

Mmen Orature and Environmental Sustainability: A Study of Some Selected Mmen Proverbs

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
Article history: Published: February 2026 Keywords: Environmental Mmen Orature Proverbs Sustainability	Literary scholars have recently been applying the environmentally based approach, ecocriticism, to the appraisal of literary texts. In order to address issues central to local and global ecological sustainability, <i>Mmen Orature and Environmental Sustainability: A Study of Some Selected Mmen Proverbs</i> set out to investigate and analyze some proverbs of the Mmen people of Cameroon. This study demonstrates that Mmen Orature can be studied with the aim of questioning and advancing the worth and relevance of the environmental information contained in it. Considering the relevance of the environment in the lives of Mmen people, the study contends that, Mmen Orature can be studied to promote environmental sustainability. The problematic here is to ascertain whether Mmen Orature possesses environmental data that can enable the application of the ecocritical framework to their appraisal and advance the contemporary discourse on climate change and environmental degradation, and be a source of inspiration for the awakening of environmental consciousness in Mmen that can help to sustain the environment locally or globally. The analysis here was guided by ecocriticism. The study equally highlighted that, in composing texts, the traditional artists consciously or unconsciously showed environmental knowledge which responded to the ecological needs of their society and can, today, contribute solutions of environmental crisis, currently discussed in international conferences. Methodologically, this work required intense field work and the researcher collected data through interviews, performance contexts and observations. The findings tentatively revealed that Mmen proverbs are instruments that can foster environmental sustainability.

1. Introduction

Mmen orature in this study undoubtedly constitutes both the oral and written forms. This study seeks to investigate and analyze the impact of orature in a contemporary Cameroonian society. In order to achieve this objective, the study hopes to examine the role that Mmen orature can play in the sustenance of the environment. No one doubts that the environment is plagued by constant environmental degradation and pollution. This has brought about the international cry of climate change and the call for the change of man's attitudes towards Mother Earth (nature). From this premise, one cannot be wrong to underscore the fact that mother earth is a beautiful place that has sustained everything for millions of years. Thus, people are now more than ever before, gaining awareness of the environment and are showing a willingness to change because human expansion, deforestation and pollution have done damage to it. This study is expected to contribute in changing the way man thinks about his environment. This is to be done by encouraging him to create a friendly relationship with his environment. It emphasizes the importance of orature as it demonstrates that proverbs and oral narratives can be used to sensitize man on the need to manage his environment sustainably.

The evolution in the study of orature has led to the development of terms such as African oral literature or African orature. In Kashim Ibrahim Tala's *Orature in Africa*, orature is considered as "literature that is composed orally, performed orally and transmitted orally." (11) This means that it is a blend of sounds, words, body and rhythmic movement. Here, the composers of the performance are the singers and the dancers. By the same token, the performer usually transforms an oral piece into words, before an audience on a specific occasion and the audience participates and contributes in realizing the oral performance. The composition, performance and transmission of the oral piece, be it poetry, drama, or prose, is done orally. There is no written instruction. This constitutes the core of African oral literature otherwise known as orature. It is therefore, through Orature that the people come face to face with their world view, their environment, their mores, cultural values, philosophy and belief system. orature can be considered as rich and original in knowledge and wisdom.

Nowadays, children spend most of their time playing football, watching television and browsing the internet or even interested only in urban orature like music. Some of these activities have very little or nothing to contribute to environmental sustainability. This means that orature stands out as one of the sources of social, economic, environmental and philosophical knowledge in our culture.

2. Definition of Terms

Defining the key concepts will facilitate the understanding of this paper, and dispel ambiguity. It is in this view that one can cite Bernard Fonlon's postulation that: if any discussion, any investigation, is to be fruitful, we must begin with the first principles... and yet, it is the first discourse, this is in order to let our readers know clearly and precisely right from the start, the context in which the terms shall be used. (2013:3)

It is important in a scientific study of this nature to begin by providing operative definitions of terms which situate the researcher(s) and their audience in the context of the study. Operational definitions should, therefore, help readers distinguish one concept from another and see how a study meets up with the definitions offered. The terms 'Mmen' 'orature' 'environment' 'sustainability' 'proverbs' and 'oral narratives' will, therefore, be defined here since they are the key words in the study.

Mmen, the study area is a village found in Fungom Sub-Division in Menchum Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. The population of the study includes all the Mmen people who by the June 28th, 2020 worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nation's data culled from *TOLOKYI Folktales in Mmen Tradition* is approximately 100,000 inhabitants. (2020: xiv) Mmen, is characterized by hot, humid vegetation, and has two seasons. The rainy season, generally runs for eight months and the dry season with four months. The mean annual rainfall in Mmen is approximately 2550mm while the mean annual temperatures are between 27°C and 34°C. Day time temperature therefore exceeds 27°C while temperature falls to about 10°C at night. It is important to note that, during the dry season the afternoon periods are hot while the nights are cold. The relative humidity exceeds 80% in July-August and it is lowest in January-February (35-40%).

The dry season starts from mid-October to mid-March and the wet season from mid-March to mid-October. There are however, local variations due to other orthographic factors. Rainfall is unevenly distributed throughout the year due to the effect of the two different air masses. The South West winds absorb moisture from the Atlantic Ocean, causing rains from Mid-March to November. Mmen has an uneven or undulating topography made up of hills, lowland as well as level lands. The topography of the place has contributed in making Mmen undoubtedly an enclave area. In that wise, much trekking was done since they neither had accessible roads nor vehicles to ply the road. The aspects of relief are very present in the oral art forms as we would be discovering when we get to the art forms under study. This and other values that are attached to some features like the caves, the rivers, explain the sacred relationship they share with them. Talking about the land situation, Mmen has very fertile soils. Farmers produced crops like maize, beans, millets, vegetables and trees like cola nuts, eucalyptus, palms, together with some medicinal plants that they cultivate and plant. Their farm produce were used for feeding and excesses were sold or exchanged for what they did not have, while herbalists relied on the medicinal plants to heal the sick and other traditional rites. Owning land for the above purposes was free and mostly acquired by the males since women at the time were not allowed to own land but to farm family lands or those owned by their husbands. The size of land owned by a man in the process was another measure of livelihood and man hand and at times determined the title or attributes given to the man in society.

Orature comes from two words, that is; "ora" from oral and "ture" from literature meaning oral literature. The term orature was coined by a Ugandan scholar Pio Zirimu in an attempt to avoid an oxymoron but oral literature remains more common both in academic and popular writing. Orature has to do with spoken forms of art like poetry, prose and drama.

The Encarta Encyclopaedia defines Orature as a collective body of oral texts, variously described as folklore of verbal arts.

In a similar vein, Nol Alembong in an article entitled "*Culture, Orature and Personality in Africa*" says, 'orature is a term used to designate what Ruth Finegan has referred to as "unwritten literature" or that branch of literature that is told orally' (2003-2004)

Tala Kashim Ibrahim sees Orature as:

a work of art expressed in carefully selected language, irrespective of whether it is spoken sung or chanted and which deals with the thoughts, concepts and ideas of an individual or a people. Thus whether an individual expresses his joys or sorrows through language effectively, orature can be said to be in the making. Orature is used for such function as praising, mourning, moral instruction and entertainment and is characterized by creativity beauty and emotion. (Ambanasom 2012:252).

Here, one can clearly see the intellectual puzzle that goes with the definition of this term.

In as much as one can agree with such views, it is also important to highlight that, the researcher's intention in this work is not to get into the polemics of the term but to assert as Tala does in *Power and Marginality in Contemporary Cameroonian Orature*, (5) that: 'when a literary piece has been composed orally, performed orally, transmitted orally and is presented in a special literary language, that constitutes Orature'. Henry Kah Jick, also upholds like Tala on orature that 'when a literary work has been composed orally, performed orally and transmitted orally, it is considered orature' From both definitions it is obvious that both art forms fit squarely within the context of this study. This would be my adopted definition for this study. The researcher intends in this work to use Oral literature and Orature interchangeably, given that both need to be seen to carry the same meaning.

Environment/ Nature

When one turns to the meaning of the environment, one would readily agree with Environment in Aslet's view in *The Grolier Library of Environmental Concepts and Issues* is said to: literally mean all things around us, including nature.

Environment is 'all of the surrounding things, conditions, and influences affecting the growth or development of living things... the condition of the air, water, soil, plants and animals; natural surroundings (Clarence L., Barnhart 708). Holly E Brisbane defines environment as 'the people, places and things that surround and act upon someone and influence how that person develops (514) According to Webster's Third New Dictionary, the environment consists of the... 'aggregate of social and cultural conditions (as customs, laws, language, religion, and economic and political organization) that influence the life of an individual or a community (760).

On the other hand, 'environmental' is an adverb derived from the noun-environment. According to the New World Dictionary of the American Language, environment is 'a surrounding, all conditions, circumstances and influences surrounding and affecting

the development of an organization or group of organization' (468) Claraence L Barnhart and Robert K. Barnhart consider environment as 'all of the surrounding things, conditions, and influences affecting growth or development of living things... the condition of the air, water, soil, plants, and animals; natural surrounding' (1994: 708).

Generally, therefore, environment will be considered in this study as all the natural surroundings and conditions within which a living thing lives, interacts and is influenced by them. These will include not only the natural but also social and cultural conditions that affect the growth or development of living things. Nature in this study which is synonymous to environment, is also defined by the all *Encarta Dictionary* as: The physical world including natural phenomenon and living things, the faces and processes that collectively control the phenomenon of the physical independent of human volition and human Intervention, sometimes personified as a woman called Mother Nature.(http://Encarta.mms.com/dictionary_18616325/nature.html).The western world and Africa have clear views about nature. The western world sees it as an independent phenomenon with an aesthetic reality. In rural Mmen society, nature is strongly woven into the social, economic and metaphysical realities, as it cannot be independent.

Ralph Waldo Emerson sees Nature as: the environment that is free from society's conventional attitude and opinions, a place where one can discover oneself, unique and apart from all other relations. (1985).This means that Emerson sees the natural environment as a place in which we return to reason and faith. This researcher is going to use the word nature to refer to the natural environment composed of man, plants and animals and physical features. This is going to be the researcher's working definition in his analyses in this work. It is important to understand this definition because this researcher would occasionally be referring to it in the thesis. Given that environment and nature can be interchangeably used to mean the same thing, nature can stand for environment or natural ground, unmodified. That is, standing for the summary of everything that has to do with biological, chemical and physical states, and events in the physical universe. It is important to point out that both terms would be used interchangeably in this work to mean the same thing.

The next term to be defined here is 'Sustainability' Sustainability is a noun from the verb 'to sustain'. From the verb to sustain, we have the adjective 'sustainable' which is also important as an important indicator in this study. Sustainability, according to the online Encyclopaedia Britannica is:

The long term viability of a community set of social institutions or societal practise. In general sustainability is understood as a form of intergenerational ethics in which the environmental and economic actions taken by present persons do not diminish the opportunities of future persons to enjoy similar levels of wealth, utility or welfare <https://www.britannica.com/search?query=Environmental+sustainability>. Assessed 11/07/2022 at 19: 30 pm

From the above definition, it is important to note that the viability of community in which every activity of the society is carried out on the environment, ought to be long term and intergenerational without diminishing any opportunities for future persons. Sustainability is therefore presented as an alternative to short term, myopic and wasteful behaviours. It can also serve as a standard against which existing institutions are to be judged and as an objective towards which society should move. Sustainability also involves an interrogation of existing modes of social organisation to determine the extent to which they encourage destructive practices as well as a conscious effort to transform the status quo, so as to promote the development of more sustainable activities. It is therefore imperative to point out that the institutions in which this term would be judged would be no other locus than Mmen, our case study.

On the other hand, The Cambridge online Dictionary defines 'sustain as 'able to be maintained at a certain rate or level' and 'sustainability' being 'the ability to be maintained at a certain level; or avoidance or the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance'. From the foregoing delimitations, this researcher hopes to consider 'sustainability' in this thesis as a process of change by which attempts are made at maintaining or improving on the environment for the betterment of somebody or a group of people or something. It is, therefore, considered here as the act of continuing on a behavioral pattern or improving on this behavioral pattern by a group of people for their collective environmental betterment for both the present and future generations.

The proverb is one of the prominent genres of oral literature. When it comes to Proverbs, the debate on which should be its right definition still raises an intellectual puzzle. There are as many definitions of the word proverb as there are scholars in the area of proverbial studies. There is no universality accepted definition of the word. This is true as Peter Grybek, quoted by Nol Alembong in his book *Standpoints on African Literature* opines that 'There is not generally acceptance which covers all specifics of the proverbial genre' This means that each group defines the word from the standpoint of its culture, which is carved on the points of form, brevity, figurative language and comment.

Ruth Finnegan, in *Oral Literature in Africa* notes that those who specialize in the study of proverbs define a proverb as: a saying in more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and salt and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it. (1976:395). In fact, given their in-exhaustive definitions, it is important to note that the experiences of each community as well as their environments remain vital. Indeed, the common thing about them again is the fact that they carry wisdom that is very rich, intended to teach society. This valid prescription can be seen as a parameter through which society can be judged in an attempt to give it meaning.

The proverbs of a people as defined by Webster are 'short sayings in common use, expressing a well-known truth or common fact ascertained by experience or observation.' This means that proverbs are a key to both the language and culture of a people. It is for this reason that the Mmen community pays a lot of attention to it. On the importance of the proverb, leading African writers like Chinua Achebe uphold in *Things Fall Apart* that '...among the Ibo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten.'(1958:6).To support the value of the proverb, Kashim Ibrahim Tala in *An Introduction to Cameroon Oral Literature* opines that 'proverbs constitute a fundamental ingredient in the intellectual tradition of Cameroonians. It stems from everyday activities and is used by elders as a guide to conduct, to express moral lessons and improve

on oratory.' (1984) Proverbs constitute literature and literature is a reflection of a given society. It codifies the existence, struggles, philosophies, aspirations etc of the people, seen in this light, proverbs reflect the realities of the society that produce and use them. John Nkemngong Nkengasong has rightly pointed out in *A Stylistic Guide to Literary Appreciation*, that African cultures have a rich repertoire of proverbs and riddles. In many of African societies effective speech and social success depend on a good command of proverbs. As the Ibos in Nigeria say "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten" such treasure sayings express the wisdom of the ages and are also very vital in arguments or discussions, (2007: 61)

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary Encyclopaedia Edition defines a proverb as a short well known saying that states a general truth or gives advice.

In fact, proverbs are short sayings with words of advice or warning, always philosophical and relate more to the author's background and tribe. Just like Achebe uses proverbs to validate the aforementioned assertion, I also wish to do same by focusing on proverbs from Mmen. In that light, the use of proverbs is declining with the people's indigenous wisdom and there is need for them to be revived. Given that the debate on the definition of what a proverb should be is yet to have a consensus, This researcher, would for the purpose of this study define a proverb as a popular saying with immunity from censure that carry authority, expressing in a concise manner moral and value judgements, indicating what is right or wrong and what is good or bad.

3. Research Problem

The global environment is in crises and Mmen orature can rescue that environment both locally and globally. In his unpublished Master's Thesis, Sama Festus Ambe states:

All the efforts that have been put in by policy makers, development agents, economists, environmentalists, and others to curb environmental problems have failed to make the environment comfortable. As such, the problems remain a major challenge to man. Even though environmental education has long been established in Cameroon, and efforts are being made by the Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection to preserve the fauna and flora of the environment through radio programmes, legal prosecution, tree planting campaigns, and liaising with international bodies such as the World Bank and the United Nations' Environmental Programme, the situation remains disturbing (17).

This study therefore, seems to question the appropriateness of all the approaches used, relative to the efforts that previous scholars and environmental specialists have employed to no avail in seeking to make the environment comfortable. Mmen oral tradition is dying. The oral art forms are declining and the people's language, cultural and social value as well as indigenous knowledge about the environment contained in the proverbs. Proverbial lore is giving way to western recreational facilities such as the television, radio and the internet and as such endangering the native wisdom contained in proverbs. In Mmen, the dying nature of proverbs is threatening the natural environment. Environmental awareness is on a poor state and the environment can be considered to be threatened.

Although Mmen orature is still vibrant in real life situations it has failed to focus on environmental issues, making its critical voice virtually silent in this domain. Environmental issues affect every human being and are a true global concern. The impact of climate change worldwide and across many areas of life, this includes our food, physical and mental health, where and how we live, wildlife and environmental systems and political direction. We need therefore to explore how climate change affects Mmen people in varying ways and how we can take action to manage such threats, providing possible solutions with regard to effective environmental management. Considering the importance of the environment to Mmen people, scholars of Mmen extraction have carried out studies on other literary genres as if they have not got their own orature. They seem to think that literature is only that of the written text. Literature nonetheless, involves both the oral and written forms. Mmen people in particular tend to abandon their rich, dynamic and important culture in favour of western cultures. Mmen orature has a vital role to play, especially with a focus on proverbs in the promotion of environmental sustainability, would be the main focus of this work. This neglect can be noticed in the attitude of elders and youths alike.

4. Objectives of the Study

This study has as objectives to point out how ecocriticism can effectively be applied in the analysis of Mmen orature, Next, how a corpus of Mmen proverbs can help in environmental sustenance. In the same vein, to evaluate how Mmen people think about their environment and its sustenance.

5. Hypothesis

This work's hypothesis contends that the environment is in crisis, and Mmen Orature can be studied to rescue it and promote environmental sustainability.

6. Methodology and Scope of Study

This study required intense field work in order to collect the selected proverbs and oral narratives in their original form. Consequently, the researcher conducted interviews with a specific rank of informants drawn among the traditional authorities, sub-chiefs, king-makers, titled men and women and both the old and young people who are knowledgeable in the Mmen oral tradition. The researcher recorded the proverbs in the target language. That is, in Mmen from both live and simulated performances, and then translated them into the English language. Furthermore, the performer, his role, the role of the audience, the performance context, kind of proverb and para-linguistic features were identified during the selection and classification of the proverbs from tapes, photos and from jotted notes. In all, the researchers collected forty five proverbs. This paper, therefore, limits itself only to 4 of the proverbs due to the constraint of space. This study paid attention to Ben-Amos's insistence that: the attempt

to discover the principles of Oral Literature communication in each culture in Africa must begin with the identification and analysis of the cognitive, expressive and social distinctive features of Oral Literature forms... (2016).

The substance of the foregoing contention highlights the fact that the collection of present day Orature also employs the library search as an approach for data collection which this researcher also used. In the field the researcher collected proverbs and narratives and after their classification worked strictly with those related to the environment. The art forms were collected by means of interviews, context performance and simulation, following the fact that proverbs no longer exist as frequently as before. Interviews were conducted by tape recording, although in the course of this, the researcher jotted a few points on paper to understand better, a camera was also used in which pictures on performances were taken. The researcher visited all of the study areas. So a lot of trekking was done following the fact that the researcher had to walk these distances to get proverbs and carry out interviews. In the course of these sessions, performers were alerted ahead of time, so that they organized themselves, this showed clear evidence that proverbial lore is in decline. During the performance it was noticed that some of the informants did not really understand the interrelationship between them and nature. Hence, the selected proverbs were those that best suited the study. Indeed, it is necessary to state here that such green proverbs are very rare and are thus not readily available.

7. Theoretical Consideration

I have employed the analytical tools of ecocriticism in my analyses of the selected proverbs and oral narrative 'Ecocriticism' was first coined by William Rueckert (1996) in 1978 in his essay "*Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*". According to him, the urge was to verify the relevance of aspects of nature to literature.

Specifically, I am going to experiment with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature, because ecology (as a science, as a discipline, as the basis for human vision) has the greatest relevance to the present and future of the world we all live in of anything that I have studied in recent year. (107)

Thus, for Rueckert, to apply ecological concepts to the reading, teaching and writing about literature is to develop an 'ecological poetics to serve both the purposes of experimentation and resolution of the antagonism between science and poetry so that together, they could be generative. By so doing, the human community will not only come to the realization that 'Everything is connected to everything else', see the need for coexistence, cooperation with natural community, but also will curb the 'Self-destructive or suicidal motive inherent in our prevailing and paradoxical attitude toward nature' (107).

Ecocriticism did not become popular until in 1989 when Cheryll Glotfelty, the American scholar adopted it as an important critical perspective in studying nature writing. However, its application is very common nowadays due to Glotfelty's definition and expatiation:

Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies. (xviii)

According to Glotfelty, an understanding of Ecocriticism should proceed from asking questions such as: 'How is nature represented in this sonnet? Are the values expressed in this play consistent with ecological wisdom? How do our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat it? How can we characterize nature writing as a genre?' (xvii-xix).

It is therefore, against the backdrop of these submissions on Ecocriticism by Cheryll Glotfelty that the selected proverbs and oral narratives under study will be analyzed. Ecocriticism was officially acclaimed by the publication of two seminal works both published in the 1990s; *Ecocriticism Reader* edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and the *Environmental Imagination* by Lawrence Buell. Ecocriticism is an intentionally broad approach that is known by a number of other designations including "green (cultural) studies", "ecopoetics" and "environmental literacy criticism" Ecocriticism, as a critical tool, thus widens the field of literary criticism from traditional literary theory wherein "the world" is synonymous with society, to the notion of "the world" which includes the entire ecosphere. Ecocriticism as a literary theory originated from the west and hardly takes the African reality into consideration. There is the need for African scholars to extend its use to Orature which is essentially an African phenomenon. This explains why African scholars must insist on the need to go back to our culture in general and our Orature in particular. This is because African societies are rooted within and dependent on the environment. Ecocriticism started as an Anglo-American literary discourse and has gained ground since the 1990s, especially in Europe Asia and America. As a western concept it has failed in its objectives in the indigenous African context. This is because it focuses mainly on written literature. Hence, we need as a matter of fact and urgency to see Orature too as an important kind of literature because, it can benefit from the indigenous ecological knowledge contained in traditional African culture. Glotfelty, one of the first authorities in ecocriticism, defines ecocriticism as: "*the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment*"

Semantically, the term comes from a combination of the prefix eco- (from ecology, and refers generally to environment) and the adjective, critical, which refers to the tendency to give comment and pass judgment in a particular situation. Ecocriticism could then be explained to mean the tendency to comment on and pass judgment in matters related to the environment. The Ecocritical Reader.

In terms of objectives, ecocritics question how nature is represented in literature, how physical setting influences content and how the values expressed in art are consistent with ecological wisdom. The approach seeks, to underscore the fact that literary studies in an age of environmental crisis may do some good and ameliorate such crises. The tenets to be used in this paper would be *those of human interdependence, interconnectivity and coexistence, ecological relationships between humans and non-humans and dependence, that "everything is connected to everything else"*. Therefore, this paper demonstrates how ecocriticism can be effectively applied in the analysis of Mmen orature.

8. Textual Analyses

Mmen Proverb: ghuo ka' mo' va+n kuol+ puh

English Translation: *One hand cannot tie a bundle.*

Analysis: A quick look at this proverb from both traditions would definitely paint a picture of unity or better still the need for concerted effort if one needs to succeed in life in any endeavour. When the Cameroon Government enacted laws about the protection of the environment one could hear the late regional delegate for environment -Dr. Che Ngwa Francis constantly using the slogan '*our environment, a war we must win*'. He understood just like the Mmen indigenes that communality was very imperative if this environmental preoccupation of the government had to be supported in terms of environmental education and sustainability. In fact, it is also important to highlight that, apart from such orature being created in the rural milieu; Apart from the function of the proverbs, one can also see how the tenet of eco-criticism has been validated here in the sense that, "*everything is connected to everything else*"

Mmen Proverb: erghuo tam dz+s+ a ka+yn +sas + mos' koh f+ka.

English Translation: If you dress a monkey it must still climb a tree.

Analysis: In the analysis of this monkey related proverb, one notices that it talks of attitudes that are difficult to do away with. For instance the monkey is so tight to its environment and ways that one can hardly take it off from such ways. Man and the monkey are said to be actors in an environment which they are obliged to coexist. This then calls for some metaphorical use of language within our communities by the elderly people to educate themselves and the younger generation to beware of certain traits that could be negative if not discouraged. When one becomes adamant to counsel or change, he/she can only metaphorically be referred to as a monkey vis-a-vis his waist clothes are naturally worn by humans, as such when the shift is taken to the monkey, it presupposes that man and the monkey can coexist and even share loins or clothes. The tenet of coexistence ecocritically speaking is hinted here. This lo brings to bear in mind that '*the child of a snake is a snake*', That is, a child takes after his parents especially their negative traits. Conversely to such an acclaimed suggestion, one can also point to the fact that the positive side of the just mentioned proverb can be seen from the point of view of creating their orature which can eventually be replicated by their offspring in future. This proverb of the monkey by extension, suggests that those who might not want to take environmental education seriously they will only have themselves to blame.

Mmen Proverb: nzeh tw+ner +nyonger va+n.

English Translation: When a sheep is old it is suckled by its young one.

Analysis: In the above proverb in both communities, the theme of love and reciprocity is highlighted. In both communities just like elsewhere, it is largely believed that when parents bring up their offspring, it is presupposed that in future when they are tottering along the lines of senile decay, they would have to depend on their offspring for survival and descent treatment. Consequently, people are advised to practise such a cardinal principle of love and care towards the elderly. The message in this proverb in Mmen culture is by way of personification. By the same token, people in both cultures are cautioned not to ill treat their kid and kin because they might eventually need their assistance when they grow old and weak. We live in the traditional society and rear goats or sheep as the case may be. As ecocriticism holds it, one can clearly notice the tenet of ecological wisdom expressed in this proverb. In the same vein, the notion of interconnectivity is seen in this proverb when it is used metaphorically. This is supported by the fact that man is interconnected with the sheep or goat in the acquisition of distilled and unchallenged knowledge within the communities.

Mmen Proverb: erghuo t+m ghol a' +tch+ Er kwuo ky+ tch+.

English Translation: If you hit your foot on a stone/ rock let the stone break

Analysis: This proverb brings into play the ecological relationship between humans and nonhumans in both cultures. To begin with, this proverb is a prayer of good luck to anyone who is either travelling or is going for a competitive lucky venture. This means that, even as the stone may want to stand on the way of the traveler as the case may be, its destruction when one hits his foot on by no means really insinuates its destruction. The stone in this proverb plays a double role in the sense that it needs to be preserved as the Mmen person largely depends on it for survival. This proverb means that the Mmen person needs to preserve the stone which is a physical feature within his environment for didactic purposes in conversational eloquence. When one looks at the role of the stone, one will realize that it is a special physical feature that needs not only to be preserved for our use but even for posterity in the sense that the stone can be used for constructing our houses, bridges, roads and even for hunting. Hence, the stone in these communities is seen as an important physical feature that needs to be preserved for beneficial use when need arises. That is, during constructions, during cooking as fire sides and much more. Therefore, the stone is a very important element in conversational eloquence that paints the situation of environmental preservation and protection within the Mmen community. The image of the stone is used to show how destructive it can become to an individual who is not lucky in his deeds or ways when this proverb is reversed. The stone here can be seen as a double edged sword because it does not only play a positive role but can also play a negative role. As for the function of this proverb, the exaggeration in its use is to show the unreserved manner with which the user wishes his interlocutor good luck.

Proverbs as already seen above employ metaphors, allusions, paradox, hyperbole, just to name but these. Such paraphernalia or array of devices is designed to delight the audience of the proverb. Like most forms of figurative language, proverbs, can be seen to thrive on specific comparisons. They display a suggestive power between the particular form chosen and the description. Apart from enlivening speech, they accomplish other major functions, that is, to concede meaning, rebuke, and veil reverence, and even persuade. They display potentials for commenting on a situation, ridiculing a speaker, criticizing another's action. All of this is

accomplished in an oblique fashion rendering the proverb highly effective in driving home one's point without necessarily giving offense in one's conversation point be it with a friend, acquaintance, equal or a superior. Proverbs generally are the prerogative of older people.

The proverbs also exhibit enormous didactic potentials. They are tools for education and acculturation especially to the benefit of the youth who may be culturally uninformed. Thus elders use them to teach the youth wisdom about the world and how to behave. That is, teaching them the right values of life, approving good conduct and decrying deviant behavior. This is of course, in addition to giving pleasure.

9. Conclusion

This research paper entitled *Mmen Orature and Environmental Sustainability: A Study of Some Selected Proverbs* set out to show that Orature can play an essential role in promoting a peaceful coexistence between man and nature. Next, that the global environment is in crises and Mmen orature can rescue that environment both locally and globally. In short, the selected but rare Mmen proverbs have been treated within the backdrop of the sustenance of the environment. In addition, the study also reveals that environmental problems are predominantly a matter of attitude, hinged on man's worldview. The work has strongly highlighted the fact that the African by way of his culture has an innate and harmonious attachment with his environment, which the impact of Western Civilization and development has destroyed. Mmen orature is borne out of the environment and that the environment is also a crucial component in the literary analysis and interpretation of the data under study. By the same token, this paper has equally been to answer the following vital questions like: What the role of Mmen orature is in shaping environmental sustainability, how Mmen orature can provide solutions to environmental crises, how ecocriticism can effectively be applied in the analysis of Mmen orature, how a corpus of Mmen proverbs can help in environmental sustenance and how Mmen orature shows a decline in moral values vis-a-vis environmental sustainability.

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