “a child always falls down in the hand of someone who holds him;” that is, despite your skills and you are well-known of something, one day you may face certain difficulties. The wisdom that this second proverb carries entails

tolerance, forgiveness and it is a call out to understand and accept the involuntarily mistakes of your brother, sister, neighbor or the other next to you. By promoting such a value through a proverb, it may avoid several useless conflicts between people.

For instance, in the Khassonke society, a mother is so close to her daughter(s) because of many feminine reasons. She has to prepare her to be dignified wife before she leaves her house for another. Then, when she is married, she will honor herself and get her mother proud of her. In that case, a young girl, when she is cooking and carelessly or by inexperience puts more salt to the sauce and it becomes uneatable, generally her mother does not directly blame her, she will find tactful ways to encourage her daughter. So, the proverb, « Dinḡosiboyi a ta baxo le bulu » may be used in order to avoid her feeling ashamed and exhort her to improve her cooking in the future.

### **2-1-3 Explanation of Proverb 3 on Union as Force in True Relationship**

The third Khassonke proverb: « **joxon na domo lesi suyadia** ». This proverb, translated word for word, gives the following: “In witchcraft society, to kill the mother of each other is the best way”. But, in Khassonke society, this proverb specifically means in union, we are strong. It also indicates when we live together, we need each other and no one can be an island by himself or herself. That is why, Fanta Kante from Logo, argues that we generally use this proverb to warn or to advise those young boys and girl who like loneliness or individualism in a society. So, one may use the proverb, « joxon na domo lesi suyadia » in order to get those young people sensitive and aware of the importance of union because divided or alone we are forceless but united we stand stronger as a people or society. In talking about a young boy or a young girl, she further adds: “to warn him or her in common life, if you raise one hand to say you need nobody, you have to raise the other one to understand that nobody needs you too.” According to her, it may also concern two brothers who live in the same family, they work together, share and gather their possessions. By doing so, they will live peacefully and prosperously. This respondent concludes that the use of such a proverb teaches true relationship as the basis for a solid and strong union.

### **2-1-4 -Explanation of Proverb 4 on Prudence**

The fourth Khassonke proverb: «keneninkepi beete buke dulati». It Means in English: “you cannot judge a book by its cover.” This proverb, translated word for word, gives the following: « All clear place is not a place to saw ». As in English, this proverb keeps the same meaning in Khassonke society because it teaches and urges us not to rely on appearances or jump to sudden conclusions on the basis of appearances.

A young girl who spontaneously met a gorgeous man, well dressed, wearing shining shoes and on the spot, she decides to get married with the latter. So, one may refer to the proverb «keneninkepi be te buke dulati», in order to advise a young girl not to trust people on the sole basis of appearances. We may be blinded and astonished by the appearance (cover-up) of a person but we do not know what that person is capable of. So, the use of this proverb may open our eyes and enable us to see things more clearly comments Sidy Diallo from Medine.

### **2-1-5: Explanation of Proverb 5 on Experience and laziness**

The next khassonke proverb: «**Muro da diata ja o ja a me a fan xalolesu**» means in English: «you cannot teach an old dog new tricks ». Specifically, this proverb means: “Although a knife is so sharp, it never makes itself”. This shows us strong experience and knowledge of how to do things. It is in this context that Fanta Soucko from Medine sustains that, in the Khassonke society, this proverb generally concerns elderly people who have more experience of life. They have lived longer in life and experienced many challenges. In such a case, an old woman may advise and invite her granddaughter, who is not serious and lazy through the use of this proverb, to avoid laziness. The same proverb may be used again to discourage a young girl who wants to teach her grandmother how to dance the “dansa”. The grandmother may reply by saying: «muro da diatapa o ja a me a fan xalolexu», in order to show her that she did it first.

### **2-1-6 Explanation of Proverb 6 on inherited Character**

The sixth Khassonke proverb «**Daxa be mun wulu la tege nan xo**», meaning in English: «like father, like son ». This proverb has double implications and it generally concerns a person whose behavior seems to be the replica of one of his parents. The use of this proverb is first meant to urge people not to be amazed whenever they see a person behaving in a certain unethical way. Perhaps that person has inherited his behavior from one of his parents in terms of bad character. This proverb is therefore utilized to convey a moral lesson on the necessity for parents to good models and good citizens in society, because; if they behave badly such as stealing, lying, being dishonest, etc. their children would not be useful for the society too. It implies that parents have to do their utmost to behave in accordance with the socially established great values of the Khasso.

The second implication of the aforementioned proverb is the very opposite of the first one because it, this time, is meant to congratulate and invite parents to continue being good models. The Khassonke people strongly believe that if parents behave correctly according to the established ethical norms of the society, their children would grow up by imitating them. This would actually lead to good citizens who refuse laziness, dishonesty and any form of crime or bad behavior which may hinder the smooth development of the Khassonke society.

### **2-1-7 -Explanation of Proverb 7 on Self-Dignity and Self-Honor**

This proverb «**yirilon, sulon, fan lon le noxontè** » means in English: “knowing one’s self first is better than giving priority to any other knowledge.” It also means that before knowing another people’s history, culture and sciences, you have, first of all, to know yourself meaning your own history, culture and sciences. The Khassonke people use this proverb because they believe, if you know yourself, you will be independent socially, politically, economically and mentally. They have been able to understand that many of the problems of development facing various African societies are due to the ignorance of one’s self. That is why the respondent Drissa Diakite from Diamou sustains that this proverb is used to urge people to stick to their roots and history which may result in having respectful and good citizens. If people are knowledgeable about themselves, they would preserve their dignity and honor against unethical behaviors and manners.

In addition, this proverb can be used to invite or advise people to get rid of their bad behaviors in society. It may be used in the family context to remind the dignity and the honor of that family in situations where one member deviates from his or her family's sense of dignity and honor. For example, when a son of a man becomes disrespectful and doesn't like to work in the family, this proverb may be used to motivate him or her to become respectful and a hard worker. A teacher may also use it when pupils talk and make noise in class. To quieten them, he may use the proverb "know yourself" as a way to make them aware of their future and why are they here in the classroom? The same proverb can be used to advise a friend who is not correct at his work place. So, the use of this proverb may help him become a good colleague and a model for the other workers.

### **2-1-8- Explanation of Proverb 8 on Evil and Result**

The eighth Khassonke proverb: "I je me lan, o le be faalinna » meaning in English: «he who sows the wind shall reap the whirl wind." The Khassonke people generally use this proverb because they have noticed that some people are not cautious enough when they do things or behave. To remind them of the consequences of their acts, the Khassonke people may use this proverb to tell them to stop acting awkwardly. In fact, this proverb can be used in several cases. For instance, when someone has a bad behavior and does not care much about the advent of events, this proverb is used to warn him against the dangers or consequences of his irresponsible acts. A house wife, who always wastes her husband's food, sells it or cooks it without any control. So, her husband may use the foregoing proverb to warn her in case of starving in the future. This proverb may also be used to a young girl who spends most of her time to run after young boys and at the end she is pregnant without knowing the father of her child. Then, one may use this proverb to tell her that she is actually responsible for the consequences of her acts and she has to face them now.

### **2-1-9- Explanation of Proverbs 9 on People and Providence**

The Khassonke proverb number 9 « A la dèma, a xe taara, I ba silo xan ». It means in English « God helps those who help themselves ». The data of the study show that the Khassonke people strongly believe that everything has been planned ahead by the Almighty since the creation of mankind. That is why, they attribute their material success or failure to God. Although they believe in the preceding thought, they also use this proverb to discourage laziness, resignation and fatality in society.

In fact, according to Djita Konte from Logo, this proverb is used to express situations which are categorically against the divine will because people tend to wait for God's clemency for the attainment of their objectives instead of working hard. It means that, do something for yourself and by yourself and the Almighty may help complete what you intended to do. In other words, if one wants to be successful, one should first stand up and work hard. Then after, God will intervene and assist you by providing the means to continue.

This proverb is used by the Khassonke people in many cases. For instance, a student who thinks that he will succeed in his exam only if God wanted him to. So, one may use the proverb, "God helps those who help themselves", to advise and make him confident. This entails that

he has to work hard if he does not wish to fail in his exams as the result of his passivity. It may also be used in the case of a farmer or a so-called farmer who wants to have much harvest without any effort. He usually seeds his field and rests at home. So, he has to clear up his field and take care of it otherwise God may not help him.

### **2-1-10-Explanation of the Khassonke Proverbs 10 and 11 on Anticipation and Carefulness**

The tenth Khassonke proverb is as follows: “moxo ma sininkulon”. It means in English: “No one ever knows tomorrow or tomorrow never comes.” The eleventh proverb is: “nikepin ta isi sada jaxo ko,” which means “haste makes waste”. The use of such proverbs is advantageous for warning and counseling. They are used in many other occasions. For instance, by the proverb “moxo ma sininkulon” (tomorrow never comes), it is meant here when tomorrow arrives it becomes “today.” That is, if you don’t want to do something today, will you want to do it tomorrow? Or will you find some other reason to postpone it? The proverb “tomorrow never comes” seems to say “hurry” and don’t waste time. But what happens when you do something in a hurry? You probably break things or lose them. Hurrying doesn’t always save time. Sometimes it wastes it. You have to mend what you have broken. You have to find what you have lost. You have to redo the same job. However, the other proverb “nikepin ta isi sada jaxo ko” (haste makes waste) is used at the time to warn against hurrying to do things. It is better to work slowly and carefully than to work fast and make mistakes. If you drive fast and have an accident, you will arrive late at the place you want to go. These two proverbs are generally used by the people of Khasso simultaneously to promote anticipation in doing things but they should be done carefully to avoid mistakes or unexpected negative consequences.

### **2-Social Significance of the Collected Proverbs**

In traditional African society, proverbs, which appear as generic terms to express concepts related to morality, popular wisdom or general truth, etc., are significant for several reasons. First, proverbs help to ensure social cohesion through the transmission of social values, integration, and the strengthening of relationships between individuals and their communities. In addition, they help make more effective the respect of the rules of social life while preparing people to better integrate their environment and avoiding social deviance. Second, proverbs permit to promote peace values and constitute a better means of solidarity, reconciliation, tolerance as well as forgiveness. They also make it possible to settle disputes in the sociolinguistic community through its discretionary nature. Besides, proverbs are used to give advice and call for mutual assistance among community members. As a result, proverbs are elements of social, moral and civic education whose ownership is gained from elderly generations.

The critical importance of proverbs in the Khassonke society can be categorized such as educate or instruct, advice or judge as a form of social control, as commentary on critical life events through justification or ridicule and to comfort or counsel the society (Courlander, 1975). Based on the khassonke heritage, the proverbs were either recorded during conversations or 1. The elderly in the society were the one who had the exclusive knowledge of the proverbs and they used them to articulate the community’s moral principles and educate youngsters on

important aspects of life (Courlander, 1975). Based on the nature of African social structure, proverbs are critical aspect in moral development of a child. People were encouraged to not use shortcuts in the society either to enrich themselves or undermine the community's moral principles through deceitful ways.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, proverbs are undoubtedly prolific learning resources. The study reveals that the proverb, which embeds a sacred character, has mobilized man to use it in order to pass on wisdom, creative and didactic sociocultural values to future generations. To this end, the proverb, through its educational character, provides us with the knowledge and understanding of the behavior of man. The experience and the ways which are lawful or unlawful to a man diffusedly transmitted by its typological characteristics (precept, adage, aphorism, maxims, etc.). Last but not least, incorporating proverbs into curricula and textbooks could serve as an effective means of promoting our traditions, culture, and identity and enable the educational authorities to use it as a means of instruction at all levels of education in Mali.

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