

Why the Python's Skin Has Dark-Brown Blotches

As told by Wumbein in Chakping on 16th March 2022

Introduction

The following story is one of many, in Konkomba folklore, that seek to offer insights into why a python's skin is multi-colored. In this story, the storyteller relates the costly friendship between a python and fire, which ultimately results in the former's house being gutted by fire, forcing him to flee to the riverside. Worst of all, the fire incident leaves the python forever scarred and multi-colored.

If you want to see some of the Likpakpaln narration in action, [click here](#).

Story

'There once lived a wild creature,' Wumbein commences his story.

'Ehen!' Some audience respond amid unintelligible chatter to assure the storyteller that they're paying attention to him.

Wumbein continues:

The creature was known as *ujuun*. He used to visit his friend *n-ηmii*, and the two would usually eat together.¹ However, his friend replied: 'Ujuun, I can't come to your house. Continue coming to my house instead.' But ujuun insisted, 'No! It's only fitting that if you frequent your friend's house, he should also visit you one day.'

Wumbein intones the song and his audience join in:

Likpakpaln transcription

Ki cha la'i 'kuur?²
'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!
(2x)
Njo le yin ma.
'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!
M bui maa choo ya.
'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!
U bui ki m dan na.
'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!

English translation

Where to, when it's so dry?
I've seen wonders - seen wonders!

My friend has invited me.
I've seen wonders - seen wonders!
I said I won't come.
I've seen wonders - seen wonders!
He insisted that I should come.
I've seen wonders - seen wonders!

After walking a distance, he resumed singing:

Likpakpaln transcription

Ki cha la'i 'kuur?
 'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!
 (2x)
 Njo le yin ma.
 'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!
 M bui maa choo ya.
 'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!
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 My friend has invited me.
 I've seen wonders – seen wonders!
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 He insisted that I should come.
 I've seen wonders – seen wonders!

On walking further he repeated the song:

Likpakpaln transcription

Ki cha la'i 'kuur?
 'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!
 (2x)
 Njo le yin ma.
 'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!
 M bui maa choo ya.
 'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!
 U bui ki m dan na.
 'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!

English translation

Where to, when it's so dry?
 I've seen wonders – seen wonders!

 My friend has invited me.
 I've seen wonders – seen wonders!
 I said I won't come.
 I've seen wonders – seen wonders!
 He insisted that I should come.
 I've seen wonders – seen wonders!

By this time, n-ɲmii had walked closer to his friend's house. As a result, ujuun and his wives could hear him from a distance. They rushed to the wall at the entrance of their house and fixed their gaze in the direction from which ujuun's friend was approaching. Ujuun asked his wives to open the gate quickly and let his friend in. As he inched closer to the house, n-ɲmii repeated his song:

Likpakpaln transcription

Ki cha la'i 'kuur?
 'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!
 (2x)
 Njo le yin ma.
 'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!
 M bui maa choo ya.
 'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!

English translation

Where to, when it's so dry?
 I've seen wonders – seen wonders!

 My friend has invited me.
 I've seen wonders – seen wonders!
 I said I won't come.
 I've seen wonders – seen wonders!

U bui ki m dan na.	He insisted that I should come.
'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!	I've seen wonders – seen wonders!

At this point ujuun announced to his friends and neighbors that his friend was coming to visit him. After a while, n-ɲmii resumed singing as he approached:

Likpakpaln transcription

English translation

Ki cha la'i 'kuur?	Where to, when it's so dry?
'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!	I've seen wonders – seen wonders!
(2x)	
Njo le yin ma.	My friend has invited me.
'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!	I've seen wonders – seen wonders!
M bui maa choo ya.	I said I won't come.
'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!	I've seen wonders – seen wonders!
U bui ki m dan na.	He insisted that I should come.
'Kan dama dama ye'i - 'kan dama!	I've seen wonders – seen wonders!

Meanwhile, ujuun had retreated into his *kinakuɔk* and instructed his wives to get ready to welcome his friend without delay.³ However, his wives rushed to him and informed him that their house was on fire. N-ɲmii had set their house ablaze on entering. Ujuun subsequently fled his home to escape the blaze. Since then, the bush ...

'The riverside,' cuts in one of Wumbein's female audience, prompting the storyteller to correct himself as follows:

... Yes the riverside, has been his home; and whenever the dry season is approaching, he quickly moves closer to the riverside. ⁴.

'The burns he sustained when n-ɲmii visited him are the blotches on his skin,' chips in another of Wumbein's audience.

'Enn!' Wumbein agrees with him and concludes amid applause:

'Ehen! That's why the python's skin has dark and brown blotches.'

'That's true, that's true,' concurs one of his audience while another one who appears more interested in why pythons now live in the wild quizzes: 'So that was what drove the python into the bush?'

To this, Wumbein responds in the affirmative: 'Yes, the riverside.'

(After these exchanges, the next storyteller commences his tale.)

Notes

1.

It is common practice in Konkomba culture for close friends, especially the youth, to share meals regularly. The practice is often a mark of the

depth of a friendship as close pals will usually visit each other's houses and eat together as part of the things they do together. It's a symbol of trust between two or more friends, and also feeds into the Konkomba communal living spirit as this practice ultimately unites the families of friends.

2.

This line is a truncation of the Likpakpaln interrogative clause, 'Ki cha la ki ni kuur kina?' (transliterated as 'Where to, when it's so dry?'). But it can be translated in this context as 'Where am I going in this dry weather/season?' Note that the phrase, 'Ki cha la' is non-subject specific. The subject is only determined contextually. As a result, in other contexts, the phrase could be translated variously as: 'Where are you going?' / 'Where is he/she/it going?' / 'Where are we going?' etc.

3.

In Konkomba culture, this 'welcoming' will often commence with the offering of water, after which kola nuts, tobacco, or a local drink called pito can be offered – depending on the guest's preference or what is available. After this, food can then be served. The guest will either eat together (from the same bowl) with one of the host's children or with the host, if they have a close relationship (e.g., as friends or relatives). The former case (i.e., a child of the host eating together with the guest) is known in Likpakpaln as lisambichuu /lisa'mbitsu:/ (transliterated as 'the act of holding a bowl').

4.

Here, the correction effected by one of Wumbein's audience points to the fact that even though the individual Konkomba (KKB) storyteller has the liberty to select, add, and/or omit certain details in a tale, the audience can still serve as checks and balances on the veracity of his/her details. This underscores the communal ownership and policing of the development of tales among KKB communities. However, individual storytellers can always agree or object to and defend any detail or details that are contested by their audience.

A Glossary of Likpakpaln Words

enn!:

is one of the interjections used to say 'yes' in Likpakpaln.

kinakuɔk:

a round room that serves as the main entrance to a typical Konkomba house. It has two doors at both ends to serve as the passage in or out of a house. It also serves as a place for relaxing or hosting visitors/guests. In ubor's palace, kinakuɔk usually has a stage or a raised platform where ubor sits to hold meetings and perform other functions. Thus, kinakuɔk can assume political significance rather than being a mere passage or a place for hanging out or playing host to visitors. Within this political context, kinakuɔk can be used as a synonym or a metonym (in literary speech) for ubor or the authority of ubor. It is therefore normal for a Konkomba to say that 'Kinakuɔk has spoken' – meaning, 'Ubor has

spoken.'

n-ŋmii:

Likpakpaln word for fire.

ujuun:

Likpakpaln word for a python.