



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Context and Meaning: A Pragmatic Exploration of Balti Proverbs

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the pragmatic functions of proverbs in the Balti language in relation to their context. It seeks to understand how context determines meaning, regardless of the literal or metaphorical interpretation. This study is qualitative in nature, and the data have been analyzed through content analysis. Specific proverbs were collected using purposive sampling, based on their use in warnings, requests, advice, and criticism within the discourse of the town. Contextualizing Theory and Politeness Theory have been employed for theoretical grounding. The selected proverbs were examined using content analysis. The findings reveal that Balti proverbs have multifaceted applications depending on the context in which they are used. Furthermore, the study suggests that cultural and situational contexts play a pivotal role in explaining these proverbs. This paper also recommends that future researchers conduct an etymological investigation of Balti proverbs.

**KEYWORDS** Balti, Proverbs, Pragmatics, Contextual, Application, Discourse

## Introduction

The field of language is not as simple as using the right sequence of words in order to make a point. Although the definitions of individual words and the sequence thereof are a determining factor, the real meaning of a sentence is colored by a set of contextual factors (ex. the meaning of a sentence can be heavily influenced by the situation or setting in which it is adopted). An example of this is that in different situations the proverb *Sha zosy rospa khila* would be given different interpretation. There are also unspoken social rules and norms concerning language use which equally are significant in helping build meaning. E.g. speaking formally in the workplace as opposed to conversing casually with friends. In addition, it can also be appropriated by the implication of the meaning not expressed by words e.g. sarcasm or irony. The meaning and intonation of the speaker can have significant impacts in interpreting the sentence further since the interpretation can take on friendly pattern or hostile one. Finally, the cultural background and shared knowledge can also work in the meaning because some phrases or expressions can have various senses according to the cultures. A combination of all these factors helps to prove that language interpretation is a complicated process which is not limited to the literal meaning of words.

Such situational background has the potential of enhancing elaborate content to a sentence thus complicating interpretation of language. Pragmatics is the study of the

interaction of such situational factors with the actual meaning of the words to form a sense of language.

Rizvi (2019) argues that proverbs are short statements that convey philosophical beliefs which are applied through the experiences of humankind in respect to cultural contexts. They provide the information about the history, world perception, and values of a community, not to mention that they also shape the social conduct and provide a possibility of mutual understanding. Such Nigerian authors as Chinua Achebe and Ola Rotimi have made proverbs use. Nevertheless, the definitions and uses of proverbs are less focused on the adages but determined by the context, thus, pragmatics is very important in analysis and interpretation. This paper discusses the practice of Balti proverbs as used by the Balti people in Baltistan and examines the contexts within which it appears with the aim of identifying their meaning, purpose and relevance to messages conveyed by the texts.

**Proverbsception** The beauty of proverbs is that they allow a complex idea and advise to be passed on in few words making it a good mode of communication (Odebunmi, 2006, Ogbulogo, 2002) Often with a proverb, a speaker is able to compress a great deal of sense and experience into only a small number of words, Thus, instead of having to explain that you are so late are why you are late, a teacher may simply say *eshan wakh sos* instantly conveying to the person that it is important to come in time. Such cultural understanding and exposure to proverbs make them time-saving ways to present information and make the intended message easily understood by listeners because the shortened information is directly relevant to the listener.

Proverbs ensure a survival of a culture and its practices. They come with ancient wisdom, life lessons and moral values of the older generations to the younger generation. Proverbs are quite a powerful means through which crucial knowledge can be shared in places such as Baltistan, where the majority of people tend to pass knowledge through words. When one utters a familiar saying, this provokes in minds of other people the intimations of certain common credence and experience by causing people to become more connected to the society (Tournier, 2017).

Proverbs also come in handy whenever one is trying to describe something or persuade others. They are used by people with an argument or dialogue in order to prove their point. Better proverb may contribute to a solution to a problem in Balti culture, a smart or funny detail, or a matter that is used to make a dialogue easier. People usually respect those who use proverbs since most of them regard them as being wise.

In order to comprehend a proverb, it is necessary to be provided with context and words. It is not enough to learn what number of words mean, but one should also know when and where to use these words. An example is a proverb about patience: It would feel reassuring when an individual is depressed but would be different otherwise, at a busy workplace. When the proverb is employed in an incorrect case it can end up either causing confusion or dejection to the other people. That is why it is quite important to know when and where a proverb is to be used.

Many Baltistan proverbs grow out of the country and lifestyle here. Quite a number of them speak of nature, agriculture or coexistence as a community (Yousuf, 2023). Ali, R., & Baqir, M. (2022) comment that these proverbs make us realize the differences in how Balti people perceive the reality, how they think the world is and what is considered important in this life. Learning of these sayings not only makes us understand how incremental Balti is, but also how Balti people live, how they fought and how they learnt.

## **Literature Review**

Pragmatics deals with the context of language and how it is employed to pass information and have certain objectives fulfilled. Pragmatics analyses the use of language based on a social interaction with consideration of the implicit knowledge in the interpretation of the use of language (Birner, 2013). Mey (2001) expands on this position by defining pragmatics as a science of the language in reference to individuals who use languages by studying the actual communication in the real world and how people use language to suit their own interest.

Viewing pragmatics as a systematic study of meaning based on the usage of a language, Huang (2007) focuses on the study of the context-controlled meaning, not only about formal word qualities. According to Leech (2014), pragmatics is called the study of meaning, relative to speech situations in which the language has an impact on the attitude of the hearer. Likewise, Yule (2002) indicates that the speech situation helps the users of language to manipulate words to accomplish a specific effect on the listener.

The possibility of using proverbs as a means of indirect communication may also be interpreted as indirect communication, as most scholars argue (Finnegan 1970). Because proverb is used by the sender to convey messages in ways perceive as culturally acceptable particularly under circumstances where direct speech may have been deemed inappropriate. Levinson (1983) makes it clear that pragmatic is about the context in which language is to be used like how the meaning of words and sentences can be understood and interpreted without taking literal meaning. In the example of Balti proverbs, the given context of particular society and culture of this region is needed to identify the intended meaning of the given proverb (Ahmad & Hussain, 2018).

Ariel (2008) thinks of pragmatics as the study of relationship between language and context which is pertinent to language grammar and Yule (1996) merely defines pragmatics as the study of what is intended by a speaker based on the context. The combined definition is a reflection of the emphasis that pragmatics lay on language use, context and user friendly communication.

The literature of proverbs in African culture is something that has just been researched. Fashina (2011) refutes the fact that proverbs should be as wise and beneficial as they always are, as they may be vague and ambiguous. Through the use of critical theory and linguistics, he analyses novels of Chinua Achebe and concluded that proverbs serve not only aesthetic, but also affective purposes and can be confusing.

The study by Ehineni (2016a, 2016b) is conducted on Yoruba proverbs, which demonstrate their significance in expressing other ideas and the intentions. Through his analysis these proverbs which are used by the Yoruba people have peculiar lexical and grammatical structure that makes it easy to use it in plays to get the intended information pass across. Besides, Ehineni shows how proverbs help to underpin different discourse activities and communication objectives.

Gogoi (2017) examined how a proverb is used in *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*, by Chinua Achebe. African sensibilities are expressed through creative utilization of oral culture factors by Achebe, which include use of proverbs, folktales, and myths. According to Gogoi, Achebe makes use of strategic use of proverb to comply with various social, cultural situations to general political issues.

Alimi (2012) reviews his (Achebe) usage of proverb as an element of literature in *Things Fall Apart* and *the Arrow of God*. Alimi discovers that proverbs assist in explaining the appearance of characters, their activities, and thoughts, therefore, Achebe has defined characters well.

It is through studying language within the social situation that pragmatics can be useful in discovering how people make meaning in the course of interaction. Pragmatics is crucial to communicate better, because it puts into perspective the intricate connections among language and surroundings, as well as the dynamics among people (Nabi, 2015).

### **Material and Methods**

In this study, a qualitative analysis of the content will be used in order to analyze the pragmatic roles of proverbs in Baltistan concerning its meaning, context, and culture. The information is in the form of a few proverbs, gathered through oral culture, folklore, and observing people in social life. The use of the elders and folk literature in the community and interviews among them also enhances the data set. The proverbs have been selected based on their relevance in the culture, their usage, and their popularity in pragmatic functions, viz., advising, warning, and criticizing. The analysis is based on the pragmatic theories, mainly Contextualization Theory and Politeness Theory. Each proverb assesses on how it fits in particular societal contexts and in this regard interpretation of meanings is made in regards to the cultural and situational context of proverbs application in the society. The Politeness Theory also lets us know the Balti sayings and how they portray societal norms such as respect and order. To validate the findings, we checked them using the local elders and various data collations. Regarding respect of local values, the study promotes ethics, such as the informed consent and cultural sensitivity.

### **Results and Discussion**

This paper attempts a thorough analysis on the pragmatic roles of Balti proverbs within the perspective of two different theories: Politeness Theory and the contextualization theory. By the means of these theories, guiding the research towards the ancient expression of Balti proverbs, the researcher would determine to find out the intricate dynamics of language, culture and communication which are the foundations of the Balti proverbs. Politeness Theory is used to look at how Balti proverbs enable the negotiation of social relationship and how they express respect, whereas Contextualization Theory is used to understand the cultural and historical context in which the meaning and significance of these proverbs permeate differently. Having employed such a multi-theoretical approach, this paper aims to be one of the contributions toward a better comprehension of complications of the language, culture, and communication interrelationship in relation to Balti proverbs.

### **Contextualization Theory**

The Gumperz (1982) shrouds this theory concentrates on the meaning, which was employed in the social and situational context wherein communication occurs. The theory is especially reflective in interpretational situations with the pragmatic functions of proverbs since the meaning a proverb is intended to convey can change according to the speaker, to whom, in what context, and the culture surrounding the norms involved. The proverbs always have a more flexible meaning which depends on the above mentioned contextual factors. The ways the speakers handle social roles, relations and perform them in the course of communication, and the ways proverbs are changed to fit into the various social processes, expectations, and designs are seen in the use of the proverbs.

Contextualization Theory makes us understand that it is not true that proverbs always bear definite meanings, but rather moulded by the circumstance to allow them to perform different tasks depending on the context, including advising, complaining or persuading, as the case may be.

### **Bongi buna bili bu**

the children of a daughter, like the kitten of a cat ).

The Balti proverb is employed to criticize grandchildren, when they disobey their grandparents. It is a figurative statement where children are literally likened to the kitten since they have the same trait of disloyalty. Similar to a kitten, grandchildren do not obey their maternal grandparent since they are not very close to him/her . The saying enlightens the conventional culture of daughters leaving the house of their father in marriage that leads to physical and emotional separation to their children.

### **khumulchu medna khser med**

No pain no gain follows.

These vary depending on the context on which they are used, but the implication of the balti proverb lies in this. The proverb finds application in various circumstances, like during teaching whereby the teacher uses the proverb to motivate the students. In another scenario it lays stress on hard work as the key to success. The lifestyle of struggle is admirable since nothing can be achieved without struggle.

### **Ha msk L Ph L ha handoq**

Get out (well before the work is done )

When they forecast before the event, their own criticizing common use of the Balti proverb is used. The proverb highlights the nature of information to spread rapidly, in most cases, prior to completion of the work or the task due to the nature of the society and communities that is culturally centered in gossips, rumors as well as news and travels via social networks at a very high speed. The proverb in itself is an observation of the society and the reality of information dissimulation whereby news and rumors can travel faster than real facts.

### **Laq bji , lung bji( to do good turn and hope of receiving rewards)**

The Latin word, laq bji or lung bji, a proverb which states that kindness and goodness knows no boundaries but is transactional as people expect a similar act or favour in response to their own activity. This is based on the cultural and social standards of the communities where kindness may be considered as a mode of investment and the reward is expected on a later date.

### **Skaboe bareing xsharpha chon shiks (wet wood also burns along with the dry wood)**

The proverb is an expression of the community life in terms of experiences and observations made in the society. In this regard, the proverb emphasizes the process of innocent person getting shipped by forces beyond his or her control as it would be with wet wood which burns together with dry one. Such contextualization matters a lot since it shows how the society approaches justice, accountability, and how the community actions can influence the lives of the individuals.

**Uckeessing zheek meed na mikeyk la tikmeed.**

Without heart pangs no eye-drops, Prayer is to the soul what tear is to the eye, In each case there must be pangs of pain, ( There will be no tear In eyes and no pain In the heart)

It is a deep saying that attracts attention to the cause and effect correlation between human feelings and bodily action such as tears. Also, it declares that when a part of the human body is in pain, then the whole body is in pain. All the parts to the body suffer equally. The proverb has an application whereby a certain person is pretending to be sad, without logical reasoning.

**Hlo nara qi Hltaragi handoq khro chorong.**

This proverb is applied when guest visits the impoverished family and spot the laying sheet instead of the carpet. Then the guest mocks at the host by saying that: when did you purchase this carpet? This is a proverb that implies in the relationship between the financial status of a person and the things that he/she owns. The host makes an implying statement with the help of this proverb, referring to the fact that his or her guest has misdirected assumptions about the carpet.

**Hрмаq zan zo Hрмаq tam ma zer**

The proverb is employed in the sense of instruction and direction. The proverb tells the hearer to avoid speaker at meetings and foster self-awareness. The warning tone of the proverb is used to discourage people to speak without thinking before they open their mouths especially in the presence of people. Moreover the prescriptive nature of proverb underlines the significance of respecting the elderly and courtesy in social gatherings that exhibits the usefulness of social stability.

**Politeness Theory**

Proposed in 1987 by Brown and Levinson, Politeness Theory examines how individuals can more or less preserve social harmony by taking care of their own and other people has face or self-impression in society. It makes a distinction between two faces positive face which is the desire to be liked and approved by and negative face which is the wish to be free and independent. During the communication process, people usually engage in face-threatening acts (FTAs) in the form of requests, commands, or criticism that may hurt the face of a listener. In an effort to downplay this threat, speakers adopt a number of politeness strategies.

The bald-on-record style is the first one, in which the speaker is blunt and straightforward and does not soften the message e.g., by saying, "Close the window." This is normally applied in case of emergencies or to those persons who care very much. An example of such a straightforwardness is the proverb: Honesty is the best policy.

Positive politeness comprises of friendliness and underlining of a common ground in order to make the listener feel important. It may contain something like compliments, colloquialisms, or inclusive terms and one of them is the following phrase, which is expressed like this, "Hey, can you close the window, can you. It is getting chilly." The same can be said about a related proverb called You can attract more flies with honey than with vinegar implying that be nice and warm.

Negative politeness, conversely, respects the personal territory and autonomy of the listener and may employ a formal or indirect manner of phrase or expression, as in, example, "Would you mind shutting the window, please?" This is implied in the saying that it is better to ask than to presume and this means not to be untidy in imposing.

The off-record strategy is even less direct where what one wants is suggested not exactly said, as in saying it is chilly in here rather than asking someone to close a window.

Balti proverbs are discussed with the aid of politeness strategies that help to identify how indirectness, respect, and social harmony may be reflected through the traditional sayings. During the framework of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, an analysis of whether a proverb makes use of direct or indirect language is carried out, and to what extent such values as humility, honor, or criticism are expressed. Such strategies are useful in neutralizing the sound of brutal realities or tactless advice in the proverb so that they fit in dignified or respectful discussions. This method illuminates the complexity of the connection between language, culture, and society, the Balti communal attachment.

### **Hrtala rgatse hrta rzila**

The Balti saying is Hrtala rgatse hrta rzila which is translated into English as A horseman will love even more than he/she loves his/her horse, the individual who tends his/her horse. It is a positive politeness proverb according to the Politeness Theory. One point this proverb brings out is the raising of affection and appreciation to those who appreciate what others care about. The proverb contains a more profound statement because it involves complimenting the person who takes care of the horse: being kind, being responsible and being thoughtful establishes the emotional connection between people. It suggests socially rewarded conduct and reinforces the unity in the society. Rather than criticizing or distance creation, the proverb brings about closeness and mutual respect as well as a positive relationship all of which are major elements of positive politeness.

### **Ghzorba dukse laq hrngas**

Ghzorba dukse laq hrngas as a Balti proverb may be translated as Still mowing grass by hand when the sickle is at hand. They use it in rebuking a son who issues commands in the house when the father is present in the house. This proverb criticizes the son indirectly because he overestimates his scope of responsibility and behaves as the man of the house when the actual supreme is the father who happens to be around hence it is negative politeness. The proverb does not directly scold him, but politely puts him in his place.

### **What has Lasmi said, chuk hrkunma bretchuk**

Politeness Theory is reinforced by the Balti proverb, Lasmi that chuk hrkunma bretchuk, meaning, as a direct translation, Entertain the hardy workers and punish the thief severely so that he may not be able to steal any more, and also includes a cross of positive politeness and bald on-record. The positive politeness aspect of the proverb is the first portion of the quote advising people to respect and take care of people who work hard. It encourages gratitude, equality, and acknowledgment of efforts made by people with honesty. This type of linguistic reinforces the sociality ties and demonstrates the appreciation of the cooperation with the community. On the contrary, punishment of a thief on the brutal side of the second part of this proverb is a bald on-record approach. The

approach is straightforward, categorical, and hard to misunderstand which is not bad in a scenario where rules and justice must be well established.

### **Kho khara sningp ro ara**

An example of the off-record politeness is the Balti proverb, meaning “a malign person with a sweet tongue” or “a fair face may hide foul heart” and is given out as Kho khara Sningspo ara. The off-record politeness compels a speaker of a message to say nothing explicitly; hence, the listener is left to interpret what she/he really means. This proverb does not blame anyone but it presents a kind of warning or caution about the people who talk sweetly with ill intentions. It sends a serious message, in an understated manner without confronting the issue. It assists the speaker to express concern or caution without provoking a conflict since it involves metaphor and indirect language.

### **BalBisi xyangspa nasbui stroqla**

An example of off-record politeness is: the Balti proverb, which states, Balbisi xyangspa nasbui stroqla, that is, the sparrow died even in the palms of his or her own nearest child. This saying points to the unintentional damage that innocent or immature people can create in the form of actions brought on by curiosity or playfulness including killing a sparrow. On a wider scale, it condemns people in authority or those without the empathy to know better, where killing takes place to satisfy selfish needs or gain glory including kings or rulers to fulfill their luxury or fame.

### **Xhoila zere xlangla**

A very explicit representation of off-record politeness technique in the Theory of Politeness is the Balti proverb that combines a direct meaning with an unspoken one, that is, Xshoila zere xlangla which can be translated as To ask something of the ploughing ox by speaking to the plough described as the Theory of Politeness. The proverb refers to an instance when someone is shy or afraid to request assistance (e.g., to borrow an ox) directly. As an alternative, he or she speaks about something akin to it (e.g., the plough) to start the communication process. This is the actual request which is perceived indirectly. This will enable the speaker not to be embarrassed, respect and save face to both the parties. The speaker is not open in making a demand, instead he has figured out how to use an implied request with the hope that the listener can interpret what is really implied.

### **Towana byarna skinoq, rgomna byarna phe**

The indirect approach to off-record politeness can be traced in the advertisement going, *Towana byarna skinoq, rgomna byarna phe*; (if you sit near cooking, you are sure to be oiled: if you sit near flour box, the flour will make your dress white). This idiom does not condemn or commend anybody in particular; rather, his symbolic application of cooking pot (which refers to being dirty) and flour box (which refers to being clean) is intended to mean that one should take care in the company that he or she keeps. It teaches a social lesson in an oblique way: an association with good persons brings a good name, an association with bad ones brings shame.

### **Finding**

It was discovered by the study that Balti proverbs have multiple pragmatic roles in the society such as symbols of communication in society, as a source of cultural expression as well as a means of control. The functions are giving advice, making warning, praise, criticism or insults, expressing abuse, encouraging others, correcting improper behavior



and making assertive statements. The discussion revealed that what these proverbs would mean largely depends upon the context of their utterance (who is saying them, who is listening, what social and cultural nook it is amplified in). Use of proverbs is an indication of Balti speakers who use indirectness, metaphor and common cultural knowledge as a means to convey difficult or embarrassing concepts in a socially acceptable way. In using Contextualization Theory, the research demonstrated that proverb interpretation cannot be separated; it depends on how people apply it in a situation because the context of the use of a proverb is what determines the shift of meaning. Also, according to the Politeness Theory, it was revealed that Balti proverbs frequently represent the strategies serving the ideas of social peace, respect, and hierarchy, positive politeness (compliments to favorable behavior), negative politeness (email-style suggestions), off-record strategies (implicit hints), and bald on-record strategies (explicit requests). These practical instruments can express indirect meanings without any loss of interpersonal sensitivity and social cohesion.

### **Conclusion**

The paper has concluded that there is more to learning proverbs of the Balti than just knowing its literary meaning. It is not the literal translation of these proverbs that made them so effective and deep but their contextual and practical use to the social paradigm of Baltistan. Proverbs are not permanent word anatomies but fluid communications that can be changed to suit particular communicative demands, and with wisdom, criticism, encouragement and values, communicated culturally sensitively. The study points out that the pragmatic ability, especially the ability to recognise the context and the politeness convention, is critical in the more precise interpretation of proverbs in different cultures. The insight is particularly of use to the linguists, educators, and researchers in the field of pragmatics and intercultural communication. Finally, the research highlights the point that proverbs are not just forms of style in speaking; they are parts of culture that help control the relationships, express the societal ideas about the ways things should be done, and transmit the traditional knowledge with the help of pure forms of speech in indirect yet extremely effective ways.

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