

2 Language Profile

Goemai Proverbs

What is a proverb? A proverb is a short, popular saying that is regarded as an embodiment or representation of a cultural value, commonplace truth, or useful thought. We have many of these in English, such as “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush”, and “don’t count your chickens before they’re hatched.” Proverbs usually make use of metaphor – neither of these English proverbs is limited to birds or chickens. The former says that to have one thing for certain is better than to have two things unknown, and the latter warns against making plans before contingencies come to fruition. They can serve as simple warnings or lessons when given in a particular context; proverbs serve a similar function in culture to moral-infused stories, but in a much shorter form.

In this discourse, two speakers discuss the Goemai proverb that translates into English as ‘The road to the house of a relative is made by your feet’. The speakers explain: Relatives and neighbors regularly visit each other to show their commitment to each other, to share in each other’s sorrows and joys.

You can listen to each line of this conversation by clicking on the appropriate sound file, indexed by line number.

After reading through the narrative, ask yourself: Are there similar proverbs in English or another language that you are familiar with? How are they similar? How are they different?

The narrators are: Louis Longpûan (LL) and Andreas Shakum (AS)
This short conversation was recorded on May 17, 2004.

Note: The first line of every unit (blue text with a line number) is a hyperlink that will play an audio file.

1 LL: Wààr lù gòemì, à sh'é hààr tóe.
path:of compound:of relative FOC foot eat EMPH

‘The road to the house of a relative is made by your feet.’

2 AS: Gòènnòe=hòe à tàl mú?
this.one=exactly FOC greeting right

‘This is (a proverb about the importance of) greetings, right?’

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3 *T'òng góe=muáán gòe=tál góenyé góe.*
will you=go you=greet neighbor your
'You will go and greet your neighbor.'

4 *Lá góed'áár d'á tál.*
when/if tomorrow tomorrow greet
'And tomorrow, he will greet you.'

5 *Là góe=nyáng gòe=gòe muààn, bì lá d'á p'ét fâ?*
when/if you=refuse you=to go thing when/if tomorrow come.out what
'If you refuse to go, what if something happens to you tomorrow?'

6 *D'óng t'òng góe=nyáp mé dé góe d'óng yì ò?*
it.is.better will you=prepare really so.that should be.good PART right
'Isn't it better that you have invested (in friendship, so that your friends can help you), so that things should turn out good?'

7 *LL: Dé gòe d'óng yì.*
so.that should be.good PART
'So that things should turn out good.'

8 *AS: À bì gòenyáp ái.*
FOC thing for.preparing hey
'It's something that needs an investment, hey.'

9 *LL: Ní d'á muààn lú góe, gòe=muààn lú múk zák.*
he when/if go compound your you=go compound his also

10 *D'á muààn lú góe, gòe=muààn lú múk zák.*
when/if go compound your you=go compound his also
'When he goes to your house, you also go to his house. When he goes to your house, you also go to his house.'

11 *AS: À bòep'úát tóe.*
FOC how.it.come.out EMPH
'This is how it happens.'

12 *LL: Sh'é gwén hààr wàkáám tóe.*
foot your eat road EMPH
'Your feet have made the road.'

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13 AS: *À bòep'úát tóe.*
FOC how.it.come.out EMPH
'This is how it happens.'

14 LL: *Yâuwá.*
right
'That's right.'