

Cross-cultural Wisdom in English and Amharic Proverbs

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Abstract: Proverbs are integral parts of spoken communication which reflect the national spirit and the traditional wisdom of a particular country. However, comparative studies of international proverbs have illuminated that a similar kernel of wisdom could be gleaned from cross-cultural contexts (Grauberg 1989). To that effect, a comparative analysis of popular English and Amharic proverbs has been undertaken under 30 thematic categories to determine their propositional equivalence. The comparative approach thus revealed a striking degree of thematic intertextuality between the corpus of English and Amharic proverbs. The bilingual proverbs encapsulate the antiquarian legacies of both cultures ranging from traditional folk wisdom to philosophical abstractions of didactic-moralistic nature which transcend racial, temporal and spatial boundaries without prejudice to their national peculiarities.

Key words: *English-Amharic proverbs, paremiology, intertextuality, cross-cultural wisdom, linguistic determinism and relativity, thematic universals.*

An Overview of Paremiology

Folklore is more than a century old although no ultimate agreement has been reached on its conceptualization. The common idea pervading all folklore is that of traditions transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth and preserved in memory According to Maria Leach:

Folklore is the generic term used to designate the customs, beliefs, traditions, tales, magical practices, proverbs, songs, etc.; in short, the accumulated knowledge of a homogeneous unsophisticated people (Leach 1950: 403).

Folklore is subdivided into subgenres such as material culture, social folk custom, performing folk arts and folk literature (Dorson 1972:2).

Folk Literature interchangeably used with oral literature could be also collectively defined as, "those utterances, whether spoken, recited or sung, whose composition and performance exhibit to an appreciable degree the artistic character of accurate observation, vivid imagination and ingenious expression (Wandewa and Bukenya 1983:1).

Paremiography and paremiology are sub-disciplines of folk literature dealing with proverb scholarship.

In contrast to paremiographers, who engage themselves with the collection and classification of proverbs, the paremiologists address such questions as the definition, form, structure, style, content, function, meaning, and value of proverbs' (Mieder et al 2004: XII). Proverbs could be

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defined from the functional point of view. Thus, many attempts ranging from philosophical abstractions to cut-and-dry lexicographical assumptions have been applied to define proverbs. For instance, (Mieder et al 2004: 1; 1996: 597) defines proverbs as ‘...concise traditional statements of an apparent truth with currency among the folk which embody wisdom, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical and memorable form’.

Dundes also provides a functional definition of proverbs as ‘a traditional saying that sums up a situation, passes a value judgment on a past matter, or recommends a course of action for the future (1975:35). Norrick (1985:8) on his part maintains that ‘a proverb is a traditional, conversational, didactic genre with general meaning, a potential-free conversational turn, preferably with figurative meaning.’ Above all, proverbs fulfil the human need to summarize experiences and observations into nuggets of wisdom that provide ready-made commentary on personal relationships and social affairs. There are proverbs for every imaginable context, and are thus as paradoxical as life itself.

By the same token, Hasan-Rokem, (1990) contends that proverb’... represent ready-made traditional strategies in oral speech acts from highbrow literature to the mass media.’ Thus, the application of proverbs is boundless and dependent on the contextual situation against which it is employed, and as broad as human experience itself. Thus, the functional definition of proverbs is near universal and well established that there is no need for operationalizing it.

When it comes to classification, there seems to be no ultimate authority over the matter that proverbs are treated under arbitrary categories. Abrahams (1972: 123) that the ‘the study of proverbs has been severely complicated by the taxonomy of conventional conversational devices that share various categorizations of proverbs proposed by different scholars. One of these categorizations is based on figuration according to which proverbs could be categorized into synecdoche, metaphoric, metonymic, hyperbolic, and paradoxical’ (Honeck 1997:130-35). Concurrent with these categories are adages, axioms and wisdom literature drawn from the Holy Bible

Accordingly, the selected corpus of data for this study could be interchangeably referred to as proverbs, idiomatic expressions, axioms or sayings. Proverbs are thus universal folk genres which possess a repertoire of formulations used as a rhetorically effective means of transmitting accumulated knowledge and experience from generation to generation by word of mouth. All the more, ‘folklore is not an echo of the past but also gives a fascinating sense of continuity with the present in both pleasure and wisdom (Boswell and Reaver 1962: 11).

Chronologically, proverbs antedate the national literature of any country. Their origin is untraceable but spring from an unknown source, spread over a country and cross-cultural boundary. (Marvin 1922: 4). The global spread of proverbs into many parts of the world is attributed to the agency of geographical explorers, cross-border caravans, travellers, evangelists, missionaries, migrants, soldiers and the incredible power of mass media. Grauberg (1989: 94) also argues that since many proverbs are so widely circulated, they are reflections of broad human experience rather than a single cultural heritage. This is applicable to the origin and dissemination of both English and Amharic proverbs whose composer are anonymous.

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affairs. There are proverbs for every imaginable context, and are thus as contradictory as life itself. By the same token, Hasan-Rokem, (1990) contends that proverb '... represent ready-made traditional strategies in oral speech acts from highbrow literature to the mass media.' Thus, the application of proverbs is boundless and dependent on the contextual situation against which it is employed, and as broad as human experience itself.

Literature Review

Ethiopia is characterized by ethno-linguistic diversity and multi-culturalism that it has been well styled as un *museo di popoli* by historians like Conti Rossini (*in* Trimmingham 1952:1). This presupposes the fact that each ethnic group which populates the country is endowed with many subgenres of folk literature ranging from legendary stories to proverbial expressions which are permeated with traditional wit and wisdom.

A host of researchers and scholars have attempted to collect describe, classify, analyse and publish vernacular proverbs as an academic exercise. For instance, Berhanu (1986) deals with the social and cultural significance of *Kämbata* Proverbs which is one of the nationalities under the Southern Ethiopia, Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SENNP). Teferi (2000) also describes the role played by proverbs in the Southern Agäw society which inhabits north western Ethiopia along with its Amhara neighbours.

The other study is that of Adugna (2015) which deals with gender stereotypes in Amharic proverbs gathered from Eastern Goğgam which underpins the dominance of patriarchal ideology in the traditional Amhara society. Quite recently, Tadesse (2004), has conducted a critical survey on the contextual function of Guji-Oromo proverbs in which he attempts to determine the reflective, corrective and reinforcement dimensions as reflected in the selected proverbs.

Apart from the aforementioned studies, a range of anthologies of proverbs in many vernacular languages like that of Mahtämä Selasse (1960) have been published.[†] Similarly, anthologies of English proverbs have been published by paremiographers like Collins (1965).

However, comparative studies of English and Amharic proverb are lacking. Given this background, the present study was designed to determine the cross-cultural congruence between English and Amharic proverbs.

Methods of Data Collection and Translation

The procedures of data collection and selection are primarily based on document analysis. To begin with, all accessible English proverbs were randomly listed down from various sources like Collins (1965) while their Amharic parallels were reconstructed from the store house of memory apart from cross-reference to Mahtämä Səlasse's anthology of Amharic proverbs (1961:17-149). Originally, 100 hundred English proverbs were collected with their corresponding Amharic parallels. This was followed by a careful selection and thematic reorganization of the most popular bilingual proverbs in currency for space and time.

[†] It is worth noting that the list of studies or anthologies on local proverbs is inexhaustible.

On the other hand, many proverbs which have similar meanings could be discovered across both languages and applied in the same contexts, but with different form, and diction or idiomatic expression. Baker (1992: 65) also proposes four strategies for the translation of idioms and fixed expressions including proverbs. These strategies are using an idiom of similar meaning and form of source language using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form of source language idiom, translation by paraphrasing and by adaptation.

Recreating proverbs presupposes mastery of the linguistic and non-linguistic features of both languages. Mollanazar (2001: 54) asserts that proverbs cannot be translated literally (word-for-word) and they may sometimes lack natural figurative equivalents in the target language. Thus, he proposed that some similar proverbs can be found in the two languages with more or less similar form, diction and meaning.

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In the following section, about 75 Popular English proverbs with their corresponding Amharic parallels under 30 functional categories are analysed in a comparative perspective. The presentation of the selected proverbs defied a perfect alphabetical order as the process of tenor identification is not essentially chronological. On the bases of textual explication and comparative analysis of proverbs with propositional similarity have been categorized into conceivable propositions to avoid fragmentation and render them semantic cohesion.

Conceptual Framework

Comparative Literature whose scope ranges from folklore scholarship to the study of international literatures is an academic field dealing with degree of influence and originality, reputation, penetration, and the synthesis of national, regional and universal literatures and cultural expressions across linguistic and disciplinary boundaries (Wellek and Warren 1962:48)).

This assumption underpins the visibility of thematic crosscurrents among languages and cultures since language and culture are complementary modes of communication. According to Bassinet (2002: 22), “No language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture nor can any language exist outside the structure of language”. This organic unity between culture and language as its mode of expression is reminiscent of Plato’s analogy between flesh and soul which underpins a horizontal approach to literary studies.

According to the Sapir-Whorfian derivatives of linguistic determinism and relativity (1970), there are two complementary viewpoints regarding the recreation of SL expression into the target language which involves bilingualism and biculturalism. The first one is linguistic relativity which holds that “the world is differently conceived and experienced in different linguistic communities” (Brown 1970:238). This phenomenon is attributed to structural differences between two languages which in turn conceptualize and categorize the world differently.

The second one which derives from the first assumption is linguistic determinism which proposes that ‘language is related to the psychological differences in our world-views’ (Brown 1970: 238). The ultimate implication of this hypothesis is the futility of translating SLT into another due to the cultural peculiarity of each language.

The intermediate position between both assumptions is the existence of certain conceptual universals shared by all languages. Thus, the brain of all humans of all races and linguistic backgrounds is capable of conceptualizing linguistic data like proverbial idiomatic and figurative expressions irrespective of spatial or temporal gaps.

In fact, these Proverbs and idiomatic expressions could be either culture-bound or trans-cultural in their appeal. The present study was thus designed to determine the thematic intertextuality between selected English and Amharic proverbs against this backdrop.

Presentation and Discussion of Data

English and Amharic are the most widely spoken languages in their respective landscapes. After all, English which has been adopted as an international medium of communication since the British colonization of many African and Asian countries is said to be ‘a window on the world if not the chosen tongue’ (Moore 1969). By the same token, Amharic which became the dominant language of Ethiopia by the accidents of history (Bender 1983: 48) is widely spoken even outside Ethiopia.

Irrespective of their longstanding orthographic traditions, English and Amharic abound with a set of time-honored proverbs and idiomatic expressions which could be culture-bound or cross-cultural in their appeal. In the following section, about 75 Popular English proverbs with their corresponding Amharic parallels under 30 functional categories are analyzed in a comparative perspective.

The selected English and Amharic proverbs have been juxtaposed under 30 thematic categories for the sake of organizational convenience. Each category is followed by a descriptive commentary aimed at discovering the underlying cultural congruence or dynamic equivalence between the selected English and Amharic proverbs.

Medical Advice/Forewarning

An apple a day keeps the doctor away.

Prevention is better than cure.

ታሞ ከመግቀቅ አስቀድሞ መጠንቀቅ፡፡

They strongly warn against undesirable consequences ranging from health hazards to socio-economic insecurity. This is a medical advice to do with the role of proper diet in developing immunity against disease. By implication guarding against any possible or imminent danger is far better than seeking a subsequent remedy for any perceivable ailment. Interestingly enough, this advice is also not culture-bound but cross-cultural in its appeal. A similar overtone of advice is also featured in the following proverbs which caution against hasty works or premature decisions or underperformances which are bound to relapse or backslide:

The farthest way round is the nearest way home.

ተንጋለው ቢተፋት ተመልሶ ባፍ ነው።

He who fights and runs away may live to fight another day.

የነቶሎቶሎ ቤት ግድግዳው ሰንበሌጥ።

Haste makes waste.

ሲሮጡ የታጠቁት ሲሮጡ ይፈታል።

የቸኮለ አፍሰሶ ለቀመ።

Thus, a short and direct method of doing a thing which is thought will gain an object quickly or easily, is less effective than a long and indirect one. It also warns against wastage of time, energy and resource. By implication, a given project should be accomplished in accordance with the prescribed timeframe or span of time as required by its complexity or simplicity. The inefficiency of a hasty project is disapproved by both cultures.

Evolution of phenomena

Rome was not built in a day.

ወሃ ሲወስድ አያሳሳቀ ነው።

ቀስ በቀስ እንቁላል በእግሩ ይሄዳል።

The journey of thousand miles begins with a step.

ጥቂት በጥቂት ይሞላል ልቃቂት።

This idea underpins the importance of progressive stages through which a person gradually slides from glory to infamy. It also warns against maximalism in which case the proper channel is violated in an attempt to achieve something overnight or hit a given target with acceleration.

In the English version, the ideas of ‘building Rome and the journey of thousand miles’ are comparable to the evolutionary growths of an ‘egg into chicken and the conversion of a cotton ball into yarn’ through carding and roving ,not overnight. At times, the progression could be from constructive moves to destructive ones and vice versa depending on its context.

Desperation

Beggars cannot be (must be) no choosers.

አራቁቱን ለተወለደ አራፊ ጨርቅ መቸ አነሰው።

When one lacks thrushes, one eats black birds.

የወደዱትን ቢያጡ የጠሉትን ይቀላውጡ።

A drowning man will clutch at a straw.

የጨነቀው አርጉዝ ያገባል።

This idea is reminiscent of the choral song in ‘Oedipus the King’ which predicts the self-inflicted fate of the hero: ‘Call no mortal happy till he carries his happiness to the grave’ which implies the reversal of fortune in one’s life for one reason or another and as a result of which one may become desperate or hopeless.

Figuratively, if one is in a weak and dependent position, one cannot lay down or be exacting in demand or preconditions. In other words, a person in desperate straits will put his hope on or seize every chance, however slight or improbable, to extricate himself from an immediate danger or difficulty whatever one’s ethnic background or national identity may be.

Contagiousness of behavioral disposition

Birds of a feather flock together.

ቁጥኛም ከወርዶ ይወላል።

Evil Communications corrupt good manners.

ካህያ ጋር የዋለች ጊደር እንትን ተምራ ትመጣለች።

These proverbs are embodiments of moral sanction against evil communications. People of similar characters and tastes associate with one another. In effect, association with bad people ruins a good person's morals.

Denial of expectations/disillusionment

Two blacks do not make a white.

አዘለም አቀፈም ያው ተሽከመ ነው።

ጉልቻ ቢለዋወጥ ወጥ አያጣፍጥም።

በርኖስ በገለብጡት በርኖስ።

ከዝንጅር ቆንጆ ምን ይመራርጣል።

(Blacks = bad acts' white = a virtue) imply the fact that quantitative change is not as radical as qualitative change. The analogy drawn between two blacks on the one hand, and caring and caressing, the beauty contest among monkeys, and black traditional attire overturned on the other, underpin the same morale. In other words, the repetition of an evil act by the same or its commission by another person does not make it any better but vicious circle. Denial of the immutability of the inherent nature of character is implied by the replication of a similar black colour, a host of ugly monkeys and interrelated tactile positioning all of which do not demonstrate a marked difference but repetition of past mistakes.

The strength of blood bond

Blood is thicker than water.

ትንሽ ሥጋ እንደ መርፌ ትወጋ።

ጣት ገማ ተብሎ ተቆርጦ አይጣልም።

የዘመድ ጥል የሥጋ ትል።

አህያ ለአህያ ቢራገጥ ጥርስ አይሳበርም።

In the English version, the organic metaphors, blood and water, imply two diametrically opposed modes of human relations. The decomposition of meat, one's rotten finger and the conflict between donkeys stand for blood thus emphasizing the probability of reconciliation between relatives who had harboured grudges against each other.

Thus, the bond created by blood relationship is stronger than that forged by other circumstance such as marriage, friendship, business relations, etc. It also highlights the traditional family environment whereby relatives care for each other instinctually irrespective of their old wounds.

Oppportunistic betrayal

Rats leave a falling house/Rats leave a sinking ship.

አካሄዱን አይተው ስንቁን ይቀሙታል።

A stuff is quickly found to beat a dog with.

የወደቀ ግንድ ምሳር ይበዛበታል።

Give a dog a bad name and hang him.

ሊበላዎት ያሰቧትን ዶሮ ጅግራ ናት ይሏታል።

ወዳጅ ሲያረጅ በጓሮ በር ይሄዳል።

These expressions are associated with bad luck or the reversal of fortune in one's life who, in the good old days, must have been influential and commanded high respect. Once the glorious days are over, intimate friends, faithful lovers and servants may betray their masters or a cause when they foresee one's or its decline. The rats, the stuff with which a dog is beaten and bad name in the English version symbolize 'Judas' who betrayed Jesus three times before cock crow. Conversely, snatching one's provision, over-chopping a fallen trunk and the guinea-fowl-chicken analogy in the Amharic parallel reflect the same degree of opportunistic betrayal.

Ambitiousness vs. Steadfastness

A jack of all trades is master of none.

ሁሉ አማረሽን ገበያ አታውጧት።

It is impossible to gain, benefit from or enjoy two circumstances or conditions that are inconsistent and incompatible with or opposed to each other. A person who follows much diversified occupations can never specialize in any and is bound to remain a generalist

Grasp all, lose all.

የቆጡን አወርድ ብላ የብብቷን ጣለች።

It is better to be in possession of a small thing than to have expectations based on something that is of a greater value and is remote or far-fetched.

A rolling stone gathers no moss.

የረጋ ወተት ቅቤ ይወጣዋል።

A person who constantly moves and changes from one occupation to another will never gain a steady position. Thus, 'all trades a rolling stone and grasping all' in the English text resonate with 'window shopping, a coagulated milk from which curd /butter is made and it could be contrasted with ; change is the spice of life" whose Amharic parallel is ያልተገለበጠ ያርራል.

Obstinacy / lack of good will

None are so blind as those who will not see.

መርፌ ሲለግም ቅቤ አልወጋም ይላል።

None are so deaf as those who will not hear.

አውቆ የተኛን ቢቀሰቅሱት አይሰማም።

You cannot teach old dogs new tricks.

በድንጋይ ላይ ወሃ ማፍሰስ።

There are no people so difficult to convince or persuade as those, who are obstinately determined not to listen to or read arguments that are against their convictions. Some people are unreachable or unwilling to unlearn old habits and embrace new ideas. They are too dogmatic to change their practice or attitude. People with such mindset are abundant all over the world.

Hereditary trait/Acquired habit

What is bred in the bone will come out of the flesh.

መሸጥ የለመደ እናቱን ያስማማል።

The leopard cannot change its spot.

ዘር ከልጃም ይጠቅሳል።

Habit is second Nature.

ሌባ ላመሉ ዳቦ ይልሳል።

An acquired habit or tendency in someone's character becomes so deeply ingrained that it surfaces out consciously or unconsciously. In other words, what is inherited will not fail to show itself and cannot be expelled. The ingrained spots of a leopard imply that a person cannot change his inherited characteristics (spot= stain, blot, and blemish). The proverb is based on a passage in the Holy Bible, 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?' (Jeremiah 13:23) It is also applicable to acquired habits which are persistent.

Forgiveness/reconciliation

Let bygones be bygones.

It is no use crying over spilt milk.

ላለፈ ክረምት ቤተ አይሰራም።

It is too late to shut the stable- door when the horse is stolen.

ጅብ ከሄደ ዉሻ ጮኸ።

The propositions of proverbs are identical. One should be concerned with the present or the future rather than craving for the past. "Bygone- *lalläfä kərämət*, crying over spilt milk, *yäfässäsä wätät* and, to shut the stable door-after the horse is stolen...' *ḡäb kähedä*- are all references to past events which cannot be undone however hard one may try to restore them. It capitalizes on prospects rather than prospects and resonates with other English mottos which run, 'Yesterday is a cancelled check; Today is ready cash; Tomorrow is a promissory note.

Optimism/ Prospect

Every cloud has a silver lining.

ሳይደግስ አይጣላም።

The longest day has an end.

ቀን እስኪያልፍ ያለፋል።

ቀን እስኪያልፍ ያባትህ ባርያ ይግዛህ።

Every dog has his day.

አንዳንድቀን ዋልድባም ይዘፈናል።

There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.

እልፍ ሲሉ እልፍ ይገኛል።

In every trouble and difficulty, there is hope or expectation of an improvement over the seemingly gloomy or dismal circumstances. The expression is used with reference to

surmounting a troublesome experience as optimistically as possible. In this context, clouds are followed by brightness, the longest day by sunset, the dogs suffering by moments of joy and one's misfortune by a corresponding fortune over time.

Assertiveness /forthrightness

The cobbler should stick to his last.

አያገባው ገብቶ አያወዛው ተቀብቶ።

One must draw the line somewhere.

ቆማጣን ቆማጣ ካላሉት ገብቶ መፈትፈቱ አይቀርም።

Call a spade a spade.

እዉነቱን ተናግሮ በመሸበት ማደር።

This is a moral sanction or code of conduct prescribed by a conventional society with reference to deviants from the norm or maladjusted people who cannot live up to the expectations of their families, communities or societies. By implication, there should be a limit to what one will endure or allow as right or permissible. But if undesirable acts or behaviors go unabated, they will be consequential.

Paradoxical Phenomena

The darkest place is under the candlestick.

Lookers- on see most of the game.

ያባይን እናት ዉሃ ጠማት።

ጆሮ ለባለቤቱ ባዳ ነው።

አልሰሜን ግባ በለው።

Paradox is said to be an apparently self-contradictory statement which reveals a grain of truth on closer examination(Melakneh 2003:126). Accordingly, a chief person in an organization/firm etc., whom one might expect to be more familiar with all the inmost secrets of his company than anybody else, is often surprisingly, ignorant of what is a matter of public discourse. Figuratively, for instance, it is applicable to the Nile Basin countries endowed with water resources but unable to mobilize them and as a consequence of which suffer from periodic famine and drought. In other words, scarcity in plenty is experienced.

State of deterioration/aggravation

Out of a frying pan on to the fire.

ከድጡ ወደ ማጡ።

This is an idiomatic expression which suggests a slide from a bad situation to a worse situation. This proverb implies the proposition of escaping one danger only to end up in another danger which is even worse. The English proverbs employs 'frying pan and fire' while its Amharic parallel draws upon a slide from slippery mud to quagmire both of which underlie a state of deterioration and aggravation of a perceived crisis.

Contemptuousness

Familiarity breeds contempt.

አብሮ ማደግ ያናንቃል።

ካብሮ አደግህ ጋር አትሰድድ።

ያገር ልጅ የቁጥ አከከ ነው።

A prophet is not without honor save in his own country (Mathew, 13:57).

ነቢይ ባገሩ አይከበርም።

The notion of familiarity in English denotes the acquaintance of one with another by locality, schooling and other modes of affinity or exposure. The Amharic parallels like ‘*abro madä*, *kabro adägäh* and *yagär läg*’ are synonymous with familiarity. Thus, the more we know people, the more likely are we to become fault finders or disrespectful of them. Conversely, we crave for and appreciate outlandish people or ideas with which we are not familiar. It is a critique of countries or people who do not recognize their own scientists, prophets, philosophers and denigrate indigenous knowledge.

Conformism with the status quo

When you are in Rome do as the Romans do.

እንዳገሩ ጅብ ይገሩ።

ወፍ እንዳገሯ ትጮሃለች።

It is advisable, and possibly advantageous, to abide by the customs of the host country or community when one is out of one’s country/community. Thus when one is in Rome, one is expected live up to the expectations of the Romans with all its implications. By analogy, the Amharic parallel stress that a bird should chirp to the tune of its locality thus cautioning against deviation from the conventional code of conduct upheld by society or established by customary law.

Suspiciousness

A secrete between more than two is no secrete.

ካፍ ከወጣ አፋፍ።

ሚስጥር የባቄላ ወፍጮ አይደለም።

Walls have ears.

ሰውን ማመን ቀብሮ ነው።

ያልጠረጠረ ተመነጠረ።

An utterance of warning to be careful of what one says as there may be listeners who might overhear one’s private talk or whisper. This is a very useful warning to the people from all walks of life as privacy and secrecy are the most important matters in our lives.

But if our secrets are leaked, it’s impossible to control them from spreading like bushfire. Walls and ‘*ʿfaf*’ metaphorically refer to the third party to whom secrets could be leaked to our disadvantage. Especially, the fox’s warning, ‘believe not anyone unless one is buried’ forewarns against information leak, and the need for secrecy.

The power of Unity

Many straws may bind an elephant.

Many hands make light (or quick or slight) work.

ድር ቢያብር አንበሳ ያስር።

Two heads are better than one

ካንድ ብርቱ ሁለት መድኃኒቱ።

Several people working together provide more hands, brains and minds to solve a problem or lift a heavy weight. This is applicable to physical stamina as well as ideological and psychological power. Straws are compared to threads while heads and hands represent those who stand united rather than divided. It is consistent with J.F. Kennedy's popular motto "United we stand; Divided we fall." The gist of unity is also prevalent in other modes of folk literature like fables and folktales where animals and abstract ideas are personified.

The Influence of Alcoholism

In wine is truth.

ሆድ ያባውን ጌሽ ያወጣዋል።

Some people are courageous enough to externalize their suppressed grudges or inhibited emotions when they're under the influence of alcohol. The assumption is that people speak their minds when they are drunk in spite of its consequences. It is in the context of angry accusations and counteraccusations between people who harbor some kind grudges against their mates or bosses or neighbors. The English 'wine' has its Amharic parallel 'malt' /hop 'both of which are ingredients of brewery marking intoxication with alcoholic beverages.

Slip of tongue /Speech mannerism

There is no venom like that of the tongue.

ከፉ ነገር አጥንት ይሰብራል።

Think twice before you speak once.

የምላስ ወለምታ በቅቤ አይታሸም።

The most offensive expressions people exchange with one another can hurt more than the deadliest poison can during an unfriendly interpersonal communication among human beings. The tongue is metonymically used to refer to the slanderous language used by interactants. The Amharic 'mēlas' is equivalent to tongue, the literal 'sprain of tongue' is similar to offensive language which may have far reaching psychological consequences on both sides. "Venom" in the English expression implies the severity of the psychological wound due to vulgarity of language. By implication, modesty and politeness in the conduct of interpersonal communication would foster friendship, socialization and peaceful co-existence not only among homogenous groups but also between international communities.

Hypocrisy/behavioral flaw

Half the world laughs at the other half.

አንዱ ባንዱ ሲስቅ ጅንበር ጥልቅ።

The pot calls the kettle black

ይሉሽን በሰማሽ ገበያ ባልወጣሽ::

Figuratively, , it is intended to criticize a group of people or countries, a bunch of idiots or fault finders who accuse others of the same behavioral wrong or moral flaws which they themselves commit. If a racist country, for instance, condemns another for racial discrimination, the propaganda ploy boils down to hypocrisy. In fact, the color ‘black’ in this idiom should not be taken literally.

Injunction/Warning

Do not cross the bridge before you come to it.

ልፋ ያለው በሕልሙ ዳዉላ ይሸከማል::

To put the cart before the horse.

ከፈረሱ ጋሪው::

Do not count your chickens before they are hatched.

ወጡ ሳይወጠዎት ወስከንቢያው ቁጢጥ::

The expression is used as an injunction or warning with reference to a particular project that there are difficulties to surmount before it can be realized. One should not assume the possession of something before its conditions are ripe enough. Thus, counting chickens which are non-existent, crossing the bridge which is far away and to put the cart before the horse are as illogical and irrational as one who carries a load in his dream and as one who craves for sauce before it is cooked. Both of them are either ideal dreamers or too impatient to obey the dictates of common sense or ripening of circumstances.

The Irony of life

The race is neither to the swift nor the battle to the strong.

ብላ ቢለኝ እንደባቴ በቆመጠኝ::

These proverbs suggest that the fortunes of men are advanced not by honesty, learning, wisdom worth, but by chance or by treachery.

The offender never pardons.

ጅራፍ ራሱ ገርፎ ራሱ ይጮሃል::

They assert that one may manage to commit, a big iniquity without being punished, whereas another is brought to book for a trivial offence. It also happens the case that some people who committed the crime or the offense turn out to be the proponents of justice themselves which is illegal and immoral by all standards.

Oaks fall when reeds stand.

ጋኖች አለቁና ምንቸቶች ጋን ሆኑ::

This one concept resonates with reversal of fortune that a onetime giant and influential people(oaks) may fall victims of their juniors, servants or down-trodden classes(reeds)due to the verdict of history.

At any rate, they are expression of grievance over the ironic nature of justice, recognition and success. They strongly appeal to the paradoxical nature of life and human experience where merit is undermined, justice abused and might is right.

Psychological warfare

The Pen is mightier than the sword.

ጦር ከፈታው ወሬ የፈታው።

አንድ ወሬኛ ያወራውን ሺ ፈረሰኛ አይመልሰውም።

This proverb indicates that communication, or in some interpretations, administrative power or advocacy of an independent press, is much more effective than physical violence. More specifically, in the context of international or civil wars where propaganda and counter-propaganda are waged against each other, armed confrontation would be less effective unless it is backed by the former.

After all, propaganda is capable of psychologically disarming the public and the fighters on the war front. It seems that the proverb is applied in its prohibitive sense to warn against the far-reaching consequences of ill-motivated gossip-mongering, hearsay, and groundless rumors. On the other hand, it also connotes the power of literature to influence the mind of people, which means ideological conviction is stronger than exertion of physical force

Warning against Curiosity/ Inquisitiveness

Ask no questions, and you will be told no lies.

አሳ ጎርጓሪ ዘንዶ ያወጣል።

ዶሮ ጭራ ጭራ ታወጣለች ካራ።

It is generally a moral sanction warning against extremism in which case the questioned activity could be 'shady' and the expected answer unpleasant and regrettable. In the Amharic parallels, it is implied that one who is more skeptic would end in learning the passing away of his mother. An ambitious fisherman may also end up in trapping a reptile while a chicken digging the ground might discover a knife -all of which are not pleasant findings.

Perseverance/Sacrifice

The darkest hour is that before dawn.

ካልደፈረሰ አይጠራም።

Omelets were not made without breaking eggs.

ያለመስዋዕትነት ስርየት የለም።

In its theological sense, perseverance connotes the notion of continuance in a state of grace to the end, leading up to eternal salvation. In its secular sense, it promotes the doctrines of determination, courageousness, patience, commitment and steady persistence in a course of action, a purpose, a state, etc., especially in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement. Figuratively, things are often at their worst, before they get better, or the stage is the prelude to an improvement and thus an indomitable soul would surmount its problem at the end of the day albeit trials and tribulations.

Appearance vs. Reality

Fine feathers make fine birds.

ፀጉራም ወሻ አለ ሲሉት ይሞታል።

Don't judge a book by its cover.

የጠመጠመ ሁሉ ቁስ አይደለም።

All is not gold that glitters.

የሚያብረቀርቅ ሁሉ ወርቅ አይደለም።

'Fine feathers make fine birds' implies that physical appearances are often delusive, and cloak what is of no value. Ornaments, fine clothes and dresses set off disguise stupidity or a bad personality. 'Don't judge a book by its cover' is a metaphorical adage warning us against prejudging somebody or something by its outward physical attributes alone without considering one's psychological disposition.

'All is not gold that glitters' in its universal usage, implies that appearances is deceptive, and people or things that sound and look valuable could be worthless on closer observation. Fine feathers, book cover and glittering in the English version represent appearance rather than substance. In the Amharic version, one with a head gear, a hairy dog and a shiny jewelry also symbolize form rather than content. Thus our value judgments should be as critical as possible rather than impressionistic and shallow.

The healing power of time

Time cures more than a doctor.

Time is the best healer.

ጊዜ የሰጠው ቅል ድንጋይ ይሰበራል።

Time is for all.

ለሁሉም ጊዜ አለው (ቦ ኩሉ ለጊዜ)።

The realization of one's dreams and aspirations depends on the ripening of subjective and objective conditions. Time is a very significant actor in the context of government changeovers, one's achievement, success and failure though it is conceived as an abstract entity. Thus, victory, healing power and circumstances which induce change are metonymically conditioned by Time.

Wish fulfillment/predestination

If wishes were horses, beggars would ride them.

ድኃ በሕልሙ ቅቤ ባይጠጣ ንጣት በገደለው።

Man proposes; God disposes.

ሰው ያስባል እግዚር ይፈጽማል።

'If wishes were horses, beggars would ride them' suggests the futility of day-dreaming instead of engaging oneself with a pragmatic action which is more productive. In the sense of its pleasure value, it could be employed to promote encouragement or discouragement depending on the intended message. 'Man proposes; God dispose' reasserts the superiority of Divine will over the Human will. This is an expression of fatalism dating back to ancient Christian societies whose success and failure in life was attributed to the will of God rather than their efforts.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of selected English and Amharic proverbs revealed spectra of cross-cultural values ranging from didacticism and philosophical abstractions to moral sanctions. Philosophical viewpoints such as pessimism and optimism are interlaced with secular elements or values like contemptuousness, ambitiousness, appearance vs. reality skepticism, infidelity, opportunism, and conformism with the *status quo*, secrecy, the paradoxical nature of life, the thickness of blood bond, contemptuousness, assertiveness, the incredible power of unity, the drive for change and the impact of time. Overall, English and Amharic proverbs partake thematic universals and cross-cultural wit and wisdom irrespective of linguistic, cultural, national and racial boundaries.

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