

The Selfish Upininkpil and Her Granddaughter

(as narrated by Maatulnbi Dandam Poryii in Kutol on 18/03/2022)

Introduction

This story makes a case for the necessity of knowledge transfer, especially from the older generation to the younger generation. The story has it that an elderly woman living with her granddaughter refuses to teach the girl the basics of life because she is afraid that the girl will abandon her after learning everything there is to learn. But the girl's persistence eventually wears the old lady down and she teaches the child all she needs to know. To watch the Likpakpaln narration [click here](#).

Story

'This is my story,' Poryii announces to her audience and proceeds:

There lived a certain *upininkpil* and her grandchildren. *Upininkpil* was very knowledgeable in so many things but was never willing to pass on the knowledge to her grandchildren.

Anytime the grandchildren asked her to teach them something or show them how to do something, she declined with the excuse that if she taught them, they would eventually learn all they needed to know and abandon her.

One day one of her grandchildren threatened that if she failed to pass on her knowledge to her, she would relocate to *lijaanltaab* and bear a lot of fruits. The girl sang this in a song as follows:

(The storyteller teaches her audience the contents of the song, tells them which lines to sing, and breaks into singing.)

Likpakpaln transcription

N-ya ee, n-ya ee,
Mok 'bi la ŋaan bu ya.
Aa yaa kaa mok 'bi la ŋaan bu ya,
M la fii kpi *lijaanltaab* ee

Ki ti lu *lijaanl* gbar gbar gbar gbar -
Lu *lijaanl* gbar gbar gbar gbar.

English translation

Grandmother, grandmother,
Teach me how to do stuff.
If you do not teach me how to do stuff,
I'll relocate to the foot of the *lijaanl*
tree
And bear *lijaanl* fruits in abundance -
Bear *lijaanl* fruits in abundance.

(The storyteller repeats the song and the audience join in again.)

After much persistence from the girl, *upininkpil* finally gave in and taught her

granddaughter how to cook, how to do the dishes, and several other things. The girl was content and consequently aborted her plan to relocate.

(Poryii now attempts to break down the moral of the story to her audience as follows:)

‘By teaching the girl how to do these things, the elderly woman was preparing the young girl for life. So initially when she refused to pass on the knowledge, was the girl not right in threatening that she would relocate unless the grandmother taught her the basic things of life?’ she quizzes rhetorically.

‘Yes, she had the right to relocate,’ interjects one of her audience simultaneously as the storyteller.

‘M-hen!’ Poryii seems pleased with the audience’s response. She then concludes:

When a child lives with *upininkpil*, she must endeavor to teach the child the basics of life so that the child can survive later in life.

This is the story I have (to wit, this is the end of my story).¹

Note

1.

Poryii’s conclusion is atypical. The usual conclusion to a Konkomba folktale is, ‘This is the end of my story,’ or ‘May my story diminish while I grow as tall as my grandfather’s Kapok tree,’ or ‘Tiin tiin kulb’ (translated as ‘The end of the story’), etc. But Poryii’s conclusion points to the liberty afforded to the Konkomba storyteller in creating variants of so-called standardised or normative forms.

A Glossary of Likpakpaln Words

lijaanl:

a type of tree found in the savannah region of Ghana. Perhaps its closest resemblance is the fig tree.

lijaanltaab:

translated as, ‘under the lijaanl tree;’ or ‘at the foot of the lijaanl tree.’

n-ya:

Likpakpaln word for grandmother

upininkpil:

Likpakpaln word for an old lady or old woman. The plural form is bipininkpiib.