

Endangered African Proverbs Collections: Chagga (Tanzania) Sayings

One of the follow-ups to the African Proverbs Project (1993-1996) is the collection of African proverbs in languages that are small, not well known or in danger of dying out. These are called "Endangered African Proverbs Collections." A modest collection of 100 to 200 proverbs in these languages is being carried out through our four Regional Resource Centers in Africa. This "Collection of 100 Chagga Sayings" was carried out in 2004-2005 under the direction of the Hekima College Library in Nairobi, Kenya, the Regional Resource Center in Eastern Africa. A summary of this booklet is as follows:

Endangered African Proverbs Collections A Continuation of the African Proverbs Project

Collection of 100 Chagga Sayings (Njaambo 100 za Kichakha)

Collected and explained by Michael Mushi

Arusha, Tanzania: Privately Duplicated, June, 2005. 18 pages

Reviewed by John P. Mbonde

The compiler of this collection is Father Michael Mushi, A.J., a member of the Apostles of Jesus Religious Congregation, who lives at Tengeru in Arusha Region in northern Tanzania. He hails from Hai district where the Kiuru dialect of the Chagga language is spoken. The Chagga people live at the foot of the famous and tallest mountain in Africa, Mt. Kilimanjaro. The Chagga people's history is full of prosperity particularly in areas of education, economy, and social infrastructure development including the early missionary evangelization and the development of Christianity. The Chagga people are considered to be very good businesspeople, administrators and leading entrepreneurs. This ethnic group has diversified cultural heritages enhanced by the historically renowned Mt. Kilimanjaro that is one of the centers of tourist attraction in Tanzania

This ethnic group has three dialects that are basically culturally and linguistically connected: *Kirombo*

in Rombo district;

Kivunjo

in Vunjo district; and

Kiuru

in Hai district. By and large, the three dialects have many things in common. That is why the contextual meaning of each dialect is easily understood by all the speakers of the three Chagga dialects through their unique cultural and economic activities. In this collection the sayings have been arranged in the following manner:

Kiuru/Kivunjo/Kirombo

. This is followed by the literal Swahili translation and the English translation. For example, No. 3:

A nkilyi kora ivo mcharenyi, kochaakia ivo mraraonyi? (Kiuru)

An kiilyi oora ipfo mcharenyi, kocheakiya ipfo mraraonyi? (Kivunjo)

Nikili wata chamba cha maru a mshare kwaenda chamba cha maru a mtoto? (Kirombo)

Kwa nini umeacha shamba la ndizi mshale (za kupika), ukaingia katika shamba la ndizi za mraro (za kuivisha)? (Swahili)

Why did you pass by the plantain (cooking and eating bananas) garden and enter into the general bananas garden? (English)

These Chagga sayings dwell specifically on economic and traditional activities. As the agriculture is the main economic activity in Kilimanjaro Region there are quite a number of sayings based on farming and animal husbandry activities and products, e.g. No. 3, 18, 19, 46, 58, 63, etc. There are also cultural sayings, myths, beliefs, e.g., No. 2, 4, 10, 11, 12, 15, 22, 27, etc. All in all, these sayings are very useful in everyday life not only among the Chagga people but as well are applicable to other ethnic groups inside and outside Tanzania, Africa and the world at large. Indeed, they also have a pedagogical role to play in society, particularly in bringing up children. A good example is No. 18 that encourages all people to work in order to earn their living: What God gave us is only a machete and a hoe. This is true to every Tanzanian to use such tools in agriculture to grow both food and cash crops. Indeed, agriculture is the backbone of the country's economy. No. 70 says *Mdu o mrasa nguo ya kawi* in Kiuru that is

nguo ya pili

in Swahili and

A neighbor is a second cloth

in English. This saying teaches any given community to respect one another.

It would have been very useful if Mushi would have also compiled the explanations on their daily

use of these sayings so that the wisdom with which they carry would have been vividly understood more widely. This is challenge for the other Chagga groups to come out with their concrete observations.

Mushi has collected 100 Chagga sayings and has classified them into three most dominant Chagga dialects: *Kirombo* in Rombo district; *Kivunjo* in Vunjo district; and *Kiuru* in Hai district. But by and large, they have many things in common, that is why the contextual meaning of each dialect is easily understood by all the three Chagga dialects through their unique cultural and economic activities. In this collection, the sayings have been arranged in the following manner by a bar:

ivunjo/Kirombo

Kiuru/K

. After that each saying is literally translated into Swahili language and finally into English.

Reviewed by John P. Mbonde