

## Introduction

The following story is one of many in Konkomba folklore that proffer explanations as to how and why certain animals are either domestic or wild. In this particular tale, the story relates how sheep came to be domestic animals. The story has it that the household of a certain *ubor* (i.e., leader of a Konkomba community) first encountered a singing lamb on their farm and brought it home. Since then, sheep have remained domestic animals. To watch the Likpakpaln narration [click here](#).

## Story

‘My story is as follows:’ Piigri announces to her audience and proceeds without waiting for them to respond.<sup>1</sup>

Once upon a time, there lived a certain *ubor* who had three wives. He stored his food in a silo on the farm so whenever the women needed food, they had to go to the farm and fetch some. One day they needed food so the first wife went to the farm, together with the *wunlaan*, and instructed the latter to climb and fetch the food from the silo. On entering the silo, the *wunlaan* saw a lamb. When he touched the lamb, it bleated as follows:

*(The storyteller intones a song and her audience join in.)*

(Mbeeh mbeeh ee<sup>2</sup>  
Dandar ka nyaa) x2

Saa kimar nluu  
Dandar ka nyaa  
Saa kimar nkpee  
Dandar ka nyaa  
Ki mar nlu ki mar nkpee  
Dandar ka nyaa.

The *wunlaan* and *ubor*’s wife broke into a dance on hearing the song. After a while, the second wife had to make a follow-up. On arriving, she reproved her co-wife and *wunlaan* for taking longer than usual to return with the food, noting that their husband was complaining angrily back home about their delay.

The three then agreed that the second wife’s son should climb into the silo and fetch the food since the *wunlaan* had failed. When the boy entered, he also touched the lamb and it broke into song again:

(Mbeeh mbeeh ee  
Dandar ka nyaa) x2

Saa kimar nluu  
Dandar ka nyaa  
Saa kimar nkpee  
Dandar ka nyaa  
Ki mar nlu ki mar nkpee  
Dandar ka nyaa.

At the sound of the song, all of them started dancing. After some time, the third wife arrived at the scene to find out what was causing the hold-up. She also rebuked her two co-wives and *wunlaan* for taking longer than usual, adding that their husband was complaining angrily back home that he was famished.

The others suggested that the third wife's son should enter the silo and fetch the food since the *wunlaan* and the second wife's son had failed. On entering, the boy also touched the lamb and it broke into song:

(Mbeeh mbeeh ee  
Dandar ka nyaa) x2

Saa kimar nluu  
Dandar ka nyaa  
Saa kimar nkpee  
Dandar ka nyaa  
Ki mar nlu ki mar nkpee  
Dandar ka nyaa.

All present started dancing and failed to return with the food.

After waiting for a long time, *ubor* sent another *wunlaan* to find out what was holding up his wives at the farm. On arriving at the farm, the *wunlaan* asked why they had delayed in returning home, adding that their husband was complaining angrily back home. They then told him that the others had failed to fetch the food so he should give it a try.

The second *wunlaan* went in, also saw the lamb and touched it, whereupon it burst into song:

(Mbeeh mbeeh ee

Dandar ka nyaa) x2

Saa kimar nluu  
Dandar ka nyaa  
Saa kimar nkpee  
Dandar ka nyaa  
Ki mar nlu ki mar nkpee  
Dandar ka nyaa.

At the sound of the song, all started dancing again and failed to return home. Eventually, *ubor* had to follow up in person to find out what was wrong. When he got to the farm, he saw his household and asked why they had failed to return. They then told *ubor* that they couldn't fetch the food because there was something that was singing in the silo, and that *ubor* should help fetch the food himself. On entering the silo, *ubor* saw the lamb and touched it, whereupon it started singing:

(Mbeeh mbeeh ee  
Dandar ka nyaa) x2

Saa kimar nluu  
Dandar ka nyaa  
Saa kimar nkpee  
Dandar ka nyaa  
Ki mar nlu ki mar nkpee  
Dandar ka nyaa.

After listening to the song, *ubor* suggested that they take the lamb home, together with the guinea corn they had gone to fetch, so that after eating food, they could then dance to the lamb's song properly. *Ubor* and his household, thus, returned home with the lamb and tied it outside their house. Unfortunately, the lamb broke free. But instead of returning to the bush, it stayed home. That's why to date, sheep are domestic animals – they used to be wild animals.

'This is the end of my story,' Piigri concludes.

## Note

### 1.

Piigri's commencement of her tale without waiting for a response from her audience is a common phenomenon in the Konkomba storytelling culture. On occasions when a storytelling session has been ongoing for a while, a storyteller who announces his or her intention to tell the next

tale can commence without any interruption from his or her audience since they have been listening and responding to previous storytellers. Their response is contextually implied in their silence and presence at the session.

2.

The musical interlude is untranslatable because it is not of Likpakpaln origin and contains a lot of meaningless words. It is in Dagbani, the language spoken by one of the neighbours of the Konkomba people. Thus, this story is clearly of Dagomba origin. According to the storyteller, they memorised it from school where their colleague told it. Unfortunately the musical interlude cannot be translated since some of the words are mispronounced by the storyteller and so cannot be found in any Dagbani dictionary. While this points to how folktales can travel and metamorphose in different cultural contexts, it also highlights the challenge with translating meaningless words.

## **A Glossary of Likpakpaln Words**

### **ubor:**

the political head of a Konkomba community. Ubor is usually the eldest male member of the royal family. He inherits that position from his father after the latter's demise. Thus, Konkombas practise the patrilineal system of inheritance.

### **wunlaan:**

Likpakpaln word for a linguist. It is of Mole-Dagbani origin. In traditional Ghanaian politics, the linguist is a male official at the royal court. His duties, among several others, include serving as the mouthpiece for the ruler of a people, the intermediary or liaison officer who conveys messages from subjects to their rulers, and an emissary on high diplomatic missions between rulers. The word linguist is therefore not used in the context of scholarship in Linguistics or someone skilled in several foreign languages. But the choice of this word for this office might be attributable to the fact that one major prerequisite for this office is mastery of court language. Typically, in Ghanaian royal courts, rulers and their elders speak in proverbs and a highly sophisticated language that the ordinary person cannot understand. So it is usually the responsibility of the linguist to decode and transmit such language from the court to the people. Similarly, the linguist also encodes messages from subjects in court language before transmitting them to rulers. Thus, there is usually no direct communication between rulers and their subjects – linguists speak for either party in the appropriate language. In Konkomba culture, the roles of the linguist extend to running errands for the wives of rulers. This explains why in this story, the wunlaan is asked to fetch food for ubor's first wife.