‘Age’ In the Khurkhul Society

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Abstract: Proverb is the knowledge that a group of people earned through many experiences in their live. Later such experiences are set down as a kind of rule of their society, in the form of language. It gives a sight how a society conceptualises the world; its culture, its belief and so on. Thus, in this paper proverb is used to study that ‘age’ did not mean disengagement from the society; it rather means the storage of knowledge in the Khurkhul society. The ‘age man’ is highly respected and valued. Khurkhul is an endangered Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Khurkhul village, Manipur. This is the first attempt to study on ‘age’ specified on proverbs from a sociolinguistics point of view.

Key words: age, Khurkhul, metaphor, proverb

Research Methodology

A qualitative approach is applied in this research. The primarily source of data comes from the native speakers of Khurkhul who are between the 70-90 years of ages who are not (less) contact with the other language speaker, especially standard variety. The date is partially from the present author of the paper also, who happens to be a native speaker. Part of the data comes from secondary sources too. The key method of the research deign are interview, group discussion, and observation. Due to time limitation, it was impossible to collect all the proverbs. So, the current study is done on some of the selected proverbs that relate to ‘age’.

Introduction

Khurkhul is spoken by the inhabitants of the Khurkhul village. McCulloch (1980) writes the language of Khurkhul as Khooreekool Shan language. However, at the present context, this language no longer exists. They believed that the only context where the word san is used, in one of its holly song called hoi laoba (shouting hoi).

Vocalist/Singer: ibungo koubru asukpa
Choir: san nasi san
Vocalist/Singer: Poirei khunda hanba –o
Choir: San nasi san
Vocalist/Singer: Charik mapal thariba
Choir: San nasi san

The current language is a variety of meiteilon. Thus it comes under the Kuki-Chin language family. It is also endangered due to frequent contact with other languages especially standard variety. It is the oldest generation who use it in all the domains (both in home and public contexts), while the majority of younger generation use the standard variety. The current research is done on the spoken form of Khurkhul use by the native speakers who is between 70-90 years of ages, who are not (less) in contact with standard variety (or any other language).

Geographical and Historical account of Khurkhul

Khurkhul is located in Imphal west-1, district of Manipur, one of the nine districts of the state of Manipur in the north-eastern India. It is 15/16 km from Imphal, the capital of Manipur. It is in the northern side of the valley in the West of Imphal Dimapur Road. The entire village is divided into Awang Leikai (North locality) and Makha Leikai (South locality). They are again divided into sub leikais (localities). Silk rearing is the most important occupation next to the rice cultivation in Khurkhul.

According to 2011 population Census, the Khurkhul village has 6450 of which 3300 are males while 3150 are female (which includes the present author). Khurkhul has higher literacy rate compared to Manipur. In 2011, the literacy rate of Khurkhul was 78.16% compared to 76.94% of Manipur.

The Khurkhuls come under the community called Chakpa Loi. The Lois is classified as Schedule Castes in Manipur. The population distribution of Manipur is such that the valley is inhabited by the meiteis, the majority group, whereas the surrounding hills are inhabited by the various hill tribes. And the Lois are spread about thirty villages located in the foot hills. They thus live between the meiteis in the valley and the tribes on the hills.

The origin of Khurkhul

There is no written record of how Khurkhuls began to inhabit in the Khurkhul village. However, many
stories are passed on generation to generation through oral. The following are some of the examples:

- Khurkhuls are believed to be descendents of those people who came out from a *leikhun* (cave) that is behind the Ichum Lairambi Temple. According to this oral story, when one dies, he comes back home after five days of burial. Thus, one day, a mother in law instructed her daughter in law to keep warm water ready as her husband is coming back from the cave. Her daughter in law was supposed to pour the water on him. However, she fainted when she saw her father in law who stood in their courtyard carrying his coffin. This embarrasses her father in law and went back to the cave. After this incident, *Yendrembam sagei* (Yendrembam lineage) close the cave for the safety of children and women folk. According to this story, *Yendrembam sagei* (Yendrembam lineage) is the first lineage who inhabited in the Khurkhul village.

One of the evidence that supports this story is that like those Kabos who search a place to settle by throwing an egg, Khurkhul practices a ritual in which an egg is thrown to find the burial place. The death body is buried where the egg is broken (Louriyam, 2004).

Though there are many of such oral stories of the original inhabitants of Khurkhul, the exact information is not known.

**Proverb in Khurkhul**

Mieder rightly says, “A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorisable form and which is handed down from generation to generation” (Mieder, 1985: 119, 1993: 24, quoted by Mieder 2004:3).

Proverbs are an essential part of the society of Khurkhul. They influenced in individual, family, and the whole village. The proverbs furnish the sight how Khurkhuls view the world, its culture, its belief and so on. Thus, many proverbs signify how the Khurkhuls conceptualise ‘age’ and its influence in its social structure.

**Age in the Khurkhul Society**

According to ‘disengagement theory’ aging is treated as the stage of withdrawing from the society. It means decline in contact between the aging person and others in the social system he belongs. Thus, in some societies ‘age’ relates to ‘retirement’. However, in some collectivism society like Khurkhul, this notion of ‘age and disengagement from the society’ is provoked.

In a similar way, Lunda community (the speaker of Lunda, a Bantu language of the Central African Plateau in the north-western corner of Zambia) also considered that it is impossible to have a society without the presence of ‘age people’. They compare elders as ‘frying pan’ who keeps the water from putting out fire, and the fire from consuming water. According to their belief, it is the elder who maintain harmony in the society.

In the Khurkhul society, ‘age’ is not simply a number or the stage of declining from the society, it rather means experience, knowledge, skills, and so on. Age is a compulsory factor of its social
structure. Aged people are highly valued and respected. The belief is that without the presence of them, the society will ruin in chaos. Thus, the way how the Khurkhul society visualises ‘age’ is observed in many of its social structure. For examples, kinship system (within the family): according to its kinship system, it is the male who holds the highest position in the family, since they practice patriarchy system of society. However, ‘age’ often interrupts it. For instance, the eldest man (whether male or female) is considered the owner of the house. He/she represents the family. Thus, his/her name is appeared on any invitation cards of any occasion. In another example, after the death of the grandfather, it is the grandmother who has the right of decision making in the family. However, in many patriarchy societies, it might be the father who gets the right of decision making.

Some of the Khurkhul proverbs are analysed in order to study how ‘age’ is conceptualised in its society.

- **elder faeces-NOM pot-mend**

The advice of elder is used to solve the problem. (Literal)

This proverb means that the advice of ‘age man’ is used in solving the problems of life. When one attends age, it is not only the number and saggy skins but also the knowledge in form of experience. Thus, any advice, suggestion, or any word from an ‘age man’ is highly valued in the society. For instance, before building a house it is necessary to take advice, suggestion from the eldest man of the family.

In this proverb, the process of producing faeces is metaphorically used to mean the process of attending knowledge. Human faeces is formed by eating the food, then digesting it, and releasing from the bowels. In a similar manner, one attends knowledge by entering into a situation i.e. experience, digesting i.e. understanding it, and releasing in the form of language. Therefore one is called a knowledgeable person after experiencing many situations which needs time i.e. age.

- **cahi-cama  t ḫbak-cama  age-hundred  work-hundred**

Age increases responsibilities. (Literal)

This proverb denotes the old age stage of one’s life. It means that when one attends more ages, his responsibility also increases because more age stands for more experiences of life, more knowledge, more skills etc. In its society, each experience he learns is expected to share/pass on to the younger generation (his family, locality, sagei ‘lineage’, and the village).

For instance, when he is young, he is only a son to his parents, a brother to his siblings, and a friend to his friends. His responsibility is limited within these people. However, when he attends age, his responsibilities increase, now, he is a father to his children, he is a husband to his wife, he is a brother in law to his sister’s husband, he is a uncle to his niece/nephew, he is a grandfather to his grandchildren, he is an ‘age man’ to his locality, sagei (lineage), and the village etc.

In this proverb, the term ‘hundred’ is metaphorically used to denote the numbers of responsibilities of an ‘age man’.

- **ucao-amu-tuba-da-unao-majam-tek-i**
  
  big tree-one-fall-TOP-small tree-many-break-ASP

The young ones suffer when an elder dies. (Literal)

This proverb means that when an elder dies the young ones suffer. Here, the ‘big tree’ and ‘small tree’ are used metaphorically to mean ‘age man’ and ‘young man’. For instance, the whole family get disturb when a father of a family dies. He is the eldest in the family who takes responsibilities for guiding and supporting the family financially, morally etc to the younger ones.

So, in case, when he dies all the responsibilities taken by him has to transfer to the person who is the eldest at the present. This changes the whole family system. On the other hand, when a young one dies, the family mourn his death but the family system did not experience a drastic change.

- **əŋ×aŋ-na-jumpanba-jum-pa-i**
  
  child-NOM-to run house- house-thin-ASP

The family run without an elder is inappropriate.

This proverb means that it is compulsory to have an elder to guide and manage the family. A family without its guidance and management is considered incomplete. It means that a family run without an elder shows lack of experience. Thus, they have no idea how to function and organised the family. For instance,

(i) The economic management: young ones have no experience of economic management. So, it is likely that he might not know how to earn, where to
spend, how to safe and so on. This might lead to economic break down of the family.

(ii) Culture: it is the ‘age man’ who constantly teaches its cultures, the social system etc to the young ones. His/her absence in the family will loss such opportunity to the young ones. The use of terms ‘running a house’ and ‘thin’ which metaphorically meant ‘taking responsibilities’ and ‘inappropriate’ only denotes that it is impossible to run a family without the guidance of ‘age man’. Thus, experience is considered one of the best ways of attending knowledge.

- lisabi-ceŋsu-ćakem-ca-i
  unmarried / young woman-pattern of pounding rice-small size of rice-eat-ASP

- hzubí-ceŋsu-ncæŋ-ca-i
  old woman-pattern of pounding rice-normal size of rice-eat-ASP

The old woman knows how to pound the right size of rice whereas the young woman spoils it by pounding more.

This proverb means that it is not the strength that helps in solving problems of life, it is rather experience. The pounding of rice is used metaphorically to mean that only strength cannot solve all the problems of life, the knowledge to carry out the strength in the right way is more important.

For instance, here, the young woman who is stronger spoils the rice because she over pounded the rice. On the other hand, the old woman who has less strength pounds the rice in correct size due to her experiences. Thus, a man with the strength can only give physical output, but a man with knowledge can give right way to use that strength. This knowledge is attended only through experiences, and it means ‘age’.

- unao-no-jumpi-sem-bo-ja-de
  small tree-NOM pillar-make-NZR-agree-NEG

It is not possible to take the place of age man by young one.

This proverb means that it is impossible to replace the position of ‘age man’ by young one. The pillar is metaphorically used to denote the meaning of a man with lots of experiences due to his age. A house is supported by the pillar, carrying the weight of the roof and supporting other parts of the house. In a similar way, a family is guided and supported by him to function in harmony.

Conclusion

It is observed that in the Khurkhul society, ‘age man’ means a ‘man of knowledge’ who is expected to share his knowledge to the young ones. Every passes of years in one’s life denotes the experiencing more situations and attending more knowledge. Thus, the notion of ‘age relating to discard from the society’ is decline in the Khurkhul society. Instead, the ‘age man’ is highly valued and respected. Therefore, ‘age’ is treated as an important factor in its social structure. It is the first attempts to study ‘age’ from a sociolinguistics point of view, thus further study is required.

Abbreviation

NOM: Nominative case
TOP: Topicalization
ASP: Aspect
NEG: Negation Marker

References


