

I. ROZPRAWY I ANALIZY

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Hausa Proverbs about Marriage: Cultural Content, Meanings, and Functions*

Przysłowia hausa na temat małżeństwa –
ich treści kulturowe, znaczenia i funkcje

Abstract: Hausa proverbs, just like proverbs in other languages, are cultural expressions in the form of set phrases that originate in oral tradition. In this article I analyze the content, meanings, and functions of proverbs encapsulating Hausa traditional views on marriage. I apply the paradigm of ethnolinguistics, specifically the linguistic worldview conception (LWV) (Bartmiński 2019, 2012), to the analysis of the lexis and meaning of the proverbs in order to uncover the conceptualization of the cultural concept of MARRIAGE in the Hausa language and culture-specific ways of thinking about marriage in the Hausa-speaking community. The data for the analysis cover twenty-five Hausa proverbs that refer to the conceptual domain of MARRIAGE. These proverbs contain numerous cultural keywords (see Wierzbicka 1997) as exponents of cultural codes. Deciphering these codes allows for the proper interpretation of the proverbs' meanings and functions. Additionally, the interpretation is supported by grouping the data into thematic categories.

Keywords: Hausa proverbs; marriage; ethnolinguistics; linguistic worldview; cultural keywords

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1. Introduction: Research on Hausa proverbs

Uttering of a proverb in many situations is an apt thing to do in the Hausa language and culture.¹ Important moments in the life of community and family are almost always marked with proverbial speech. One of such important events is marriage (*aurē*²).

According to the classic work by Finnegan (2012: 401), the “latent” function of African proverbs is to convey a certain view of the world, i.e., a way of conceptualising people’s behaviour, experiences and interpreting particular situations. Hausa traditional views on marriage, divorce and roles of husband and wife are encapsulated in folklore texts such as proverbs and tales (cf., among others, Kraft 1973: 12; Tremearne 1913: 325–333). They serve as linguistic means to pass on these views to next generations and therefore play an important role in preserving customs and attitudes towards married life in Hausa society.

Hausa proverbs (*karɪn màgàṅà*, pl. *karɪn màgàṅàṅàṅū*) are cultural expressions in the form of short set phrases that originate in oral tradition. *Karɪn màgàṅà* is considered the equivalent of the English term *proverb* and its counterparts in other languages:³

What we generally call proverbs are recurrent, pithy, often formulaic and/or figurative, fairly stable and generally recognisable units used to form a complete utterance, make a complete conversational contribution and/or to perform a speech act in a speech event. (Norrick 2015: 14)

Just like proverbs in other languages, Hausa paremias “encode social knowledge in its popular variant”⁴ (Bartmiński 2012: 160) and constitute

¹ Hausa is the biggest West Chadic language (Newman 2013: 2–3), the mother tongue for ca. 50.7 million people, mainly residents of northern Nigeria and southern regions of the Republic of Niger. It is also spoken in diasporas, e.g., in Sudan. Ca. 26.2 million people use it as a second language (Eberhard, Simons & Fennig 2022) for the purpose of interethnic communication. The vehicular function of Hausa developed mainly due to commercial contacts (Pawlak 1998: 7–8). A huge impact of Arabic on the Hausa lexicon started with the adoption of Islam around the 14th century and trade contacts between Hausa States and North Africa (Baldi 2008; Greenberg 1947).

² The rules of transcription based on standard orthography: *c* = /tʃ/, *f* = /ɸ/, *j* = /ɕ/, *sh* = /ʃ/, *ts* = /sʰ/, *y* = /j/; long vowels are marked with a horizontal bar above the letter; a low tone with gravis; a falling tone with circumflex; *r* denotes a retroflex flap /ɽ/, while *ṛ* denotes alveolar roll /r/; modified Latin letters are used to denote glottalized consonants: *Ḷ*, *Ḷ̣*, *Ḷ̤*, *Ḷ̥*.

³ Cf. definitions of Hausa literary term *karɪn màgàṅà* (Danhausa 2012: vii; Danyaya 2007: 12; Furniss 1996: 70–71; Piłaszewicz 1983: 13) and culture-neutral, yet European-coined term *proverb* (Norrick 2015: 6–27 [quoted above]; Zakrzewski 2002: 3–18).

⁴ Translations from Polish and Hausa by the author.

“a medium for the expression of commonly held views and wisdom” (Jang 1999: 83). Although many Hausa proverbs convey a universal message that can be identified also in proverbs formulated in other languages (Zajac 2018), they generally have a unique imagery and represent the values of this particular culture (Zajac 2019), thus operating within its linguistic worldview (cf. Bartmiński 2012).

Hausa proverbs have been passed orally from generation to generation for hundreds of years before any of them were recorded in a fixed form. Taking into consideration the significance and esteem of the proverbial lore in Hausa traditional society makes one presume that even in this period there must have been already a practice of (folkloristic) reflection on their meanings, use, and origin. This, however, due to the lack of written or recorded sources, cannot be proved.

A written record of Hausa proverbs, i.e. the paremiography *per se*, was initiated by a German missionary James Frederick Schön (1885) and subsequently developed by European scholars who published numerous collections of Hausa proverbs containing interpretations of their meanings, often along with semantically equivalent proverbs in English or German (Prietze 1904; Robinson and Burdon 1905; Mischlich 1902; Merrick 1905; Fletcher 1912; Rattray 1913; Tremearne 1913; Whitting 1940;⁵ Kirk-Greene 1966). The first collection of proverbs compiled by Hausa paremiographers was an anonymous leaflet *Karin Magana “Iya Magana Ma Da Ranarsa!”* [Proverbs. “Knowing How to Speak Brings Luck”] (1958). A large number of proverbs, partly with commentaries, can be found in Hausa-English dictionaries (Abraham 1962; Bargery 1934) as well as in anthologies of Hausa cultural texts, among others in the early work edited by East (1938), later works by Madauci, Isa, and Daura (1968), and Kraf (1973). More recent collections contain a few thousand Hausa proverbs each (e.g. Danyaya 2007; Danhausa 2012; Haruna 2017; Nafiou 2014; Yunusa 1977).

Overall, as of today, studies on proverbs in the Hausa language cover many more than a hundred of openly accessible works presenting various categorizations of proverbial material, interpretations of their meanings, translation issues, educational roles, gender issues, stereotypes, descriptions of paremiological analysis methodology, structural features of Hausa proverbs (also in comparative perspective), social functions, functions of Hausa proverbs in various types of texts and genres of discourse, and modifications

⁵ The materials published by Whitting had been collected earlier by a colonial official J. A. Burdon, who wrote down the first significant sample of Hausa oral literature (stories and proverbs) (Piłaszewicz 1983: 190).

of proverbs (including so called neoproverbs).⁶

2. Aim and data

The aim of the analysis is to (partially) reconstruct a fragment of Hausa linguistic worldview, namely the conceptual domain of MARRIAGE.⁷ The expected result of the following analysis is a set of statements and generalizations about marriage in Hausa traditional culture, whose content is verifiable against meanings and interpretations of the quoted proverbs applied by Hausa speakers in certain speech practices and routines, while encapsulating common concepts that they share. In some cases extra-linguistic data supports my conclusions as well.

The linguistic data for the analysis are twenty-five Hausa proverbs referring to the conceptual domain of MARRIAGE. They were extracted from the sources cited in section 1, using methods described in the upcoming section 3.

3. Methodology

In the analysis of Hausa proverbs I will employ three methods. The main method is the ethnolinguistic analysis that aims at reconstructing a fragment of the linguistic worldview (the conceptual domain of MARRIAGE) (section 3.1). The remaining two methods have an auxiliary function: they help to indicate and describe cultural keywords contained in the contents of proverbs (section 3.2) and to categorise the data thematically (section 3.3). The order in which I am presenting these methods reflects their relative salience for the analysis, rather than the order in which they were applied to the data.

3.1. Proverbs as exponents of Hausa linguistic worldview

In my analysis of Hausa paremias I refer to the concept of linguistic worldview (LWV) (Bartmiński 2009, 2012). Its main thesis is that the ways in which people conceptualise and understand the world are encoded in their language. According to Bartmiński (2012: 12), LWV is “a verbalised interpretation of reality contained in language, which can be summarised in the

⁶ I have compiled a bibliography of publications on Hausa proverbs, which contains 146 entries (forthcoming in *Proverbiuum*). Perhaps many more works, including diploma dissertations written in Hausa, remain uncatalogued in the libraries of Nigerian, Nigerien, and Ghanaian universities.

⁷ A full reconstruction would require also the analysis of other types of data than only proverbs, e.g. idioms and texts of folklore.

form of judgments about the world [...] [T]hose can be ‘fixed’ propositions [...] in a form of clichéd texts (e.g. **proverbs**)” (emphasis added).

Proverbs are therefore excellent material for the study of LWV because they directly and indirectly express “judgments about the world” accepted as true by the people who use them. The occurrence of certain features of real-life objects and beliefs about those in texts of folklore, such as proverbs, means that they have been conventionalised (Bartmiński 2012: 50). It is possible to outline many aspects the LWV of a given community on the basis of the analysis of their content.

Frank Salamone, who investigated argumentative functions of Hausa proverbs in conjugal conflicts,⁸ notes that “proverbs offer [...] an abundant source of material for investigating the way in which common cultural values are encapsulated in symbolic form” (Salamone 1976: 359).

3.2. Cultural keywords in Hausa proverbs

In the analysis I will demonstrate that commonly held traditional views about marriage in Hausa culture are encapsulated in proverbs and can be interpreted through a focus on certain words that code unique and culturally relevant concepts. In my analysis, I will operate with an ethnolinguistic notion of cultural keywords (Schultze 1999; Wierzbicka 1997).

Wierzbicka (1997: 1) observes that “[t]here is a very close link between the life of a society and the lexicon of the language spoken by it”. She emphasises, however, that in ethnolinguistic research special attention should be paid to those words that have the status of keywords, rather than, on an equal basis, to the entire lexical stock of a language (Wierzbicka 1997: 527). They are words of particular importance for understanding a culture, which are recognised to a large extent through intuition. Those are common words, very frequently used in one particular semantic domain while situated at the centre of a whole phraseological cluster (which includes proverbs) (Wierzbicka 1997: 15–16).

Examining proverbs within their social and cultural contexts reveals a fuller spectrum of their meanings than any other type of analysis (Finnegan 2012: 394). Cultural keywords in proverbs encode cultural information necessary for their proper interpretation. Investigating *karìn màgànà* through the prism of keywords is a method of semantic analysis which reveals the ways of conceptualising notions in Hausa cultural context (Zajac 2017).

⁸ Negotiation of power and position in conjugal-conflict situations happens through the strategy of using *karìn màgànà*, which allows one to express unacceptable truths in an euphemistic way, while male-female identity plays an important role in determining the proper choice of proverbs. Those proverbs, however, usually do not contain relevant marriage-related keywords and therefore are not analysed here.

My analysis focuses on the notion of MARRIAGE entrenched in Hausa by the cultural keyword *aurē*. Therefore, the presence of the word *aurē* in a proverb is considered an indication that its meaning can be referred to the conceptual domain of MARRIAGE. Preliminary selection of the linguistic data was conducted through checking for the presence of other keywords relevant in this context, such as: *mātā* (coding the concept of WIFE),⁹ *kīshiyā* (CO-WIFE), *wwar̄gidā* (SENIOR WIFE),¹⁰ *mijī* / *namijī* (HUSBAND/MAN),¹¹ and *sakī* (DIVORCE). The cultural status of these words has been confirmed by lexicographic data. They have multiple collocations as well as derivational forms, and occur in a large number of idioms. The cultural codes encapsulated in some of those notions have been subjected to ethnolinguistic research and textual analysis (Pawlak 2014, 2021). Many of the words which I recognised as relevant for the current ethnolinguistic analysis function as cultural keywords not only in paremias, but also in tales and other spheres of linguistic communication, e.g. brideprice negotiations, discussions among family members, etc. I shall refer to those words and interpret their meanings in the following analysis.

3.3. Thematic categorisation of the data

In paremiology, a common (auxiliary) method is categorising collected data according to various criteria. This method has a practical application, as in compiling collections and databases of proverbs (Lauhakangas 2015). I have used it to categorise previously selected proverbs about marriage into thematic groups. By classifying data according to the themes, it is possible to demonstrate which aspects of the conceptual domain of MARRIAGE are present in the proverbs. When assigning a proverb into a particular thematic group, I took into consideration two criteria: (1) its meaning and (2) the meanings of cultural keyword(s) in its content.¹² As a result, the following

⁹ In Hausa, the lexeme *mātā* ‘wife’ in genitive has the form *mātar̄* and is homonymous with the genitive of the word *mācē* ‘woman’. In an expression this can be interpreted as ‘a woman of [someone]’ (cf. the use of *femme* ‘woman/wife’ with possessive pronouns in French). In plural, the form is *mātā*, encoding the meaning of both ‘women’ and ‘wives’.

¹⁰ It can be morphologically analyzed as a lexicalization of the genitival construction *wwa-ṛ gidā* (‘mother of the house’).

¹¹ The word *namijī* ‘man, male, masculine’ is derived from *mijī* ‘husband’ through prefixation. It can be morphologically analyzed as a nominalization of the genitival construction *na mijī* ‘of husband’. This may be perhaps a linguistic trace of the conceptual blending of MAN and HUSBAND.

¹² Here, I mean all the keywords present in actual proverbs, not only those related to marriage. Not all keywords have the same cultural status: some are culturally meaningful, while the others merely indicate main elements of the proverbial predicate (this issue will not be discussed here). The same keywords quite often occur in proverbs about marriage

list of thematic groups was formulated:

- T1. Proverbs referring to religion (Islam).
- T2. Proverbs expressing general views and observations on married life.
- T3. Proverbs about women's experience in marriage.
- T4. Proverbs commenting on the position of women in marriage.
- T5. Proverbs about women's jealousy and situations resulting from polygamy.
- T6. Proverbs about men's experience in marriage.
- T7. Proverbs praising polygamy.

This thematic grouping indicates that: marriage in Hausa folk wisdom is seen in relation to religious life (category T1); some paremias present general views and observations on married life (category T2); proverbs often take the perspective of women (categories T3–T5); the perspective of men is less frequent (categories T6–T7).¹³

For clarity, in the following analysis, I will present the data in the same order as the above thematic categorisation.

4. Analysis of the proverbs

T1. Proverbs referring to religion (Islam)

Cultural and social importance of marriage stems from tradition as well as Muslim beliefs (to which almost all Hausa people adhere). In proverbs, reference to Islam is marked with such keywords as *Allàh* 'God', *àddīnī* 'religion' (usually identified with Islam), *Mùsùlmī* 'Muslim(s)'. In Islamic doctrine marriage is perceived as a God-ordered duty, and therefore being married is viewed positively. This is confirmed in the proverbs in (1) and (2):

- (1)
Aurē *nufī* *nē* *na- Allàh*
 marriage.M goal COP.M of-God¹⁴
 'Marriage is what God intends [for you]'

- (2)

across thematic categories.

¹³ In proverbs, polygamy is generally pictured as a troubling situation that women have to deal with (category T5), while men are moderately encouraged to have more wives (category T7).

¹⁴ A list of abbreviations is provided at the end of the article. Morphemes (words) written separately in standard orthography whose meaning should be interpreted jointly with the adhering elements are marked with a hyphen.

Aurē cikò-n àddīnī gà da-n Mūsūlmī (Danhaus 2012: 58)
 marriage completion-of religion for son-of Muslim
 ‘Religion requires a [young] Muslim to get married’.

Auren sadakā (‘alms marriage’) is a term describing a situation when a father or a guardian of the bride offers her for marriage without the husband paying a bride-price (*sàdākī*) and covers other marriage-related expenses. This type of marriage applies to a young girl or *bàzawàrā* (‘widow or divorcee’) who are “given as alms” to their husbands. Traces of this traditional marriage type can be found in proverbs such as (3):

(3)
Allāh ya yi aurē-n maràs -kwabō!
 God 3SG.M.CPL.REL do marriage-DEF PRT.NEG.POSS-*kobo*¹⁵
 ‘It was God who made this marriage [possible] for a penniless’.

Meaning: The husband was liberated from the obligation of financial contribution.

Since a Hausa man is expected to provide numerous customary gifts for the bride (i.a. *tōshī*) and pay the bride-price (*sàdākī*), it is practically impossible for a very poor man to get married unless he receives his wife as “alms”. As demonstrated above, this is seen in folklore as “Gods intervention”.

T2. Proverbs expressing general views and observations on married life

Among the Hausa “marriage is characteristically both early and obligatory. There are no institutionalised single-person social roles, such as bachelor or nun” (Solivetti 1994: 256). The traditional span of post-childhood life of a Hausa girl starts with being a *bùdurwā* (‘young woman who has never been married’). After this she is to become a wife (*amaryā* ‘a new wife or a junior wife in polygamous marriage’) and eventually a co-wife (*kīshiyā*) or a senior wife (*uwarǵidā*).¹⁶ There is no culturally or socially established role in between those “stages” (such as being *single* in Western culture). Those who put off marriage for too long are often frowned upon by the society. However, there is significantly less societal pressure on men to get married. Generally, men marry as soon as they have means to do it, i.e. they have accumulated enough money to cover the necessary expenses (Solivetti 1994:

¹⁵ A Nigerian coin of the lowest value.

¹⁶ In case she enters a polygamous marriage (precisely speaking in the Hausa society there is only one acceptable form of polygamy, which is polygyny, i.e. marriage between one man and up to four women, as is permitted by Islamic law). However, polygamy is not obligatory and monogamous marriages are common. If a man has only one wife, she becomes *uwarǵidā* at once.

256). An older man who has never married (*tùzū̀rū̀*¹⁷) is very rare to be seen. In folk tales such men are pictured in a negative way (cf. Tremearne 1913).

Some proverbs state that love can be a positive factor in building a relationship but only at certain conditions, as in (4):

(4)
Dācḕ *dà* *masò̀yī̀*¹⁸ *řī̀bà̀*
 being_suitable with lover profit
 ‘Matching with your lover is profit’.

Hausa people are known for their trading activity across Africa and beyond. Noticeably, many proverbs evoke imagery related to commerce (Zajaç 2015: 38–42). Often commerce-related notions such as PROFIT (*řī̀bà̀*) are used in similes. In fact, those proverbs and other formulaic linguistic data give reasons to infer that in Hausa LWV multiple notions are understood in terms of COMMERCE, or specifically LOSS and PROFIT.

Marriage in Hausa society is a socio-economic institution focused on the development of a household and on reproduction. The union is largely based on complementariness and co-operation (Solivetti 1994: 261). It can be seen as an investment that pays off with time, i.e. all expenses related to marriage and efforts of the suitor will be balanced by the joy of married life and giving birth to offspring (who are expected to support parents when grown up), as in (5):

(5)
Āřā̀ha-ř *banzā̀,* *aure-n* *bā̀shì̀*
 cheapness-of uselessness marriage-of loan
ìdan *an* *haihù̀* *à* *biyā̀*
 if IMPERS.CPL have_a_child IMPERS.SBJV pay_off
 ‘Cheapie – marriage on credit that will be paid off when a baby is born’.

I found no data on the number of births among the Hausa only, but the available sources show that in the two countries where the majority of the Hausa speakers live – Nigeria and Niger – even though the number of births has been dropping decade by decade (but not drastically), historically and nowadays some of the highest birth rates in the world were reported. In 2021 fertility in Nigeria reached 5.2 births per woman (8th place in the world ranking), which was topped by the Niger’s score of 6.8 (1st place) (The

¹⁷ Cf. *gwaurò* ‘a man who has been widowed or divorced and temporarily has no wife’ (Newman 2007: 80).

¹⁸ This may also mean ‘a fan, the one who likes (sb or sth)’ and thus proverb may be applied in various contexts but in this case I choose a love-related interpretation of the proverb.

World Bank 2021). It may be cautiously assumed that the Hausa people are contributing to these high rates since in Nigeria, among the Hausa and Fulani,¹⁹ the fertility rates were always the highest in the country, and reached 8.2 births per woman in 2013 (Adebowale 2019). This is probably due to the culturally shaped worldview in which a large family is a necessity as it means more hands to work in traditionally organised economy (Solivetti 1994: 259).

Religion, tradition and customs constrain contacts between men and women in Hausa society. Pre-marital and extramarital emotional and sexual relations are not acceptable or openly acknowledged.²⁰ Pre-marital affairs, especially by girls, are seen as defiance against family authority, signalling potential post-marriage behaviour. Negative community reactions against adultery emphasise its antisocial nature – it is not just an emotional betrayal of the partner. Adultery is not only perceived as a breach of affection but a violation of societal and religious norms. The same principle, belonging to the set of decency-oriented cultural rules and practices known as *kunyà*, governs marital relationships, where couples are expected to be reserved and avoid public intimacy (Solivetti 1994: 260).²¹

Given that any change of partners must be properly announced with respect to *shari'a* law, it means that to start a new relationship with a member of the opposite sex, one must marry this person; in order to end a relationship one must divorce. Hence, divorcing (*sakè*) is a distinctive feature of Hausa society, with statistics saying it happens more often than among other sub-Saharan peoples (Solivetti 1994: 261–263). The prevalence of divorce has implications for the stability of marital relationships in this society. The phenomenon of divorce within traditional Hausa society is therefore best understood by considering its unique economic and social organization (Solivetti 1994: 261–263): “Divorce thus can counterbalance a situation of conflict where any acceptable compromise is excluded, and so allow the woman to reconstitute a legal relationship” (Solivetti 1994: 265).

¹⁹ In Nigeria, Fulani is the ethnic group largely integrated and assimilated in many aspects with Hausa. The two groups are often described jointly in demographic statistics.

²⁰ Just like in any other traditional society, among the Hausa there is no socially accepted arrangement such as “being together” or “boyfriend and girlfriend”. However, there is lexical evidence of the existence of a similar practice in pre-Islamic times, called *gwajin-tàkàlmī* (‘type of trial marriage where a couple live together to see if they get along’) (Newman 2007: 79). It can be literally translated as ‘shoe fitting’.

²¹ “*Kunyà* is a cultural keyword which expressed pivotal Hausa cultural values and does not have an exact English translation: its meaning includes (at least) embarrassment, shame and modesty, although some English dictionaries define it as “shame, shyness, modesty, bashfulness, sense of propriety” (Chamo 2011: 124).

For this reason, a divorce may be sometimes seen even as a positive option from which one may benefit. This view is expressed by the proverb in (6):

- (6)
In aurē bāi kāwò shì ba sakī zāi kāwò shì
 if marriage 3SG.M.CPL.NEG/1 bring it NEG/2 divorce.M 3SG.M.FUT bring it
 ‘If marriage hasn’t brought a thing, a divorce will’.

Meaning: If you don’t achieve something with good will, you can achieve it with negative motivation (Yunusa 1977: 23).

Traditionally, after a divorce both men and women seek to quickly remarry. This however might not be easy, especially for women who are known to have misbehaved in their previous relationships, as expressed in (7):

- (7)
Aure-n bāyā, shī nē sàdākī-n na- gābā
 marriage-of past it COP.M bride-price-DEF of-future
 ‘Earlier marriage is a brideprice in the future’.

Meaning: One’s behaviour in an earlier marriage will affect the attitude (figuratively: amount of a brideprice) when re-marrying in the future (Yunusa 1977: 6).

T3. Proverbs about women’s experience in marriage

Researchers attribute the authorship of the largest number of Hausa proverbs to women who delight in linguistic scuffles, during which they try to impress each other and listeners with their artistry of words (Danhausa 2012: 40; Koko 1989). Piłaszewicz (1983: 29) suggests that the Islamic practice of making women of marriageable age remain within the household (*kullē* ‘lockdown’,²²) was one of the factors pushing them to coining proverbs as a form of entertainment and expression of inner feelings that, by being indirect, do not violate the cultural norm of politeness (Will 2017: 124–126).

Apparently, there are more proverbs relating to women’s than men’s experience of married life. Those paremias often contain insightful observations or advice for women who intend to marry, as in (8):

- (8)
Aurē yāki-n (‘yam)māā
 Marriage war-of (young) women
 ‘For (young) women marriage is war’.

²² This practice is known in many Muslim communities around the world under various names. It is most often called by the Farsi term with an anglicised spelling *purdah*.

This example demonstrates that in the Hausa LWV, MARRIAGE from the perspective of women is pictured as WAR that can be won or lost, i.e. the cultural stereotype is that for women marriage is a an opportunity to achieve success (win).

The proverb in (9) contains advice:

- (9)
Làṙūṙā, *aure-n* *namiji* *dà* *‘yā‘yā*
 Misfortune marriage-of man with children
 ‘It is a misfortune to marry a man with children’.

One possible interpretation of the above proverb is: a woman will not enjoy marriage with a man who has children already (with another woman). It is better to avoid it.

Equally, the Hausa folk wisdom says, it is better to avoid marrying an old man as he may die not long afterwards; see (10):

- (10)
Mutuwā *kusa,* *aure-n* *tsōhō*
 death nearby marriage-of old_man
 ‘Death is near, marrying an old man’.

Other marital advice for women in Hausa proverbs is to be willing to apologise, as this should prevent divorce; see (11):

- (11)
Mâtâ-ṙ *na* *tūbā* *bā- tà* *rasà* *miji*
 woman-DEF 3SG.CONT repentance NEG-3SG.F.CONT lack husband
 ‘A woman who apologizes never lacks a husband’.

Out of all divorce cases, the percentage of divorces initiated by the husband is very low, even though according to *shari’u*a divorce is for a man a simple procedure, which for the wife is more complicated. This suggests that Hausa women are significantly more affected by situations of tension in marriage than men, as could be predicted given their position in society and the household (Solivetti 1994: 266). The proverb in (12) can serve as an illustration of perceiving women who initiate divorce as a culturally typical situation:

- (12)
 “*Namiji shēgè nē,*” *in- ji* *mâtâ-ṙ* *dà tā* *nèmi à* *sàkē* *tà*
 man bastard COP.M as-said wife-DEF that 3SG.CPL seek IMPERS.SBJV divorce her
 ‘“A man is a bastard”, said the wife who sought to be divorced’.

Women may use this proverb as a provocative statement. When a woman is tired of her husband, she might call her husband names so that he would divorce her (Usman 2018: 116).

Among Hausa proverbs, there are also examples which confirm the possibility of having a successful marriage. According to the paremia in (13), when married life is comfortable and peaceful, a wife may love her husband ‘like her father’. She might even call him *bàba* (‘father’):

- (13)
Jî-n dāfi-n aurē, cē mà miji “bàba”
 feeling-of pleasure-of marriage saying to husband father
 ‘The pleasure of marriage [makes one] call the husband “father”’.

T4. Proverbs commenting on position of women in marriage

The traditional Muslim Hausa society is patriarchal with the father and the husband entitled to manage over women in their families to a large extent. Hence, the relative status of the husband and wife in the family differ significantly. The husband, as a male, has a higher position both symbolically and in practice (Pawlak 2014: 183). Evidence can be found in paremias. Example (14) confirms inequality in the status of the husband and wife, where the man is the leader, whilst the woman has to be supportive (Salamone 1976: 363):

- (14)
Bàbba-n àbù shī nē, màcè tà riga miji-ntà bawàlī
 big-GEN thing.M he COP.M woman 3SG.F.CPL precede husband-her urine
 literally ‘It is a serious thing for a woman to urinate before her husband does’ (Kirk-Greene 1966: 4, 27)

The proverb in (14) can be used to comment on any grave or serious situation (Kirk-Greene 1966, 62). Such is a case when the wife is taking over the husband’s role, as the proverb metaphorically shows. The origin of this proverb is unclear. “Urinating” here does not have any particular cultural associations and is rather used for emphasis and exaggeration.

The first wife in a polygamous family called *uwar̃gidā*,²³ which means literally ‘a mother of the household’, has a special status. The stereotypical image of the mother, confirmed by linguistic evidence, assumes her active participation in family life and performing supervisory and organizational functions at home (Pawlak 2014: 181). This feature is merged with the role of *uwar̃gidā*, as reflected in (15):

²³ *Uwā* has the connotation of something being true or significant, cf. *uwar̃ mātā* (literally ‘the mother of women’) means ‘married woman’, i.e. a woman with a full culturally-sanctioned societal position depending largely on her marital status (Pawlak 2014: 181).

(15)

Uwařgidā, sàrautà-ř mātā
 being_first_wife kingdom-of women
 ‘The first wife has a position of power among women’.

T5. Proverbs about women’s jealousy and situations resulting from polygamy

This theme is very well represented in numerous proverbs, which indicates the importance of this aspect of MARRIAGE in the Hausa LWV, in which a woman is pictured as struggling in a (polygamous) marriage (see example (8)). This is mainly caused by *kīshì* (roughly ‘jealousy, envy’), which is culturally strongly associated with “being a co-wife” (Bashir & Amali 2012: 20; Dickson & Mbosowo 2014: 635) and confirmed by linguistic evidence. Significantly, a Hausa term for a co-wife, *kīshiyā*²⁴ (roughly ‘a jealous one’), is derived from the word *kīshì*. Moreover, the interpretation of this term indicates an aversive nature as its meaning covers also the notion of OPPOSITNESS (Newman 2007: 114). Co-wives, and women in general, as pictured in proverbs, are believed to be always jealous about something, see example (16):

(16)

Kīshì kùmallo-n mātā, in yā mōtsà sai an hařas
 jealousy nausea-of women/wives if 3SG.M.SBJV move only IMPERS.CPL vomit
 ‘Jealousy is for women/wives like nausea, if it moves [your stomach], you have to vomit.’

Although a co-wife’s work in the household is hard and often not appreciated enough, it is beneficial for a woman. All co-wives must be treated by the husband equally. In the ideal traditional Hausa conjugal relationship, the man has a leading role, while his wives expect the support of a strong husband being responsible for satisfying all their needs (Salamone 1976: 361), cf. example (17):

(17)

Dà zama-n banzā gwàmmà aiki-n kīshiyā,
 PRF existence-of uselessness better work-of co-wife
kō tsinē makà akà yī, kà sāmū
 even curse.at you IMPERS.CPL.REL do 2SG.M.SBJV obtain
 ‘It is better to do a co-wife’s work than stay idle, even if you are cursed at, at least you will get something’.

This proverb may be used in numerous situations to comment that something is better than nothing (Bashir & Amali 2012: 21).

²⁴ Due to a degree of negativity inherent in this term, co-wives call each other *àbòkīyāř* *zamā* (roughly ‘co-existing friend’) (Newman 2007: 114).

Nevertheless, in Hausa LWV living together with a co-wife is seen as a compulsion since there is always rivalry. The proverb in (18) may be used when a woman finds herself in a difficult situation whose gravity equals to ‘living with a co-wife’ (Bashir & Amali 2012: 20):

(18)

Zamā dà kīshiyā sai tilàs
 existence with co-wife only necessity

‘Staying together with a co-wife is nothing more than a necessity’.

Big polygamous Hausa families are full of disputes and conflicts, especially among co-wives (this is even the leading motif in Hausa “harlequin literature” and films). This view is present in some of the proverbs. In (19), enmity among the co-wives is being portrayed again as an exaggerated situation in which they are not affected by the death of a co-wife’s mother:

(19)

Bà kūka-nā ba, uwa-ř kīshiyā tā mutù
 NEG/1 crying-mine NEG/2 mother-of co-wife 3SG.F.CPL die

‘It is not my grieving when mother of a co-wife died’.

It means that even though they are married to the same man, they are not fond of each other; they might even hate each other. The paremia can be used in a situation when a speaker wants to indicate that the issue being discussed has nothing to do with them (Bashir & Amali 2012: 19).

The negative and hostile linguistic image of CO-WIFE extending to her mother is used also in advising paremias, as in (20):

(20)

Salula,²⁵ shāwarâ dà (uwa-ř) kīshiyā
 foolishness advice PRT (mother-of) co-wife

‘It is foolish to seek advice from a co-wife(’s mother)’ (Dickson & Mbosowo 2014: 635)

This proverb contains the image of a woman in a situation in which no one is available for her to consult, and she is pushed to take advice from her co-wife (or co-wife’s mother – depending on the version of the proverb). According to folk belief, this will not bring a desired result since co-wives (and their mothers) do not care about the well-being of the woman. In fact, they may even want to harm her. By virtue of analogy, in a broad

²⁵ The origin of this word is not clear. My native-speaker consultants provided this form and meaning. Perhaps it is a derivate of *saruru* ‘fool’ (Robinson 1913: 319). In Hausa /r/ is commonly substituted with /l/ in dialectal forms. Cited sources (Dickson & Mbosowo 2014; Bashir & Amali 2012) give other forms, which are nonsensical.

context and outside of the domain of MARRIAGE, this proverb may be used to indicate the extent of the hopelessness of a given situation (Bashir & Amali 2012: 20).

T6. Proverbs about men's experience in marriage

Proverbs containing marital advice for men seem to be less numerous than those addressed to women. As it comes to the attitude of a husband towards the choice of wife or wives, Hausa proverbs point to the direction of “destiny” or rather “God’s will”, as in (21):

(21)

Māta-ř mūtúm, kabàři-nsà
 wife-of (hu)man.M grave-his

‘A man’s wife is his grave’.

‘A man’s choice of wife is largely determined by God’ (Pachociński 2009: 26)

This paremia can be interpreted as an expression of a traditional view that a man’s happiness depends largely on his wife’s (or wives’) personality. Interestingly, the paremia has another, very different interpretation: ‘the wife best guards her husband’s secrets’ (Pachociński 2009: 58).

We saw proverbs which warn women about getting too comfortable in a marriage, but there are also paremias that convey a counterpart message to men, such as (22):

(22)

Masò mace wāwā bàì san zā- tà kī shì ba
 loving.person woman fool 3SG.M.CPL.NEG/1 know 3SG.F.FUT hate/reject him NEG/2
 ‘He who loves a woman is a fool; he doesn’t know whether she will hate/reject him’.

A woman may decide to leave a man and seek a better partner (a valid ground for divorce on her part is, for example, the inability of the husband to provide for a wife’s needs as specified by her own expectations). This proverb is a warning to men, typically raised by those who had bad experiences with women they loved and trusted (Usman 2018: 113).

The negative aspect of a woman’s personality is also encapsulated in (23):

(23)

Zama-nkà kai kàdai yā fi zamā dà mūgùwa-ř màcè
 existence-yours.M you.M alone 3SG.M.CPL exceed existence with evil.F-GEN woman
 ‘Living alone is better than living with an evil woman’.

According to the proverb’s content, some women are wicked and troublesome, therefore not suitable to become wives. The advice contained in the

proverb is rather extreme, considering cultural Hausa context – sometimes it is better not to marry at all than marry such women. A man can use this paremia to justify why he still remains unmarried (Usman 2018: 112–113).

T7. Proverbs praising polygamy

Hausa people are mostly Sunni Muslims and practice polygamy (in the form of polygyny), which allows a man to have up to four wives at a time, as allowed by *shari'a*. The man has a religious obligation to treat each wife equally and provide for them. Getting another wife (called *kārìn aurē*, literally ‘increasing marriage’) is exclusively a man’s decision and he does not have to consult it with his wives or anyone else, see (24):

(24)

Kīshì-n kīshiyā, bà zāi hanà miɗ̣ī aurē ba
 envy-of co-wife NEG/1 3SG.M.FUT forbid husband marriage NEG/2
 ‘Envy of a co-wife will not prevent the husband getting married [again]’.

Traditionally, marrying more wives as one gets older is seen as a sign of a man’s prestige and prosperity (Solivetti 1994: 259), while having only one wife is seen as a certain step in a man’s life; see (25):

(25)

Mācè ɗaya māta-ř yārò
 woman one wife-of boy
 ‘[Only] one woman – wife for a boy’.

‘Marrying [only] one wife is a young boy’s thinking’ (Dickson & Mbosowo 2014: 635)

Sometimes it may be expected of a man to get more wives in order to give certain women “protection”. That is because according to strict cultural norms of Hausa society every woman (including *bàzawàrà* ‘widow or divorcee’) who stays unmarried without a valid reason for too long, should remarry to avoid infringing those cultural norms (Solivetti 1994: 256).

5. Conclusions

Proverbs are valuable data for culture-oriented linguistic analyses targeted at reconstructing a fragment of a people’s LWV. They encapsulate cultural concepts, views and values which can be excerpted from their contents by means of semantic and functional interpretation. A salient part of this process is an attempt to understand the associations of notions encoded by cultural keywords, which are often elements of a proverb’s wording. Combining information on what proverbs mean in context and how to aptly

use them, leads to conclusions about a particular notion or a conceptual domain.

Preliminary selection of data from the available sources, conducted by searching for relevant cultural keywords, by interpreting the proverbs' meanings and consulting native speakers, allowed me to identify twenty-five Hausa proverbs that can be interpreted in the context of MARRIAGE. In the analysis I hope to have demonstrated that on the basis of this set of data it is possible to reconstruct seven aspects of the conceptual domain of MARRIAGE within the Hausa LWV. Those aspects are correlated with thematic categories, to which I assigned specific proverbs.

The list of the categories shows that in proverbs about marriage the woman's perspective is dominant (T3-T5 – in total, thirteen proverbs out of the sample of twenty-five). This is related to the fact that women are believed to have coined the majority of Hausa proverbs in general (Danhausa 2012: 40; Koko 1989; Piłaszewicz 1983: 29). Taking into consideration a highly valued didactic function of Hausa proverbs, the results also show that in Hausa traditional culture women are taught to be involved in marriage matters, portrayed as WAR with reference to its aspects such as winning (success) or failure (example 8). They are cautioned about choosing a suitable husband and the bad choices are: men with children from previous relationships (9), and old men (10). Women who never repent (11), proverbs warn, will experience difficulties in their relationships. Marriage may be a comfortable situation for women (13) but should not be prolonged when problems are unsolvable – sometimes it is better to end it (12). A woman should know her place in marriage and follow her husband (14). She may have a privileged position in the family (15) as the societal hierarchy extends to family relations as well. In proverbial lore women are pictured as jealous (16), especially in polygamous marriages, where they have to compete with co-wives (17–20).

Proverbs say that for every man his wife is a destiny (21), and warn men against marrying wrong women: those who change their mind (22) and those who are evil (23). We also find that polygamy is men's (religious) right (24) and having more wives adds to the prestige of a man (25).

Proverbs (1–3) show the religious (Islamic) aspect of the concept of MARRIAGE in Hausa: marrying is a cultural and religious norm (1–2). Examples from T2 category demonstrate that: in the Hausa LWV sharing love with someone is a positive value (4); one of the main purposes of marriage is to procreate (5); divorcing is sometimes inevitable (6); and every marriage shapes the attitude in the next relationship (7).

Abbreviations

/1 ... /2 first and second part of two-part constructions
 1, 2, 3 grammatical person
 CONT continuous aspect
 COP copula
 CPL completive aspect
 DO direct object
 F feminine gender
 GEN genitive
 HABIT habitual aspect
 IMPERS impersonal form
 LWV linguistic worldview
 LOC locative
 M masculine gender
 NEG negation
 PL plural
 POSS possessive
 PRO pronoun
 PRT particle
 REL relative form
 SBJV subjunctive
 SG singular

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Streszczenie: W artykule analizowane są treści, znaczenia i funkcje przysłów zawierających tradycyjne hausańskie poglądy na temat małżeństwa. Analiza ma charakter etnolingwistyczny, a jej celem jest rekonstrukcja konceptu MAŁŻEŃSTWO w języku hausa i uwarunkowanych kulturowo sposobów myślenia o małżeństwie w społeczności posługującej się tym językiem. Dane językowe wykorzystane w analizach obejmują 25 przysłów hausa odnoszących się do domeny pojęciowej MAŁŻEŃSTWA. Przysłowia zawierające słowa kluczowe są wykładnikami kodów kulturowych. Odszyfrowanie owych kodów pomaga w prawidłowej interpretacji znaczeń i funkcji przysłów.

Słowa kluczowe: przysłowia hausa; małżeństwo; etnolingwistyka; językowy obraz świata; słowa kluczowe