

How to Collect 1,000 Proverbs Quickly: Field Methods for Eliciting and Collecting Proverbs

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Abstract:

This article presents techniques to equip researchers to help people recall more proverbs in their language, expediting the collection of large numbers of proverbs. The focus is on collecting proverbs from languages without a written collection of proverbs, especially endangered languages.

“Proverbs cannot be collected in a hurry” (McKelvie 1970:5)

1. Introduction.

Collecting proverbs from languages where they have not been documented is valuable for a variety of people: proverb scholars, anthropologists of several sub-disciplines, ethnologists, linguists, folklorists, missionaries, and also the people of the language community (and their descendants).

The importance of collecting proverbs from languages where this has not previously been done is increasingly urgent as this domain of language is being lost in many communities. As many of the world’s language communities are assimilating to broader society, they are losing their cultural distinctives and languages, which includes the loss of their proverbs. Various scholars differ in their estimation of how many of the world’s languages are in danger of extinction. Krauss has estimated that as many as 50% of the world’s approximately 6,000 languages will be lost by the end of the century and maybe 40% more will be doomed, having lost domains and speakers (1992:6,7). Though a community may not be in immediate danger of losing their language, one social domain that is frequently vulnerable is a community’s proverbial lore, its loss being an incremental step in the loss of language and culture. One study among the Kikuyu of Kenya found that their “customs and oral traditions are being lost at a rate of 60 percent in each succeeding generation. So if a particular generation knew 100 proverbs, the next generation will know forty and the following generation” will know even fewer, etc. (Healey and Sybertz 1996:58). Clearly collecting proverbs from marginal or endangered language communities is a time-sensitive priority.

In a strategic effort to fight this loss of proverbs, the African Proverbs Project has even commissioned some researchers to collect “endangered proverbs” from language communities where ethnolinguistic vitality is diminishing. Asogwa (2002) has collected proverbs to strengthen the Igbo language, hoping that people of the community will be “lured back” to the language. Garcia et al. (2002) report that in working with a language revitalization program among the Jicarilla Apache that older speakers wanted to use traditional proverbs as one of the ways to teaching the language and culture to the children.

Himmelman argues strongly and cogently for field researchers to document not just linguistic structures, but language use, including different genres of speaking (1998). Naturally, this includes such genres as proverbs. Ideally, proverbs are collected in context, in real situations, while collecting simple lists of proverbs is a “staged communicative event” (Himmelman 1998:185) at best. But collecting lists is the fastest way to collect a substantial number of proverbs quickly, especially important for documentation of endangered languages.

How does a field worker elicit hundreds, or even thousands, of proverbs from people in a short time, since proverbs are not remembered as lists but are usually recalled in an appropriate context? How do we go about collecting significant numbers of proverbs in a limited time from a language community? Asking people to simply list long lists of proverbs

in their language will only elicit a fraction of the proverbs in their language. The biggest hurdle is generally helping people to remember their proverbs in an artificial elicitation setting. Therefore, the techniques presented here have been developed to provide more efficient methods for eliciting proverbs. These techniques are all based on the fact that "Proverbs are difficult to recall from memory without an eliciting context or situation" (Herzfeld 1991:163, fn. 4). These techniques are written with an outside scholar in mind, but the techniques could be profitably used by a member of the language community working to collect proverbs from their own heritage.

Some will rightfully object that simply collecting lists of proverbs, without documenting their use in contexts, is of limited value. They may say it seems more a practice from the past, when bits of folklore data were collected with little regard for their context. "Doubtless... proverbs recorded in actual life situations, with the full complement of social, situational, and discourse contexts would be the ideal data" (Yankah 1989:172). Arewa and Dundes stress the importance of studying the context and use of proverbs, "What are the rules governing who can use proverbs, or particular proverbs, and to who? Upon what occasions? In what places? With what other persons present or absent?" (Arewa and Dundes 1964:71).

But collecting significant amounts of this sort of data requires years of work. As an alternative, this set of guidelines is prepared for scholars who will not be able to spend the years that are needed to do such well-documented collecting within a society. For researchers with only short times available for field work, given a choice between collecting lists of many proverbs and collecting only a very few proverbs in context, it seems preferable to collect lists which can later be studied in more detail. In languages which are endangered or whose homelands are inaccessible, this course of action is the only alternative. If lists of proverbs are collected, then data related to use and context can later be gathered by asking knowledgeable people about the use of specific proverbs.

The ideal setting in which to gather proverbs is in the geographical location where the language community lives. When this is not possible, researchers can often work with an immigrant group of people from the language area. This might be in a refugee camp, or working with rural people who have moved to a larger city, or even in another country to which people have immigrated. It is generally preferable to work with more than one person at once, but sometimes only one person is available, possibly a student at a university. However, such a student is likely not the best person since they have studied for a significant time outside of the traditional culture and likely outside of the language community's homeland. For example, an Ethiopian graduate student once admitted to me that if he went back to his home area and were to be involved in a lawsuit, he would inevitably lose since he did not know enough of the culture's proverbs and rhetorical traditions. Arewa and Hymes reported a Nigerian graduate student with a similar deficit in his familiarity with the use of proverbs in his home language (1964:70). Similarly, in Cameroon Siran found that native speakers of Vute who had grown up away from the traditional heartland could not explain proverbs well (1993:236,237).

Though most of the work of gathering proverbs is usually done in person, it has also been possible in some places to solicit proverbs in written form by having school students solicit proverbs from their families (Abrahams 1967:184, Kimmerle 1947:352, Kebede p.c. 2005, Tafari p.c. 2006), though this requires an adequate number of people who can write the vernacular competently. Gathering written proverb data may also be possible through ethnic associations, through less formal literacy programs (such as connected with churches), or simply via the social networks of people in the language community.

Whether working with speakers in their traditional homeland or in a displaced community, it is best to search for people who are recognized as good with proverbs, typically an older person. (It is also very useful if they can speak a language which the researcher knows, rather than depending on a translator.) But even when a person who is

excellent with proverbs is found, it is preferable if the person does not have to work alone. Proverbs are more easily generated if there is more than one person from the community involved in the discussion. As people talk with each other, they remind each other of proverbs and help each other quote partially remembered proverbs. Just one person may be adequate to help with transcribing the proverbs, but it is generally easier to elicit proverbs in a group setting.

To begin collecting proverbs, a scholar must find the best local way to speak of "proverbs". Some languages have a specific word for them, others use a more generic label that may include idioms, riddles, euphemisms, or stories. (This exploration of the emic view of proverbs and related speech genres can be valuable in itself.) If there is not a specific label for "proverb", then a few examples should clarify what kinds of language forms are desired, but do not spend much time rejecting forms that are not canonical proverbs.

Gather a group of people together, (provide beverage and food as culturally appropriate), prompt the conversation, turn on a recording device, and have fun. (Recording the conversation rather than transcribing it as it is said is preferable since it allows for the free flow of the conversation, with no pauses while waiting for the scribe to catch up.) As much as possible, the conversation should be in the vernacular, since that is the language most likely to help the people recall proverbs. The first step is to ask the people or person to simply tell as many of their proverbs as they can think of. This step will elicit only a limited list of the most common proverbs since proverbs usually need a context to bring them to mind.

Some researchers have staged proverb contests to stimulate people to recall more proverbs (Yankah 1989:169). In this format, hearing another person recite a proverb often helps stimulate the memory of other proverbs through a variety of associations.

As people recite proverbs, they may produce utterances that may not fit the researcher's definition of what proverbs are. Though the researcher may think that some of the utterances being collected are not within the narrow definition of proverb, it is generally wiser to adopt the policy "if in doubt, collect" (Bryant 1945:21) and edit later.

2. Using Situations to Remind People of Proverbs.

After people can no longer remember any additional proverbs during this first elicitation step, it is time to use additional methods to prompt people's memories. These are not presented in any crucial order; they can be used as dictated by the situation. Also, they can be used cyclically, as new proverbs open up yet additional topics to be explored by a previous method.

By suggesting situations in which proverbs are likely to be quoted, a researcher can help people's ability to remember additional proverbs (Herskovits 1950; Asogwa 2002). For example, a researcher can pose situations such as "What proverbs might a father say to his child who is slack in their household duties?" Or, "What proverbs might a mother say to her child who is angry at a friend?" Or, "What might elders say to a person who is causing discord in the community?" Other likely situations that might call for naturally using proverbs include consoling somebody who has been cheated, rebuking a lazy person, complaining about a gossip, seeking to identify the cause of misfortune. By helping people imagine themselves in appropriate settings we are able to help them remember more proverbs.

A related technique for eliciting additional proverbs is to prompt people by eliciting proverbs by topics. Ask people for proverbs about such topics as gossip, laziness, mediation, injustice, married life, treatment of elders, sorcery, etc. The topic may not be explicitly mentioned in the proverb, but people are likely to remember it when prompted by the topic that the proverb addresses. For example, the Saramaccan proverb "High branches, low branches" is ¹about showing respect to elders, but neither "elders" nor

¹ Thanks to Catherine Rountree for this example and helpful discussion.

"respect" are explicitly mentioned. Researchers will get additional ideas for potential topics from the proverbs already elicited. The more that scholars know about a culture (or a neighboring or related culture), the more appropriate topics they are likely to think of.

Healey and Sybertz found that a number of topics "seem to be universal in all African languages such as animals, children, community, death, evil, family, food, hospitality, marriage, personal relationships, sickness, visitors and work" (1996:59). Scholars working in other parts of the world will find some similarity with this list, but local distinctives, also.

In addition, researchers can help people recall additional proverbs by mentioning various events, asking them to think of proverbs that are used at such events, or proverbs that mention such events. It would likely that people can think of proverbs related to funerals, weddings, betrothals, births, planting, butchering, harvesting, religious rituals, fishing, house building, reconciliation, fires, holidays, earthquakes, games, pilgrimages, elections, battles, seasons, etc.

3. Using Types of People to Remind People of Proverbs.

Proverbs often mention different categories of people, so researchers can help people call to mind additional proverbs by asking for proverbs that mention different kinds of people. Frequently there are proverbs about such different roles as debtors, merchants, matchmakers, craftsmen, herders, warriors, chiefs, bandits, religious leaders, mourners, old people, musicians, potters, tanners, thieves, the blind, healers, supernatural beings, mediators, hunters, brides, grooms, ancestors, midwives, neighboring clans or ethnic groups, etc.

It may also be helpful to learn which types of people or occupations are seen as higher and lower. For example, in many parts of Africa, blacksmiths are despised and feared. (McNaughton 1988, Kusimba 1996). It is almost certain that there will be proverbs that mention these lowest roles, as well as proverbs that mention the higher roles.

It is also expected to find proverbs about relatives. A study of the kinship system can aid the study of proverbs, and vice versa, as scholars gain additional light on the behavioral expectations related to various kin, such parents, children, siblings, and grandparents as well as various kinds of aunts, uncles, and in-laws.

Proverbs are also common about people with behavioral characteristics, such as being honest or dishonest, polite or rude, lazy or ambitious, truthful or deceptive, generous or stingy, brave or fearful. Other traits likely to produce proverbs include people who flatter, feign sickness, gossip, exploit others, chatter, cause dissension, desire power, etc.

4. Using Key Words to Remind People of Proverbs.

An additional technique for stirring additional proverbs from people's memories is to ask for proverbs built on key words (Bauman 1963, drawing from the work of Cahana). Around the world, proverbs frequently include reference to various body parts, insects, animals, weather, implements, geographical features, etc. Asking people to tell us proverbs that mention "mouth", "ant", "donkey", "rain", "hammer", "river" will inevitably bring to mind additional proverbs that are formed by using these words. For example, at the mention of "donkey", the present author can quickly think of three Amharic proverbs about donkeys. A proverb may include a key word such as "donkey", but the proverb may really be about a person who gossips. This mention of gossip can then lead to people remembering more proverbs about gossip.

In preparing a list of potential key words, it will be helpful to prepare a list of local names for creatures, birds, bugs, beasts, and fish, domestic and wild. To help with this, there are often illustrated books that will help with compiling such a list (such books are often only available in larger cities). They typically have such titles as "A field guide to the birds of ...", or "The larger mammals of...". The pictures in these books can be used to visually prompt the people who are trying to remember proverbs, a change of pace from all the verbal interviewing. Some people will find it hard to stay focused on proverbs as they

look at animal pictures, wanting to tell stories about some of the animals, the habits of various creatures, etc., so this method works better with some people than others.

Using nouns as key words is likely the simplest way to start. As people get used to the idea of using key words to remind them of proverbs (and as the researcher learns more about the language and how to work with people from the speech community), other parts of speech can also be used. Verbs such as "cut", "plant", "kill", "seek", "die", "cook", "flatter", "promise", "die", "marry", "borrow", "deceive", "buy", "gossip" are all likely to elicit more proverbs. Some adjectives are also helpful in this, also, such as "good", "evil", "shoddy", "expensive", "poor", "rich", "smooth", "deceitful", etc. Many adverbs will also remind people of more proverbs; likely candidates include "poorly", "well", "quickly", "very", "belatedly", "stealthily", "insincerely", etc. Also, words to indicate time and frequency will remind people of more proverbs, such concepts as "never", "frequently", "belatedly", "always", "seldom", "occasionally", "regularly". Even conjunctions may be key words in the proverbs of some languages, especially if they occur in common formulae. For example, Owomoyela (1988) collected over 60 proverbs in Yorùbá that begin with 'if'. The grammars of different languages will configure these in different ways, but these types of concepts can be profitably used to stir people's memories.

Some words are the basis for large number of proverbs. For example, in Finnish, there are "hundreds of proverbs about pigs, partridges and mice" (Kuusi 1998). In his collection of Yorùbá proverbs, Owomoyela (1988:360), found over 20 that mentioned "dog(s)". In Kikuyu, Stevenson found "very many" proverbs about the "ubiquitous banana" (1927:243). Using words that are so productive as a prompt is likely to assist people in calling more proverbs to remembrance.

It can also be profitable to note if no proverbs (or very few) are found using words that might be expected to be productive. Kuusi notes the lack of proverbs about snakes and bears in Finnish, directly linked to taboos about these animals (1998). Yoffie noted an absence of "proverbs about love" in a Yiddish speaking community, tying this to the custom of marriages being arranged (1920:148). Not surprisingly, she listed a number of proverbs about matchmaking.

5. Using Structure to Remind People of Proverbs.

It is also possible to aid people's recollection of proverbs by asking them to think of proverbs with a similar structure or pattern. For example, Yorùbá has many proverbs that begin with the structure "A kì í..." 'One does not...', Owomoyela (1988) listing 239 examples of proverbs that begin with this structure. This is seen in such examples as "A kì í fi ogun dán èsò wò" "One does not taunt a warrior to a fight." If a Yorùbá speaker was asked to remember more proverbs that begin with "A kì í...", such a reminder of this opening structure would enable them to remember quite a number of such proverbs. Then by changing the grammatical subject from a 3rd person singular pronoun (the initial word "A"), other proverbs may also be remembered, such as "Òran kì í yè lóri alábaun" "Troubles never fails to implicate the tortoise" (Owomoyela 1988:325). Having found that this "kì í" structure can also be found medially within a proverb, the researcher may use such proverbs to help remind people of more proverbs with this structure, such as "Orun ríya bò! kì í se òràn enìkan" "'The sky is falling!' is no individual's problem" (Owomoyela 1988:327).

Asking for proverbs based on a structure was productive for the author when he found the Oromo proverb "'The ground is nice, too,' said the old woman, falling off of her horse." The author asked an Oromo friend for other proverbs quoting "the old woman." Being reminded of this structure in a proverb, the Oromo quickly remembered three more. In a similar fashion, other languages have many proverbs quoting a specific character, such as Twi where a number of proverbs begin with the structure "The tortoise says..." (Akrofi 1958).

A number of Somali proverbs are formed on the pattern, "Three are the marks of one who...", e.g. "Three are the marks of one who is a liar..." Finding proverbs in a pattern such as this, the researcher can ask for more proverbs of this structural pattern.

Similarly, in Spanish, Arora found that the introductory phrase "El que nace..." is very productive in proverbs, listing 125 of them (1968) then later documenting about 40 more (1998). Not surprisingly, in Portuguese (close both linguistically and geographically), she also found 27 more (1998, appendix III).

Other types of structures that may appear in proverbs include rhetorical questions, dialogues, questions and answers, comparisons. Also, there are likely to be proverbs whose structure connects clauses with "if", "because", "even though", "whenever", etc. As an example of the productivity of such a pattern, Owomoyela (1988) collected over 60 proverbs in Yorùbá that begin with "Bí...", the conjunction 'if'.

6. Asking People for Proverbs with Related Meanings.

Using proverbs already gathered, proverb collectors can then use some of these to ask people to think of proverbs that have similar meanings. For example, hearing a proverb that reminds people to be generous, people may be able to think of more proverbs that remind hearers to be generous. The meanings of the proverbs elicited may not always be so similar, but it is a useful way to help people think of proverbs in different ways.

In a similar way, people can be asked to think of proverbs with opposite meanings, such as proverbs that advise contrary actions. For example, in Khmer, there is a proverb that says "Too generous a nature makes one poor", but also one that seems contradictory, "One with a generous nature will not be poor for long." Similarly, in English we find "Look before you leap" and "He who hesitates is lost." Such contradictions can be on the surface level, as in the Khmer pair, or the contradiction may be at a more abstract level of meaning, as in the English pair. In the process of collecting proverbs, it is unimportant if the proverbs truly are exactly opposite; the purpose of this technique is simply to help people think of proverbs by suggesting categories of meaning.

7. Using Proverbs from Nearby Languages.

Another way to help people remember more of their proverbs is to mention proverbs from a nearby or related language to help them think of similar proverbs. This can be done from a language they know or by translation into their language. In the author's experience, people are always fascinated by proverb collections from their neighbors, and it helps give value and motivation to work toward their own proverbs being collected and published. The author once showed to an Ethiopian friend of the Silt'e people a newly published collection of proverbs from Harari, a language closely related to Silt'e, with Amharic translations. He was enthralled, commenting that some were identical to proverbs in his language, while some were slightly different. This book was an important tool as the man worked with a team that produced a book of proverbs in his language (Hussein and Awäl 1995). Published book-length collections of proverbs are available for many languages of wider communication, and articles containing shorter collections are available for a number of other languages. For example, if a scholar is collecting proverbs from a Nigerian language, they should consider using a book such as Owomoyela's (1988) *A ki í: Yorùbá Proscriptive and Prescriptive Proverbs*. Or if doing proverb collection from an Ethiopian language community, using Cotter's (1990) *Salt for Stew: Proverbs and Sayings of the Oromo People* would be helpful. Even an article of collected proverbs, though much shorter, can be useful. Such a collection of proverbs does not have to be in a language that the investigator understands, as long as a member of the language community who can read it is part of the team.

Proverbs from related or nearby groups may also suggest structural patterns that are common in proverbs of the area. For example, proverbs from a number of languages of India have enumerative constructions, such as "There exist three things which must be controlled: lust, mind, and anger" (Doctor 1993:58). If collecting proverbs from a group

near the Kannada, it would be wise to ask about proverbs of similar structure. As another example, since both Georgian and Armenian proverbs are often built on dialogue (Sakayan 1995), if eliciting proverbs from language communities near these groups, it would be wise to seek proverbs with this structure.

As an experiment, fifty Afghan proverbs (Afghana.com) were given to a man from the Brahui community in western Pakistan. His Dravidian language was not linguistically related to any language in Afghanistan, but his community shared a common religion and a number of cultural features with Afghanistan. From these 50 Afghan proverbs, he was reminded of 32 proverbs in his language (in some cases one proverb reminding him of two different ones). He said of some, "We have that same proverb." For others, he said, "We have a proverb that's similar."

Sometimes the similarity was in both meaning and structure; when he heard "Too many butchers spoil the cow," he remembered the Brahui proverb "Too many midwives mis-shape the baby's head." Sometimes he picked up on the meaning of a proverb and was reminded of a Brahui proverb that had a similar application, though a different form, e.g. "If there is only bread and onions, still have a happy face" reminded him of a very different Brahui proverb instilling contentment. Listening to other proverbs, he was struck by a particular word or phrase and reminded of an otherwise unrelated Brahui proverb that contained the same word or phrase. For example, the proverb "A broken hand can work, but a broken heart can't," reminded him of a Brahui proverb "A broken hand/arm always hangs from your neck." The meanings of the two proverbs are totally different, but the identical opening phrase of the Afghan proverb reminded him of the proverb in his own language.

I consulted with a field worker collecting proverbs in a minority language in China. She found that a local proverb enthusiast from a minority group was a language purist and tended to withhold or reject vernacular proverbs that too closely matched proverbs from standard Chinese. However, in collecting proverbs, the assumed origin of a proverb should not disqualify it from being included. In actual fact, many proverbs assumed by people to be indigenous are borrowed across language lines, even if people assume they are indigenous. The fact that a proverb is used within the language community is enough to include it in a collection, even if its origin appears to be elsewhere. It may be helpful to remind such purists that proverbs migrate widely, being fully at home in several languages, so it is often not possible to identify a definite language of origin. For example, a proverb of the approximate form "No flies enter a mouth that is shut" is found in Spain, Ethiopia, and many countries in between. It is embraced as a true local proverb in many places and should not be excluded in any collection of proverbs because it is shared by the neighbors. During the collecting phase of research, the emphasis should be on collecting as broadly as possible (Bryant 1945), questions of origin can be addressed later.

8. Transcription and Cyclical Use of Techniques.

Using this list of techniques will produce a significant number of proverbs. By systematically using these techniques cyclically, many more proverbs can be recalled.

To expedite this, the proverbs that have been elicited and recorded should be transcribed, preferably by a native speaker. If a person who can write accurately in the vernacular is available, they can do this by on their own. If there is no established orthography for the language, the proverbs can be transcribed by some phonetic system, but such a form is much less accessible and useful to speakers of the language community. The medium for transcription will vary according to the ability of local transcriber: it may be as simple as writing proverbs on paper cards, or as sophisticated as keying them into a computer database.

After working to remember a large number of proverbs, the team of speakers needs a rest. This is a good time for the researcher to work with the transcription and writing notes about those proverbs already collected. In addition to the proverbs themselves, for

each entry there should be notes about keywords, topics, and structures that are found in the proverb, (plus any notes about how a proverb is used). For example, in an entry for the Hindi proverb "Clouds that thunder seldom rain," the notes could include the keywords "cloud(s)", "thunder", "seldom", "rain" and also the topics "weather", "threaten", and "bluff".

In future elicitation sessions, these notes are then used as an aid in preparing questions that are likely to remind speakers of more proverbs. For example, if two proverbs are found that mention "scorpions", then this suggests that there may be more proverbs about scorpions. Or, if an enumerating proverb is noted, this will prompt the researcher to ask for other enumerating proverbs. If proverbs about honoring elders are noted, this suggests that people should be asked about more proverbs related to honoring elders, and also about dishonoring them.

By systematically following the clues provided by the key words, topics, and structure of previously elicited proverbs, a researcher can help the team from the language community remember many additional proverbs in a shorter time. This sort of coding by topics and keywords can also be used to help organize proverbs by topics, a possible way to present them for publication.

9. Translation of Collected Proverbs.

After transcription comes what is usually the more difficult part: trying to understand the proverbs. It is frustrating to read the translation of a proverb and still have no clear understanding of what it means. At least two kinds of translations are needed for most proverbs. First, a fairly literal translation is needed, such as this version of an Amharic proverb "When the unlucky man marries, the river fills up in *T'ar*."

Then many proverbs need a second translation or a commentary, something that explains the proverb. This may be much longer than the proverb itself. For example, the Amharic proverb just quoted about the unlucky man's marriage is based on the fact that *T'ar* is normally a very dry month, so if it ever would rain then, the rivers fill up and the guests cannot ford them to attend the wedding. The implication is that an unlucky person is thoroughly unlucky. This translation stage can be done by a native speaker of a language, but an outsider will have to consult on the translations so that they properly communicate to cultural outsiders (such as people who don't know that *T'ar* is a very dry time). The translator will also need to confer with other speakers about the best way to translate some proverbs, a job that is complicated by the fact that some proverbs have the potential to mean different things in different contexts.

As an example of the complexity of translation, Healey and Sybertz (1996: 59 fn. 98) cite the two-word Swahili proverb "walala hoi," which takes five English words for their literal translation "the people who sleep exhausted," but then their "meaning translation" requires 20 words. Clearly, a simple, literal translation is not enough.

For publication, especially for a popular audience, some will desire to produce translations that sound proverbial and artistic. This requires additional effort drawing on a variety of techniques, but can make it easier for readers to appreciate the artistic quality of the proverbs (Unseth 2005, 2006).

Be warned that translating proverbs is complicated by the fact that many proverbs do not follow the usual rules of the grammar of the language, words are elided, less common words occur more frequently, and even common words are often used with secondary meanings.

10. Organizing a Collection of Proverbs

Organizing a collection of proverbs for publication forces the researcher to make some basic choices: should the proverbs be organized simply alphabetically by the first letters of the proverbs, by topic, or by some other system. Though he had earlier advocated publishing proverbs organized by topic, Loukatos later changed his mind and

admitted that an alphabetical listing is still essential for scholars (1974:887). Organizing them topically may turn out differently if done according to the researcher's conceptual grid or if done with an insider's understanding (Roberts and Hayes 1987). Also, organizing them topically can be challenging since proverbs are famous for being applicable to multiple topics.

However, for article length publications, it is sometimes appropriate to present a subset of the proverbs gathered. These can be selected on the basis of sharing a common structure, such as "El que nace..." in Spanish (Arora 1968), dialogue in Armenian proverbs (Sakayan 1999), or enumerating lists (Doctor 1993). Also, it may be possible that a key word is used in enough proverbs for an article, such as "rain" (Blanco García 1993). Or a topic may be productive enough for an article, such as proverbial names for dogs among the Baatomba (Schottman 1993), proverbs about caste (Upadhyaya 1965), about weather (Arora 1995), body parts (Beck 1979), animals (Simon and Wijayatilake 1956), death (Brookman-Amisshah 1996) or women (Jeylan Hussein 2004, Storm 1992). Or proverbs may be organized by the situation in which they are likely to be heard, such as when playing dominoes (Borajo et al 1990) or in legal proceedings (Messenger 1959; Amali 1998).

Organizing the collection of proverbs by strict alphabetical order may be useful in some languages, but in languages with prefixes or with initial grammatical particles, this may reduce the usefulness of this method of organizing a collection. For example, a published collection of Amharic proverbs was organized strictly alphabetically, but since Amharic has some case prefixes, this meant that proverbs that begin with "donkey" were found in four different places in the book, depending on what case was marked on the word "donkey". (Of course, this is in addition to the proverbs in which 'donkey' is not initial.) A similar situation would be found in Bantu languages that mark noun classes by prefixes. Also, verb-initial languages with verbal prefixes would face the same problems. A better solution might be to alphabetize proverbs by the citation form of their first word. It is informative to see how dictionaries in the language (or language family) alphabetize words, especially when some classes of roots are always pronounced with obligatory prefixes.

Also, if the language has grammatical words that may occur sentence initially, it may be best to alphabetize proverbs by their first content word, so that, to use a familiar English example "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" would be alphabetized by "bird" rather than by "a". However, applied to an extreme, this will obscure the productivity of some patterns, such as the fact that so many Yorùbá proverbs begin with "Bí..." 'if'. To make the alphabetization scheme as easy as possible for readers, it may be best to include some proverbs, alphabetizing one by content word and once by grammatical morpheme. No matter what system is chosen, there will be difficult cases, and some users will not be pleased.

Compiling a significant-sized, original collection of proverbs is not a quick or simple process. Scholars collecting proverbs from language communities of which they are not a part should strongly consider hiring and collaborating with local scholars to be involved in as much of the work as possible (by "local" is meant a scholar from the country or the local area, even if they are not a speaker of the language being studied). After these elicitation methods are explained and demonstrated to local scholars, they may be able to collect proverbs as well, or better, than a complete outsider. Innumerable proverbs remind us that work done together with others is faster, easier, and more pleasant.

Using these techniques will make eliciting and collecting proverbs easier and more productive, both for those collecting proverbs and those remembering proverbs. How many proverbs can we hope to elicit in a short time? Luomala (1971) describes a small collection project done with Korean students in the USA, the article suggesting she was only able to elicit 33 proverbs. By contrast, Asogwa, used some of these methods mentioned here in collecting proverbs among his own Igbo community and reported that he was "able to collect up to two hundred proverbs from a single person in one sitting. We have also been able to collect up to one thousand in several sittings from one person" (2002:49). Using

these techniques with a Pakistani student in the USA, over 100 proverbs were elicited in less than two and a half hours by the present author who knew nothing about the culture or the structure of the language. Clearly, presenting people with contexts, topics, and also proverbs from nearby can greatly increase their ability to think of proverbs. Obviously, these techniques can only elicit large numbers of proverbs in situations where large numbers are known and used. For example, Riesenbergs and Fischer used some of these techniques in a Ponapean community, but found that some people could recall no proverbs at all (1955:9).

Linguistic scholars frequently gather language data to write on topics that are not understood by the language community, such as tone spreading or theta role assignment. Gathering proverbs is different, since this is something that the community can understand and appreciate. Professional ethics, as well as courtesy, should move proverb collectors to acknowledge and reward the help of the language community by giving printed copies of collected proverb to those who have been most helpful, whether directly involved or by virtue of their support from positions of power and influence. As a scholar leaves an area, giving a printout of the proverbs collected (even if unedited), is not burdensome, but is an appropriate way to both thank people and help them value the riches of their proverbial lore. "A debt of gold we can repay, kindness indebts to our dying day."

Acknowledgments

At the beginning stages of this study, key ideas for this paper were inspired or fed by Wilson's (1990) work on eliciting idioms from in Papua New Guinea, later these ideas were nurtured by Asogwa's (2002) work on collecting proverbs in Nigeria, plus a number of the other references. These ideas further developed during discussions at the Graduate Institute of Applied Linguistics, in conversations with friends, both faculty and students, among whom Paul Headland deserves special mention for commenting on an early draft. I also want to thank Kebbede Hordofa Janko, my friend and colleague from my days in Ethiopia, who helped teach me the joy and struggle of working with proverbs and has shared his experience in collecting them. I also thank Teferi Kassa, who has also shared ideas from his proverb collecting in Ethiopia. (In keeping with Ethiopian custom, Ethiopian authors are cited in the text by their first names.) Abdul Sattar, my new friend from Pakistan, cheerfully helped me test my ideas. Joseph Healey and John McDowell have also advised me from their years of experience. As always, Wolfgang Mieder has been knowledgeable helpful. None of these are to blame for what I have done with their wisdom and advice: "Do not blame the doctor if the patient dies."

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