

## Neological Developments in Nzema Proverbs

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### Abstract

This paper is a descriptive qualitative study which examines some recent Nzema<sup>3</sup> proverbs that have come up as a result of the departure from their original forms. These Nzema proverbs have come about for several reasons. Some arise from simple apophthegms<sup>4</sup> and platitudes which over time are raised to the status of a proverb. Others have emerged from the symbolic or metaphoric use of an incident; some are based on a story or fable, while others are variations of existing proverbs. Others also come about as a result of things in the environment. Yet there are others that come about as a result of the observations of the habits of men and others triggered by the conditions of life. For example; ‘*Wɔammaa ε ɔnwo ampe angɔ a, empe endwu*’ which is literally translated as, if you prevent your friend from passing, you will not cross either, has been discussed in this paper. Definitions, origins and moral lessons given by some scholars are discussed in this paper as well. The differences and similarities of the recent and traditional Nzema proverbs as well as the message they seek to put across are also considered in this paper.

**Keywords:** Proverb, Parallelism, Apophthegm, Tradition, Neologism.

### Introduction

It is an indisputable fact that Africa has more diverse societies than any other continent in the world. A peculiar feature of the linguistic repertoire of Africa is the prevalence of proverbs. The relevance of these proverbs is demonstrated by such sayings as “A proverb is the horse of conversation: when the conversation lags, a proverb will revive it”; “A wise man who knows proverbs reconciles difficulties (Yoruba, Nigeria); and “Proverbs are the daughters of experience” (Sierra Leone) (Finnegan, 1970). The beauty of proverbs is the universality of their meaning; everyone can relate to them in some way and on some level.

Proverb, as an oral piece, plays an indispensable role in the traditional African context which, of course, Nzema is not an exception. We use proverbs in most of our day to day activities. Proverb is used everywhere.

Studying traditional African proverbs broadens our mental horizon to understanding African oral literature. Scholars of African oral literature all over the world have made tremendous efforts in their quest to exploring this field as it continues to receive attention in the area of research.

Nzema is a Niger-Congo language of the Kwa language family spoken in the western part of Ghana (Annan, 1980). Not only is Nzema spoken in the western part of Ghana, but also in some parts of the La Côte d’Ivoire. There are five main dialects; Dwɔmɔɔ (Jomoro), Elɛmgbɛɛ (Ellembɛɛ) Egila, Ajomoro and Eɔvalɔɛ (Nzema east). Nzema is among the minor African languages that have enjoyed quite an appreciable amount of study particularly in the area of proverbs and other genres of oral literature. In their book, ‘Nzema Mɛɛɛ nɛɛ bɛ Ngilenu’ (A collection of Nzema proverbs with their meaning), Kwesi and Quarm (1998) made one thousand, two hundred and thirty nine (1,239) collections of Nzema proverbs. This collection though not exhaustive, yet there is another area in Nzema that is yet to be researched into and which can contribute greatly to the existing literature on Nzema proverbs.

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<sup>3</sup>Nzema is a Kwa language of the Niger-Congo languages in West Africa. It consists of five main dialects namely; Jomoro, Ellembɛɛ, Ajomoro, Egila and Eɔvalɔɛ.

<sup>4</sup> There are some sayings in Nzema that have universal truth and these sayings have been elevated into proverbs.

This area is the study of recent proverbs in Nzema. Due to modernization and mass societal developments, these proverbs are preferably used in conversations today. This study therefore examines some of the recent developments in Nzema proverbs.

### Research Goal

Some Scholars including, Kwesi (1979), Annan (1980) and Kwesi & Quarm (1998) have written on the Nzema Traditional proverbs but not on recent ones.

The goal of this research paper is therefore to examine the recent Nzema proverbs; why they are recent, what they seek to communicate, the differences between them and the traditional Nzema proverbs and their similarities. This study will also look at something unique the proverbs say about the Nzema society.

### Review of related Literature

This section gives the general overview and origin of proverbs by various scholars. In this section also, we discuss the importance of proverbs to the Nzema society. The messages that the proverbs seek to tell are also discussed in this section.

### Definition of proverb

The existing literature is silent on the literal meaning and etymology of proverb 'bu ɛɛɛ' (to cite a proverb). In the case of the Akan, a sister language of Nzema, however, the definition is an unclear one. Gyekye (1987) suggests that the idiom, 'bu ɛɛɛ' (to cite a proverb) literally means: to cut (bu) a palm tree (abɛ). Geest (1996) however argued that, products like palm oil, palm wine, broom, palm kernel and soap can be derived from the palm tree. He added that, all these products result from processes such as distillation. The palm kernel or palm wine is not immediately obvious to the eye as the juice of the orange is, for instance; they lie deep in the palm tree. In the same way, when someone says something that is not readily understandable, the Akan say, 'Wabu bɛ' (he has created or uttered a proverb). In such a case one must dig into the statement in order to get at its meaning. The meaning of a proverb is thus not obvious or direct. He concludes that, the attraction of proverbs lies in their use of concrete images. Cutting a palm tree is an image.

The analogy above is quite appealing in expounding the etymology of Nzema proverbs. The idiom, 'bu ɛɛɛ' (to cite a proverb) literally means: to cut (bu) a palm tree (arɛɛ). The plural for 'arɛɛ' (palm tree) is 'mrɛɛ'. Thus, the difficulty in uprooting or cutting down palm trees (obviously big ones) is directly likened to getting the super – literal meaning of proverbs. Indeed, for one to understand a proverb, he/she must not rely solely on the literal meaning but the super – literal. That is to say that one must go beyond the surface meaning. However, the imagery painted in the proverbs helps in understanding them.

According to Agyekum (2007), a proverb is a time tested, brief and witty saying, usually symbolic, that expresses a truth or recognized observation about practical lives which is based on traditional experiences and have been transmitted from generations to generations and withstood the test of time. This definition explains the fact that, although a proverb is short, it expresses an obvious truth and often offers advice. Yusuf (1997; cited in Adeyemi & Opeyemi, 2014) explains that, the truth presented in proverbs is not logical, priori or intuitive truth: it is often an empirical fact based upon and derived from the people's experience of life, human relationship and interaction with the world of nature. Generally, a proverb expresses a shrewd perception about everyday life.

Adeyemi (2005; cited in Adeyemi & Opeyemi, 2014), noted that proverbs remained from time immemorial until today and has become a very powerful and effective instrument for the transmission of culture, philosophy, social morality and values and the sensibility of the people. In essence, their values do not lie in what they reveal about the thoughts of the people; proverbs are models of compressed or forceful language that make people behave according to norms and mores of the society.

In the views of Hussein (2009), proverbs are the linguistic maxims of Africa and their employment in speech provides interest and excitement. Finnegan (1970) stressed this saying, "in many African cultures a feeling for language, for imagery and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly in proverbs" (p. 390)

Finnegan (1970) further defines proverb as a saying that is more or less fixed in form and which is marked by 'shortness, sense, and salt' and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it.

From the above definitions, it can be deduced that, a proverb is crafted based on real life situations and or experiences and it is an embodiment of some universal truth about life and as a source of wisdom. Through proverbs, individuals are able to pass on rich cultural traditions and communicate expected codes of behaviour. This practice cuts across almost all African societies in the world over which Nzema is not an exception.

From the researchers' point of view, the above definitions of proverbs hold true. Proverbs are relatively short, brief statements which are used in daily activities to admonish, advise, educate and entertain people. Proverbs are a form of verbal art handed down from generations to generations in oral tradition. Again, some proverbs can contain the narrative history of a group of people and their way of doing things.

### **Neological issues in proverbs**

The study of recent proverbs can be associated with the term, *neologism*. That is, the creation of a word from existing lexical items. It is also called coinage (Annan, 2017). The term has a broader meaning that includes not only "an entirely new lexical item" but also an existing word whose meaning has been altered. Neologisms are usually introduced when an individual or individuals find that a specific notion is lacking a term in a language, or when the existing vocabulary is insufficiently detailed. Another trigger that motivates people to coin words or phrases is in order to disambiguate a previously existing term that may have been obscure or vague due to having multiple senses.

The origin of proverbs has become very difficult for researchers to relate. It has become difficult for researchers to trace the history of even the traditional proverbs as to the person who created them. Some may arise from simple apophthegms and platitudes which over time are elevated to the status of a proverb. Others emerge from the symbolic or metaphoric use of an incident; some are based on a story or fable, while others are simply variations on existing proverbs.

The origin of any proverb has usually been a concise, brief or figurative statement usually from speeches of a wise or elderly man, in a particular situation or context. If it impresses his audience as rich and weighty with wisdom, anybody may quote it in a similar situation and as time goes on, it becomes a popular expression in the language of the people. Proverbs with moral significance become fashionable and popular and are adopted into the social ethics of the people (Ackah, 1988).

As Nketia (1958; cited in Finnegan, 1970) admits, "Proverbs have proved to be of great relevance to modern man. This is due to the fact that users with gifts of creativity who are familiar with its techniques may create new ones to avoid hackneyed expression." No wonder these new creations in Nzema proverbs.

### **Moral significance of Proverbs**

Proverbs play a very important role in the everyday language of the Ghanaian. Our languages have beautiful proverbs which cover all aspects of our life. They are drawn from careful observations of social events, the lives of people and animals. Some are also drawn from experiences in occupations such as farming, fishing, hunting, and weaving. We have proverbs that talk about family and human relations, good and evil, poverty and riches, joy and sorrow.

When a speaker uses proverbs well, we say he really knows the language. Instead of a long speech, a good speaker sometimes uses proverbs or wise sayings to express the same ideas (Bokor, 2004). Some of the functions of proverbs are the following:

- (a) They adorn the speech and make it rich and beautiful,
- (b) They bring out the main point of the matter for clear understanding,
- (c) They make an otherwise long statement short,
- (d) They make listeners pay attention to what is being discussed,
- (e) They educate and teach morals.

Most of the Ghanaian ideas about virtues are expressed in our proverbs; therefore, each proverb has a moral teaching. When a proverb is given, the listener tries to find out what lesson it is meant to teach. Most communities have proverbs which say, 'We speak to the wise man in proverbs, not in plain language.' This means that the wise man is intelligent enough to understand proverbial language (Bokor, 2004).

## Methodology

The primary source of data in this research is intuition since the researchers are native speakers of Nzema and know quite a number of Nzema proverbs. Intuition as a data gathering method is widely used in linguistics studies, especially in generative grammar studies (Haegeman, 1991).

Newmeyer (1986) explains this introspective approach as a practice through which linguists (and of course, literary writers) uses themselves as informants in collecting data about the acceptability and interpretation of grammatical constructions. It cannot however be concluded that the researchers' introspective judgments on Nzema proverbs will always be accurate. With this view in mind, the researchers where necessary, checked on the correct wordings and constructions of the proverbs against the collective linguistic and grammatical competence of other native speakers in both Jomoro and Evaloe municipalities. In doing this, the researchers wrote down fifty proverbs that are deemed recent. After compiling the proverbs, the researchers asked twenty native speakers who are known for their competencies in using proverbs, to confirm whether or not the compiled list of proverbs are indeed recent and to also give possible reasons for these recent proverbs.

The researchers also collected some data from one written source; 'Nzema Mrɛɛ nee bɛ Ngilenu' (A collection of Nzema proverbs with their meaning) by Kwesi and Quarm (1998).

## Discussion of the Recent Nzema Proverbs

In the traditional Nzema society, proverbs are the domain of the elderly "Kpanyinli." The elders of the past are believed to be the repository and makers of the proverbs. The elders are the most frequent proverb tellers. Their wisdom, wit and oratory talent are shown through their knowledge of a broad repertoire of proverbs. No wonder most Nzema proverbs are introduced by the saying, "Mgbanyima bule ɛɛɛ bie kɛ..." (Literally, the elders have the proverb that goes like this .....), or simply "Mgbanyima se..." (Literally the elders say...) or "Kɛ mɔɔ mgbanyima zele la..." (Literally as the elders said ...). This illustrates the fact that, in the Nzema society, the elders are the main personae in many proverbial apophthegms because they are makers and most common users of proverbs. However, the sole authorship of creation of Nzema proverbs by the elders in the olden days has now changed. Today, many people use their wisdom and observations from new happenings in the society to create proverbs. Some may also arise from simple apophthegms and cliché which over time are elevated to the status of a proverb. Below is one of the factors that contribute to the creation of recent Nzema proverbs.

### Variations on existing forms

Nzema proverbs are based on real life situations and observations and so, many people use their artistic skills, wisdom and linguistic knowledge to create their own proverbs. As a result, they create other proverbs that suit current trends in the society.

The variation lies in the way words in both forms are substituted for each other giving similar or different realizations. The situation in literary terms is an example of linguistic parallelism.

Below are some examples of these proverbs in Nzema.

1 a. Mɔɔ *kɔ amɔɔnla* la ɛndo ɔ nli funli.\*

Literally: He that goes to Ewe (Ewe community) does not come to meet his mother's corpse.

b. Mɔɔ *kɔla mɔɔnla* la ɛndo ɔ nli funli.

Literally: The wanderer does not come to meet his mother's corpse.

2 a. Wɔammaa ɛ gɔnwo ampɛ *ngɔnla* a, ɛmpɛ *bulu*.\*

Literally: If you prevent your friend from scoring nine, you would not score ten either. (Usually cited as no nine no ten)

b. Wɔammaa ɛ gɔnwo ampɛ *angɔ* a, ɛmpɛ *ɛndvuu*.

Literally: If you prevent your friend from passing, you will not get there either.

3 a. Raale *ɛnzɛ* boane na nrenyia *ɛmpɛ* ye bole.\*

Literally: A woman does not rear sheep for the man to tell the price.

b. Raale *sɛ* boane a nrenyia a *pɛ* ye bole a.

Literally: When a woman rears sheep it is the man who tells the price.

4 a. *ɛ* *zɛ* ara de aduoba zo a ɛnli aduoba amunli.\*

Literary: If your patrilineal sibling is on top of a guava tree, you do not eat green guava.

b.  $\epsilon$  *nl̩* ara de aduoba zo a  $\epsilon$ ni aduoba amunli.

Literally: If your matrilineal sibling is on top of a guava tree, you do not eat green guava.

5a. B $\epsilon$ nea baka *bo* na b $\epsilon$ ahɔ ɔ bo ay $\epsilon$ ne.\*

Literally: The bottom of the tree is first checked before firewood is fetched from under it.

b. B $\epsilon$ nea baka *li* na b $\epsilon$ ahɔ ɔ bo ay $\epsilon$ ne.

Literally: The tip of the tree is first checked before firewood is fetched from under it.

6a. B $\epsilon$ su a b $\epsilon$ wie.\*

Literally: There is an end to every cry.

b. B $\epsilon$ so a b $\epsilon$ wie.

Literally: A substantial increase (in number) will surely reduce.

The proverbs in the asterisks (\*) are the recent ones and the unmarked ones are the traditional ones. These recent proverbs will be discussed in detail. From the above examples, it is clear that, the major difference between the traditional and the recent Nzema proverbs is the change in grammatical forms. Some of the words are interchanged with others that sound similar but have different meaning. Most Nzema speakers prefer to use the new forms to the traditional forms for some reasons. These reasons will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

### Why some Nzema proverbs are considered recent and what they seek to say

Before one can determine as to which Nzema proverb is recent, it requires a lot of factors. One of these factors is the wording in some of the proverbs. Let us discuss some of these proverbs below.

1. Wɔammaa  $\epsilon$  gɔnwo amp $\epsilon$  *ngɔnla* a',  $\epsilon$ mp $\epsilon$  *bulu*, literally translated as 'If you prevent your friend from scoring nine, you would not score ten either.' Before the arrival of the Europeans on the Nzema coasts in the early fifteenth century, the Nzema were completely farmers and fisher folks. Literacy and computation were introduced through education by the European missionaries long after their settlement on the Nzema coasts. The English employed slave labour and quarried limestone rock from a nearby site to build the fort (Fort Appolonia, Beyin) in 1768-70. The King at the time, Awulae Amihyia Kpanyinli invited the English Committee of Merchants to build the fort (Kwesi, 1992).

There is however another contradiction from Nzema oral history that, Awulae Kaku Aka, the successor of Awulae Amihyia Kpanyinli curtailed the missionaries from entering into Nzema until his death in 1851.

The most important thing is that the missionaries actually settled for a long time before the introduction of literacy and computations. This does not however suggest that the Nzema did not know anything about numeracy. But where this has to do with formal examination in which the full mark is ten (10) and some (students) scoring low because other students failed to assist them was actually courtesy of formal education by the Europeans. Thus failure to assist a colleague student to pass an exam would render the failure of the two (students) according to this maxim. The Nzema believe in collective patronage in all their activities. No wonder the equivalent proverb, *Esale fema bia bene, ye $\epsilon$  bene bia fema*, literally translated as 'The right hand bathes the left hand and the left hand bathes the right hand.' This suggests that egocentrism was seriously frowned upon. So it would not surprise even teachers to see students helping one another during exams (even though the practice violates examination rules).

The reason discussed above makes the proverb 'Wɔammaa  $\epsilon$  gɔnwo amp $\epsilon$  *ngɔnla* a,  $\epsilon$ mp $\epsilon$  *bulu*' (If you prevent your friend from scoring nine, you would not score ten either.' more recent than the traditional saying 'Wɔammaa  $\epsilon$  gɔnwo amp $\epsilon$  *angɔ* a,  $\epsilon$ mp $\epsilon$  *endwu*, which is literally translated as 'If you prevent your friend from passing, you will not get there either.' As said earlier, the Nzema were completely subsistent farmers. The paths to these farms were so narrow that two farmers (especially with loads) could not pass over simultaneously, so one therefore had to wait for the other to get over before he/she passes. Preventing the other to pass would cause them to fall (because of the load, especially if they are carrying firewood). This saying is thus used in situations where one is found to be self-centered in dealing with others. Although these proverbs are different in terms of wording, the two forms; the recent and the traditional proverb discussed above connote the same meaning. They all connote the message that, we should not only care about ourselves and our personal well-being, but also think about others. This correlates with the epistle of Paul to the Philippians (See Philippians chapter 2 verses 4). The Nzema today prefer the first proverb (a) to the second (b) because unlike those days where one has to wait for a fellow farmer to pass (especially on a tiny wooden bridge) and illiteracy was prevalent, the story is different now. There is mass education in Nzema and very few people engage in farming (large scale) with wide and cleared roads and not only foot paths.

2. 'Mɔɔ *ƙɔ amwɔnla* la endo ɔ nli funli' literally, 'He that goes to Ewe (Ewe community) does not come to meet his mother's corpse'. This is a recent Nzema proverb. As discussed earlier, many proverbs which Nzema proverb is one came about as a result of observation of various aspects of the environments. Some are observations of the habits of men or the situations in which they live. The aforementioned proverb is attributed to this factor.

According to Nzema oral history, the ethnic group that had long alliance with Nzema as far as abolition of slave trade was concerned is the Ashanti. There is yet to be reported that Nzema had some relations with the Ewes. The question therefore is, how then did the proverb of going to Ewe land come up? To answer this question, there is the need to consider the two words, '*amwɔnla*' and '*mɔɔnla*'. Obviously both words are similar in form, what causes the semantic difference is the affix 'a' (*mɔɔnla* is to wander about, *Amwɔnla* is an Ewe land) Thus, instead of saying '*mɔɔnla*' the contemporary Nzema will say '*amwɔnla*' (because they rhyme).

According to Asilijoe (1992), the Alɔnwɔba clan (one of the seven clans of Nzema) was noted for their inability to stay at a particular place. They were sojourners and so wandered about seeking for raffia plant to tap wine from them (because they were wine tappers and farmers as well).

As a result, they acquired the name '*akolamwɔnlama*', which means 'those who can wander a lot'. The effect of this wandering was that one day, the people returned to their station where they had tapped enough wine for distillation. They realized later that the wine had fermented beyond measure and those that were yet to be tapped had died out completely causing them to toil in vain. It is therefore an indisputable fact that it was due to this attitude that people fond of travelling to far places and would seldom come home were branded '*ƙɔla mɔɔnla*'.

Despite the fact that these two proverbs, 'Mɔɔ *ƙɔ amwɔnla* la endo ɔ nli funli' and 'Mɔɔ *ƙɔla mɔɔnla* la endo ɔ nli funli', differ in wording, they portray the same idea. The distance from Nzema to Ewe land is not a short one. So travelling to Ewe land for greener pastures with the intention of not returning in the least possible time may cause you 'missing your mother's corpse' that, is missing greater opportunities and by then also serious damage might have occurred at your back just as it happened to the Alɔnwɔba clan in the history narrated.

3. '*Bɛsu a bɛwie*', literally as 'There is an end to every cry.' According to the history of the Nzema with respect to childbearing, this proverb is considered recent. This proverb came about as a result of intelligent reflection and careful study. Nzema was noted for their large birth size, some giving birth to at least ten and others twelve. That is why names such as 'Nyɔnra' (ninth born), 'Bulu' (tenth born), and 'Eduku' (eleventh born) were common in those days. The idea of giving birth to many children was that if some die some will be left. So giving birth to more children was a requirement, something that every married woman would not joke with. Because of this, when a bereaved mother is being consoled, the proverb, '*Bɛso a bɛwie*' is said to remind her that since the number has reduced, she must give birth to replenish the lose child. No wonder the bereaved would be coerced to marry again if her husband had already died so that she will fill in the gap of lose children to sustain the family size. Therefore the proverb, '*Bɛso a bɛwie*' was in its rightful place.

However, the story is not the same today in Nzema. Unlike in the olden days where the extended family took precedence over the conjugal family, it is the nuclear family that is considered now. For this reason parents make sure that they give birth to the number that they would be capable taking good care of. The advent of family planning has even made the situation worse. It is not an exaggeration to say that some couples today may even decide not to give birth at all (perhaps due to the current system of living and its related problems). It would be sarcastic then to console a bereaved mother with the proverb, '*Bɛso a bɛwie*' when in actual fact she has not planned to marry again or has not got means to cater for another child. Based on this observation, the Nzema today would opt for '*Bɛsu a bɛwie*' to remind the bereaved that crying excessively would not bring the lose child back to life and that she cannot continue to wail all her life. That would rather cause her sickness. The proverb, '*Bɛsu a bɛwie*' was thus created so as not to contradict the former notion on childbearing to the current situation.

4. '*Raalɛ sie boane a nrenyia a pɛ ye bolɛ a*'. Literally, 'When a woman rears sheep it is the man who tells the price'. It was an ideal for a woman to rear sheep alright but it was the duty of the man to decide how much it should be sold. This is because the woman was seen to be incapable of making right decisions. According to Nzema perspective, women would depend wholly on the man for everything including soliciting his consent on the kind of meal to prepare for the family. Some men therefore treated their wives the way they wished. This conception was perhaps a feature of the African man in general, as highlighted in Buchi Emecheta's (1979) 'The Joys of Motherhood' where premium is put on men against women.

The men use tradition and women's sense of responsibility to subjugate and actually enslave them. The story of Nigeria was true of olden Nzema where women were only designated to the kitchen and would be denied formal education and suffer in the hands of their husbands. The story has changed today, for women in Nzema are strongly competing with the men due to mass education and women empowerment in various fields. Thus it would be misleading to say today that women in Nzema depend solely on their husbands for virtually everything when in actual fact, most men depend on their wives for many things. Hence the contradiction 'Raale enzie boane na nrenyia empε ye bole' (meaning a woman does not rear sheep for the man to tell the price).

This recent proverb however does not suggest that, women in Nzema today are no longer submissive to their husbands. But as highlighted in 'The Joys of Motherhood', they are now emancipated from the harsh treatments and so can depend on themselves with little or no support from their husbands.

5. *ε ze ara de aduoba zo a, εnli aduoba amunli*'. This implies literally that, 'If your patrilineal sibling is on top of a guava tree, you do not eat green guava'. The reason for this proverb being recent is the fact that Nzema do not practice patrilineal system of inheritance. One would therefore ask why this recent proverb.

As indicated earlier, some proverbs are created to disabuse people's minds of former notion or concept. This recent proverb (above) actually serves this purpose. The tenets of the traditional proverb, 'ε nli ara de aduoba zo a εnli aduoba amunli' (if your matrilineal sibling is on top of a guava tree you do not eat green guava), is that nephews and nieces will continue to enjoy greater privileges from their maternal uncles. In those early days, fathers would consider nephews and nieces at the expense of their own children because the children were seen to be the property of the wife's extended family. Therefore everything that the father possessed would be enjoyed by the children while he is alive. But when he (the father) dies, all properties are then shifted to his nephews and nieces. If he had not got nephews, his properties would be inherited by his brothers. As a result, some nephews lived sedentary lives for whether they worked or not, at the death of their uncle they would inherit his properties. Some even turned recalcitrant that they would eliminate their uncle and occupy his position.

The situation is the reverse today for fathers now focus on their nuclear family and provide the best for their children. They see their wards as their 'cocoa plants' that would be harvested in the future. What has brought the change is the current belief that, 'everyone is planting for himself' and not for another.

It should be emphasized however that the creation of the recent proverb does not suggest that Nzema has moved from matrilineal system to patrilineal system of inheritance.

What the recent proverb seeks to put across is that it is the duty of every father to take absolute responsibility of his own children and not pushing them to their uncles since uncles also have their own responsibilities. Although the two proverbs differ in form, they present similar ideas. That is, those who are closely related to people occupying higher positions such as an uncle (matrilineal) or father (patrilineal) owning properties will by no means enjoy some kind of privileges that those not directly related will not enjoy.

6. *Bεnea baka bo na bεahɔ ɔ bo ayεne*. Literally, 'The bottom of the tree is first checked before firewood is fetched from under it'. To relate it to how firewood was fetched in olden Nzema especially coastal Nzema, this proverb is a recent one. Dried coconut branches were the main source of fuel for domestic cooking. The criterion for determining whether or not dried branches had fallen off the coconut trees was to look at the top of the coconut trees to see if there is a sign that new branches had actually fallen before going to fetch them. So it was not surprising for one to say that there is no firewood under this or that coconut tree. The same criterion was applied among the hinterlands. Since this criterion failed most of the time, firewood fetchers would not only look at the tip of the tree, but also go directly under it to clear all doubts. It was based on this experience that the new coinage (above) resulted. The criterion of the traditional proverb, 'Bεnea baka *ti* na bεahɔ ɔ bo ayεne', literally, 'The tip of the tree is first checked before firewood is fetched from under it', permitted seekers or fetchers to only look at the tip of trees before fetching, but the recent one urge fetchers to go beyond just looking at the tip of trees. What the recent proverb seeks to tell is that indeed there would be a mark indicating that a branch has fallen but as to whether it has already been fetched or not, that cannot be determined by merely gazing from a distance. It would be better going directly under it to clear all anxieties.

Despite the contradiction in these proverbs, the two forms; the recent and the traditional proverb discussed above connote the same meaning. Both reveal the essence of investigating before taking an action or decision. Taking marriage and work to illustrate, it would be sensible enough to investigate about the man or woman one would want to marry. He or she would be disappointed if he considers beauty and possibly height.

The inner beauty (character) would only come to light after a thorough study and enquiry on the individual one would want to marry. The same apply when one is seeking for job or wants to put up a business. He will have to first make enquiries into the business he wish to establish and not rely on hearsay that he will earn more money from his proposed business.

### The differences and similarities between the recent and the traditional proverbs

From the analysis above, it is obvious that, the major difference between the recent Nzema proverbs and traditional Nzema proverbs is the wording. Some people interchange the words in the traditional proverbs with words that are pronounced similar to them. In some cases too, they propose it negatively to suit current trend of affairs.

Notwithstanding the differences between the recent and traditional Nzema proverbs, they are similar in other ways. From the discussions above, most of the recent and the traditional Nzema proverbs connote similar meaning. They have the same structure that gives the same idea although they differ in wording. This stresses the fact that oral literature has no fixed composition, but gives room for re – creation of totally new forms (Agyekum, 2007). Thus, the language may change but the message remains the same.

### Conclusion

The outcome of this study proves that it is possible to create new proverbs from the old proverbs. This indicates the fact that proverbs may not have a fixed form as Finnegan (1970) claimed. It is however subject to changes. Although these proverbs are recent, they have some moral values. They also tell new things about the Nzema society. This study also buttresses the fact that the creation of these new proverbs supports the traditional ones in many ways.

Note: For more examples of recent Nzema proverbs, please see appendix.

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**Appendix**

7 a. BE nye endela be *nzo*.\*

Literally: The eye is not bigger than the ear.

b. BE nye endela be *ndo*.

Literally: The eye is not bigger than the brow.

8 a. Ebɔ wɔ anyile ne a, yee besoa wɔ a.\*

Literally: You are helped with your load when you have your headgear on your head.

b. *Ekɛkɛ* a, yee besoa wɔ a.

Literally: You are helped with your load when you have tied it.

9a. Befɔ be *gyake akunlu* a besele dabele a.\*

Literally: An accommodation is sought for with the sole.

b. Befɔ be *sa akunlu* a besele dabele a.

Literally: An accommodation is sought for with the inside of the palm.

10a. *Besele* awie etu bebɔ be nwo.\*

Literally: You can borrow your neighbour's gun to shoot yourself.

b. *Benzele* awie etu bembɔ be nwo.

Literally: You cannot borrow your neighbour's gun to shoot yourself.

11a. *Akwɛ* toa soe, soe a anree onli ale.\*

Literally: The fowl would go hungry should it heed to the many drive away.

b. *Boane* toa su, su a anree onli ale.

Literally: The sheep would go hungry should it heed to the many drive away.

12a. *Kokotile* de aze a nangonloma enzoa kyɛ.\*

Literally: When the thumb is alive, the knee does not wear the hut.

b. *Etile* de aze a nangonloma enzoa kyɛ.

Literally: When the head is alive, the knee does not wear the hut.