

Proverbs in Zhangzhou: Interaction between Language and Culture

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Abstract

This work presents the first attempt to document proverbs of a Southern Min variety of Zhangzhou spoken in Southern China to the audience beyond the Chinese scholarly community. Four different forms of proverbs, namely sayings, allegorical sayings, trisyllabic idioms, and quadrisyllabic idioms, elicited from the field data collected by the author in the urban area of Zhangzhou are described in this study. The various forms differ from each other either in the internal structures, the way the integrated meanings are conveyed, or the number of syllables. Each component of the proverbs is glossed in English and their implied meanings are explained with reference to the associated cultural context of Southern Min. The documentation not only reflects how the local culture is embodied and passed down in terms of speech acts, but also provides valuable evidence for future studies in semantics, pragmatics, and/or anthropological linguistics.

Keywords: Saying; allegorical saying; trisyllabic idiom; quadrisyllabic idiom; Zhangzhou.

Introduction:

Whether called maxims, truisms, idioms, idiomatic expressions, sayings, allusions, and/or adage, proverbs are considered a collection of pithy bits of wisdom and truth that reflect the values and beliefs of a community (Schuster, 1998; Stoch, 2017). They have prevailed for centuries and continue to be used as an effective spoken tool to express various meanings and intentions, ranging from the general truths of advice; values of ambition, virtue, patience, generosity and warning; and summary of human experience; to the instructions that encourage people to act and behave in difficult situations (Mieder, 1993; Schuster, 1998). For example, proverbs like ‘when in Rome, do as the Romans do’, ‘better late than never’ and ‘big fish eat small fish’ are often heard in personal interactions. The proverbs not only have a didactic function to support one’s arguments, educate younger generations, or

enrich daily conversations, but also contribute to the cultures of all nations despite the regional diversities.

The forms of proverbs are diverse. For example, they are understood as Shuyu 熟语 in Sinitic languages but include saying (Yanyu 谚语), allegorical saying (Xiehouyu 歇后语), quadrisyllabic idiom (Chengyu 成语), and other forms of idiomatic expression (Guanyongyu 惯用语). Various forms of proverbs differ from each other with respect to the internal structure (Li, 2016; Ma, 1994; Murar, 2009; Stoch, 2017; Wu, 1995; Yang, 2007). For example, a saying generally involves concise sentence(s). An allegorical saying contains two parts, whereby the first is either a descriptive phrase or a sentence, while the second appears to be an interpretative phrase. Idiomatic expression, instead, is a fixed phrase which functions as a special type of lexeme in full sentences. Thus, it is of linguistic interest to analyse different proverb forms within the formal paradigms of either discourse and/or syntax.

The meanings of proverbs are generally figurative and culturally-grounded (Li, 2016; Murar, 2009). In some circumstances, it appears difficult to deduce the integrated meanings of certain proverbs from their constituents without referencing the associated social-cultural context. In this regard, the insights that a proverb conveys can serve as a window into the history, culture, lifestyle, and mindset of a community being considered (Li, 2016). Learning proverbs of different backgrounds can thus provide a way to expand our multicultural repertoire, and through the sharing of proverbs, we can reinforce the similarities and differences among people around the world (Schuster, 1998).

This paper reports on the first work to document proverbs of a Southern Min variety of Zhangzhou spoken in Southern China to the audience beyond the Chinese community. Four distinct forms—sayings, allegorical sayings, trisyllabic idioms, and quadrisyllabic idioms—are described and interpreted. The chosen examples not only reflect how various forms of proverbs differ in their internal structures and how the local culture is embodied and passed down in terms of speech acts, but also shed light on future studies with respect to semantics, pragmatics, and/or anthropological linguistics.

Zhangzhou and Corpus

Zhangzhou

Zhangzhou 漳州 is a prefecture-level city situated in the southern Fujian province in South-eastern Mainland China, at the longitude 116° 54' 0" to 118° 08' 0" east and latitude 23° 34' 0" N to 25° 15' 0" north. It faces the Taiwan Strait to the east and borders Xiamen, Quanzhou, and Longyan to the

east, northwest, and west, respectively, in Fujian and, to the southwest, Chaozhou in the province of Guangzhou.

According to the Bureau of Statistics (2017) report, the total registered population of Zhangzhou was around 5.10 million, with a natural growth rate of 9.0%. Although the population is ethnically diverse, at about 98.5%, the Han ethnic group predominates, while the remaining 1.5% or 75,400 inhabitants, most of whom (about 58,000) immigrated to the city either to work or to study, are of 47 nationalities. Zhangzhou has the second largest population of She 畬 ethnic group in Fujian and has the largest population of Gaoshan ethnic group in Mainland China. Zhangzhou is also well known as the ancestral home of Taiwanese and other overseas Chinese expatriates.

The colloquial language spoken by the majority of inhabitants is Strait Hokkien, which is considered as the ancestor of Southern Min. The southern counties of Dongshan and Zhao'an appear to represent a variety of the adjacent Teochew Southern Min. The two Southern Min varieties have a certain degree of mutual intelligibility, while both are mutually unintelligible in relation to other Sinitic dialects (e.g., Mandarin, Hakka, Cantonese, Wu, Xiang, and Gan).

Mandarin, as the national language of China, is used as a medium of instruction in the educational and public contexts. Hakka is spoken only by a relatively small number of people living in mountainous areas of western Zhangzhou, for example, Hua'an, Nanjing, Pinghe, and Zhao'an counties, bordering a major Hakka-speaking city of Longyan.

Corpus

Ma (1994) and subsequently Yang (2007) documented the proverbs in this Southern Min variety but in the form of Standard Chinese, constraining their accessibility to those scholars outside the Chinese community. Their phonemic transcriptions, especially in the tonal pitch, are considerably different from those examined in Huang's (2018) study that is grounded in field linguistics and acoustic phonetics. In addition, it appears difficult to identify the source of the data for Ma's work, since the descriptions provided by the author appear not as representative of the urban area as he claimed, but are rather a combination of the sound systems adopted in the urban and other counties, such as Zhangpu.

Thus, the aim of the present study was to provide an accessible and up-to-date documentation of this dialect. The corpus presented here was collected in 2015 by the author in conjunction with her field work for her PhD project. Twenty-one native speakers (nine men and twelve women) from the urban area of Xiangcheng and Longwen districts were recorded for the tone sandhi investigation. In addition, another group of six native speakers (four men and two women) was recorded for local vocabulary documentation. All twenty-

seven speakers included in the investigation were asked to offer a short narrative, local stories, proverbs or rhyming songs, or contribute other speech that they wished to share. The recordings of proverbs that were mainly provided by male speakers constitute the corpus presented in this study. All informants were born and raised in the inner city and have spoken Zhangzhou Southern Min as their primary colloquial language since childhood. Their parents and spouses are all native speakers as well. This selection of informants ensures that the obtained data is representative of this Southern Min variety.

In the present study, the transcriptions of both segments and suprasegments are kept consistent with those formulated by Huang (2018). Segments were transcribed using IPA 2005 symbols, whereas the tonal pitch was described using Chao's (1930) notational system with 1 representing the lowest level and 5 the highest of the individual's pitch range. For example, a level tone is represented by two instances of the same number (e.g., [33] or [55]), and a rising or falling tone is represented by increasing and decreasing numbers, respectively (e.g., [25] or [51]). When required, 6 was introduced to denote the tone having extra-high pitch level in the non-utterance final context. In what follows, each component of the proverbs is glossed in English before providing explanation of their implied meanings in italics. The details on the research locality and speaker selection, the data collection procedure, as well as the segmental and suprasegmental system of Zhangzhou Southern Min, can be found in Huang's (2018) thesis.

Sayings

The sayings documented here are understood as Yanyu 谚语 in Sinitic culture. They generally involve grammatically full sentence to express an observation, opinion, advice, or a wisdom that exists in a vernacular form and could be memorised easily (Stoch, 2017). The meanings of sayings are not always figurative; instead, they can be explicitly stated. The contents conveyed in sayings are diverse, covering family, education, strength, health, success, and social networking topics, among others.

1. **tsø63 kəŋ35** **tsø63 kʌ63** **ʔəm63.ɦin33.ɦəŋ35**
 be grandpa be until late and dark

‘Being a grandpa means being [active] until the day is late and dark.’

- tsø63 ɦẽ51** **tsø63 kʌ63** **kjø63 ʔm32 kẽ51**
 be grandma be until shout Neg. dare

‘Being a grandma means being [active] until she does not dare to do so.’

ʔu32 ts^hwi41 bɛŋ32 tso63 sjɛ35
have mouth does not make sound

‘Elf child, listen with your ears, but keep your mouth closed.’

Parents admonish their children to keep silent and not to speak up when adults are having a discussion. The English equivalent is “a child should be seen and not heard.”

5. **pwɪ32 sin22 hɔŋ33.te63 twɛ33**
meal deity emperor big

‘The dinner god is as big as an emperor.’

Having meals is an important part of daily life, so children are admonished to concentrate on eating and not to be distracted during meal times.

6. **tsjɛ32 dɔ32 t^hɛw22; sjɔ63 dɔ32 bwe51**
eat road head cherish road end

‘Relying (on someone’s help) at the beginning of a journey; cherishing (him) at the end as well.’

This saying advises cherishing forever the persons/things that were helpful at the beginning.

7. **t^hɛn63 tsɪ22 bɔ33 sɔ41; sɛ63.bjɛ33 tjɔ32 kɔ41**
earn money no number life need take care

‘However much you earn, you need to take care of your health.’

This saying admonishes individuals not to lose sight of what is more important—their live/health—while they are earning money.

8. **tso63 hi63 t^hɛw22; k^hit65.tsjɛ32 bwe51**
perform dramabegin beggar end

‘An actor at the beginning; a beggar in the end.’

The idea here is that someone living a life of luxury, such as an actor, ends up penniless later in life. Thus, elders would admonish the younger generation not to squander the things that they had. The English equivalent is “Here today, gone tomorrow.”

9. **sě33 dī33 kwě35; dǐ32 dī33 ɓwě51**
three year official two year full

‘A three-year official has had enough in two.’

The proverbial official has a three-year-long mandate but tires of it well before his tenure is up. The notion is that individuals tend to lose their enthusiasm over time, while also suggesting that some officials are unable to devote themselves fully to serving the public.

10. **ts^hjə63 t^hew33 ts^hjə63 ɓin33 tsjɛ32 ʔu32 sin33.**
smile head smile face eat have leftover

‘A smiling face leaves one with leftovers.’

- ɓin32 ʔju35 ɓin32 zjɛw22 pɛk65.tə51 ʔjɛw35.**
face worried face wrinkle belly hungry

‘A worried and wrinkled face leaves one with a hungry belly.’

The notion here is that a positive personality brings one more than enough to eat, while a negative personality brings one bad luck and not enough to eat.

11. **tsɛ33.ɓə51 swi35 ɓɛk32.tsju35;**
women beautiful eyes

‘Women are beautiful for their eyes.’

- tsɛ33.pə33 swi35 ts^hi63.ts^hju35**
man beautiful beard

‘Men are beautiful for their beards.’

The notion here is that different classes of people are judged differently and that individuals view their surroundings in unique ways. This saying conveys an admonishment to have an open and positive attitude and to accentuate what is positive.

12. **ts^hɛ33.ɓě33 tsɪŋ35; ʔě33.kɛw35 dɪŋ22**
blind precise dumb effective

‘Though blind, the blind man is precise; though dumb, the dumb man is nimble.’

The disabled compensate for their disabilities; more broadly, individuals tend to have defects but also merits.

13. tʰi33.kəŋ35 sjə63 ɣəŋ32 kjɛ̃51.
heaven deity favour stupid kid

‘The deity of heaven favours stupid kids.’

Even foolish people can prosper.

14. twə32 pun51 pwə32 ɬə33 ɬun51
big capital gambler fear

‘There is no fear of gambling when one has lots of money.’

This saying expresses the idea that the possession of resources brings confidence and also that officials sometimes squander public funds on themselves.

15. ʔə33.ku35 kɛ̃35 twə32.ʔjɛ̃22;
turtle fake big man

‘A turtle is a fake big man.’

kʰit65.tsjɛ̃22 kɛ̃35 ɬə35.tjɛ̃35
beggar fake official

‘A beggar is a fake official.’

The notion here is that those without power may behave in an overbearing manner as if they are powerful.

16. kʰi35 tsʰu41 pʰɛ̃j63 pwɛ̃63 djɛ̃w33
build house dispatch half material

‘Offer half the material to build a house.’

This saying describes a negative social phenomenon: some individuals do shoddy work, skimping on the materials and thus their commitments to others.

17. **zin33 tsiŋ22 tsun35 ts^hj532 ki41;**
human relation just like saw

ʔu32 dɛj22 kə63 ʔu32 k^hi41
have come also have go

‘Relationships among people are like a saw going back and forth.’

Maintaining a relationship between individuals requires effort from both.

18. **tsj532 swē35 k^hwē63 swē33 si41;**
climb mountain observe mountain shape

‘Climb a mount in to observe its shape.’

zip32 ɸwī22 k^hwē63 dɛŋ33 ʔi41.
enter door observe people feeling

‘When you to in, observe the host’s feelings.’

Here the idea is that one should maintain a flexible attitude and adjust to changing surroundings.

19. **si35 dʒēw35 kwə63 ts^hju32t^hew22,**
dead cat hang tree head

‘Hang a dead cat on a tree.’

si35 kəw51 pɛŋ63 tswi35 dɛw22.
dead dog place water flow

‘Let a dead dog be washed away.’

This saying suggests that each individual has his or her own destination and that different issues have different solutions. It also advises remaining flexible and open to the world.

20. **ts^hin33 sē33 kjē51 ʔe32 tʃə63 ɸɛ32 ɸə35 ʔjen22**
blood-related birth kid also need father mother destiny

‘Kids also need a predestined relationship with their parents.’

This saying suggests that parents have a large influence on their children's lives and that individuals should be tolerant of the unfairness that they may encounter in life. It also reflects a general faith in Sinitic culture.

21. tse33.ɸɔ35 kin35.ʔe ts^hɛj63 tsi35 ɸjẽ33
 female kid vegetable seed destiny

‘Girls have a destiny like that of vegetable seeds.’

This saying reflects the limited control that women used to have over their lives in the old days, since they left their parents after marriage, like seeds that scatter and grow wherever they end up.

22. ts^hɛj32 tɔ35 ʔm32 dɛj33; dɛj32 tsjɛn33 si22
 vegetable knife Neg. sharp sharp fry spatula

‘A blunt kitchen knife but a sharp frying spatula.’

This saying inverts the usual situation, in which the knife is expected to be sharper than the spatula; the implication is that, also contrary to expectations, men do not perform better than women.

23. p^hɛ63 hɔ51 dʒɛ32 ts^hɛt221 ts^hin hjẽ33.ti33
 beat tiger catch thief blood-related brother

‘Blood brothers overcome the tiger and catch the thief together.’

The idea here is that close relations work together at crucial moments to confront threats, meaning that family members are the most supportive individuals in one's life and need to be cherished.

24. ɸɔ33 hɔ35 si32.twɛ33; dɔ32 ɸɔ33 hɔ35 si32.se41.
 no good adults then no good children

‘No-good parents mean no-good children.’

This saying suggests that parents need to be a good role models for the next generation. The English equivalent is “The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.”

25. sjɛw63 dʒɛn22 ʔm32 p^hɛ63.pjẽ41
 young year Neg. strive

‘No striving in youth.’

tsjɛ32 dɛw33 hɔ33 ɸjɛ33.sjɛ35
eat old Neg. reputation

‘No reputation in old age.’

This saying suggests that success in life depends on hard work early on.

26. kɛ33 tsjɔ35 khjɔ41 khɛ63 hɔ35 dɛŋ32 tsjɔ41
more less collect comparative good active voice borrow

‘Gathering is better than borrowing.’

This saying encourages self-sufficiency, indicating that accumulating a modest amount of resources is better than borrowing from others.

27. tsit32 hɔ32 bi51 tsjɛ32 pɛ63 ʔjɔ32 dɛŋ22.
one size rice eat hundred type people

‘One type of rice can nourish a hundred kinds of people.’

This saying suggests that those who are raised in the same background can have different personalities, for better or worse.

28. ʔju33.kɛm35 hɔ35 ɸwe35 bi33;
gooseberry good final flavor

‘The gooseberry is sweet in the end.’

kɛm33.tsjɛ41 tɸw33 ɸwe35 tɪ35.
sugarcane head end sweet

‘The sugar cane is sweet from one end to the other.’

The idea here is that some experiences are pleasurable all the way through and others only at the end, suggesting that even those whose lives begin in difficulty may find sweetness in old age

Allegorical Sayings

Allegorical sayings, known as Xiehouyu 歇后语 in Sinitic languages, as one kind of proverbs, are unique in terms of form (Lai, 2008). They contain two parts: one portraying an image of an object, an event, or a situation, and

the other indicating the meaning to be derived from the first part. The first part can be either a phrase or a cause that functions as a subject; while the second part appears to be a predictive phrase. Their combination forms a full sentence that conveys information to be derived through conceptual mechanisms. In this section, nine allegorical sayings are presented, all of which are rooted in the folk knowledge with a high degree of colloquialism and reflect general opinions of Zhangzhou community. The two constituent parts mentioned above are separated by an em-dash.

1. **p^hɛ63.tsi22** **ts^hju35kut41**
 beat break hand bone

— **tø63** **ʔjɔŋ51**
 instead strong

‘A fractured hand is that much stronger.’

The idea here is that hardship makes an individual stronger.

2. **ts^hit65 ʔe** **pwẽ63 ʔɛ55.ʔɛ**
 seven Poss. half duck

— **ʔm32** **tsẽj33 si51**
 Neg. know death

‘Ducks on the mid-July don’t foresee their deaths.’

In Southern Min culture, thanksgiving offerings, mainly cooked poultry, including duck, are presented to deceased family members in the middle of the seventh month of the Chinese calendar (corresponding to mid-July), something of which the ducks are of course unaware. The idea is that individuals are often unprepared for momentous events in their lives.

3. **ts^hẽ33.bẽ33** **djẽw35** **djẽw2.tjø** **si35** **djẽw35. ts^hi51**
 blind cat catch dead mouse

— **t^hɛw63.tu35.k^hɛm51**
 as luck would have it

‘A blind cat catches a dead mouse.’

Since a blind cat would be a poor hunter of mice, its luck in coming across a dead mouse suggests the possibility of a happy coincidence.

4. **hwe33.sj535** **djəm32** **kiŋ35**
monk recite scripture
- **ʔu32** **ts^hwi41** **ʋə33** **sim35**
have mouth no heart

‘A monk recites the scripture with his mouth but not in his heart.’

This saying describes an individual who is merely going through the motions when performing an important task.

5. **ts^hwə35.dɛ̃41** **dɛŋ32** **ke33** **kɛŋ35**
grasshopper tease chicken male
- **ts^hwɛ32** **si41**
seek death

‘The grasshopper teases the rooster to its peril.’

This saying describes individuals who take risks foolishly or in ignorance,

6. **pɛŋ63** **p^hwi41** **t^hwi63** **k^hɔ41**
release fart take off trouser
- **kɛ33** **kɛŋ35**
add **effort**

‘He takes his pants off to fart.’

This saying describes an individual prone to taking unnecessary actions.

7. **ʋə33** **k^hi51** **tsjɛ32** **tɛw32** **hu33**
no tooth eat bean curd
- **tu35** **hə51**
just **fine**

‘The toothless man has no problem eating bean curd.’

This saying describes how individuals find ways to meet their needs despite obstacles.

8. **hə35 djɛ̃w35 kwən35 pɛ32 kɛ35**
 good cat look after hundred home
- **kɛ33 pə22**
 home old lady

‘A good cat looks after hundred homes.’

In Southern Min culture, old women are often regarded as involving themselves in affairs that are and are not their concern, so the saying criticizes meddlesome individuals.

9. **sɛ̃33 kɛ33 ɸwĩ35 ɸə22; pɛŋ63 kɛ33 səj51 ʔu33**
 bear hen egg no place hen shit yes
- **ɸə33.ɸə32.ʔjəŋ33**
 useless

‘When a hen bears an egg, don’t keep it in chicken shit.’

This saying describes an unproductive action.

Trisyllabic Idioms

Trisyllabic idioms are referred to as conventionalised expression (Guanyongyu 惯用语) in Sinitic languages. They differ from sayings and allegorical sayings in terms of the internal structure, while differing from other forms of idiomatic expressions in the number of syllables and/or the source/origin. The trisyllabic idioms are colloquialisms that are created and formed by the community members in the course of their everyday activities. They are mostly used to express emotional attitudes, such as disappointment, disgust, or appreciation. They function as a single lexeme in full sentences, but differ from other common lexemes by virtue of their conventional implications, which is difficult to deduce based on the literary meanings of individual components. Below, 18 trisyllabic idioms that are commonly heard in the local society are introduced.

1. **ɸə33 ɸək32.tsju35**
 no eye

‘Eyeless.’

This term describes individuals who are indifferent to the world around them.

2. **ḡə33 ts^hɛj35.kəŋ35**
no effort

‘No effort.’

This saying describes an individual who wastes effort on something unworthy.

3. **ḡɛj35 ts^hju35si41**
bad hand posture

‘Bad gesture’

This saying describes an individual who is unlucky at gambling.

4. **ḡə32 ki33 ts^hju35**
five quantifier beard

‘Five beards.’

This saying describes a lustful man, known as a ‘cat’ in Southern Min culture.

5. **kī63 tsī33 si51**
see money death

‘Die of seeing money.’

This saying describes an individual who places financial gain above all else.

6. **ʔjɛw35 sju32 pə33**
shorten longevity strategy

‘A fatal strategy.’

This saying describes an unworkable strategy.

7. **ʔə33 ʔɛ33 ts^hwi41**
black crow mouth

‘With a crow’s black mouth.’

This saying describes an individual who says something undesirable and ominous; the crow represents bad luck in Sinitic culture.

8. **tək65 ts^hwi63 kɔ51**
fight mouth drum

‘Bicker.’

This saying describes individuals who are joking around.

9. **pwē63 t^hew33 ts^hē35**
half head immature

‘With a head half-grown.’

This saying describes an individual whose actions and decisions show a lack of maturity.

10. **?m32 kəw63 kwi51**
Neg. enoughghost

‘Not enough of a ghost.’

This saying describes an individual who acts or dresses in an inappropriate manner.

11. **hə35 ts^hwi63 tswi51**
good mouth status

‘He keeps his mouth good.’

This saying describes an individual who likes to greet others with soothing words.

12. **ts^hē33.ḡē33 ɣu22**
blind cow

‘A blind cow.’

This saying describes an illiterate individual suited only to menial labour.

13. **kəw32 ?wə32 səj51**
thick speech shit

‘Diarrhoea mouth.’

This saying describes an individual who is overly talkative.

- 14. səŋ63 kɛ63 ʔm41**
send marriage aunt

‘An aunt of the bride duties.’

This saying describes an individual is knowledgeable about the surrounding culture and also likes to dictate orders. In Southern Min culture, this term also refers to a professional (usually female) who provides services relating to traditional weddings.

- 15. kɛ33 pø33 sə51**
home elder woman sister-in-law

‘The old sister-in-law in the house.’

This saying describes a woman who likes to involve herself in the affairs of others. Traditionally, women stayed at home to do housework and, when they met together, were thought to gossip.

- 16. t^hɛw33 tsjɛ32 pɔ33**
steal eat step

‘Gain sth. by trickery’

This saying describes individuals who take advantage of the rules to further their own purposes.

- 17. k^hjɛw63 ts^hwi63.tswi51**
bend upwards mouth lips

‘Purse up one’s lips.’

This saying describes an individual who is unhappy with an outcome or decision.

- 18. dəw63 ʔɛ32 hɛm35**
drop lower jaw

‘He’s dropping his jaw.’

This saying describes an individual who is overstating something.

Quadrisyllabic Idioms

Quadrisyllabic idioms known as *chengyu* 成语 in Sinitic culture are distinguished by form and function from sayings and allegorical sayings, while being distinct from trisyllabic idioms in terms of the number of syllables and sources. The quadrisyllabic idioms of Zhangzhou are largely colloquial, and their meanings appear deducible from their constituents. They are full of rhythm and cadence that can be divided into two feet, a tempo that is easy to verbalise and memorise (Wu, 1995). Due to their colloquial and rhythmic features, the quadrisyllabic idioms are commonly used by native speakers in everyday conversations to congratulate, attract attention, advise, suggest, or to warn. In this section, 18 quadrisyllabic idioms are presented to reflect the interaction between Southern Min language and culture.

1. hwɛ33 tʰɛw33 hi35 ɸin33

happy head happy face

‘Happy thoughts, happy face.’

This saying suggests that happiness is an honest emotion.

2. tsjɛm33 kʰɛ33 ʔju63 tsʰju51

needle foot tender hand

‘With a needle foot and a tender hand.’

This phrase describes an individual who is pampered.

3. tʰɛj33 ke35 kɛ63 kɛw22

kill chicken teach monkey

‘Kill the chicken to teach the monkey.’

This saying describes punishing one individual as a warning to others.

4. ɸun35 kʰi41 kju33 tsɛj22

tolerate breath pursuit wealth

‘Put up with [bad] breath to pursue wealth.’

This statement suggests that one should not lose out on business opportunities because of another’s unpleasant personal characteristics.

5. ɸi33 sjɛ35 ɸɛ35 hɛw51

donkeyvoice horse cry

‘The voice of a donkey and the braying of a horse.’

This saying is used to describe harsh voices or songs.

6. **pɛ35** **ɸɪ33** **pɛ33** **tse41**
full year full festival

‘Full year, full festival.’

This saying describes abundance at new year’s festivals.

7. **kʰɛŋ33****tsʰwi63** **pɔ32** **tsi22**
empty mouth chew tongue

‘Empty your mouth and chew your tongue.’

This saying is used to describe individuals who gossip and say foolish things.

8. **ʎɔ33** **ku35** **pi63** **tswɛ22**
black turtle tortoisese

‘Black turtles, tortoises, and snakes.’

This saying is used to describe a group of undesirable individuals.

9. **ɸwi35** **tʰɔ22** **tsʰim33** **kut221**
soft soil deep dig

‘Dig deep in soft soil.’

This saying describes individuals who are easily bullied.

10. **ɸɛŋ33** **ɸɛj33** **kɛ63** **kʰi41**
people come guest go

‘People come, guests go.’

This saying emphasizes the importance of mutual interactions for maintaining a relationship.

11. **tsʰɛw63** **tʰɛw22** **kɛw32** **ʎjɔ22**
stinking head thick medicine

‘Stinking head, thick medicine.’

This saying indicates that individuals with a certain disease encounter a series of troubles.

12. djɤ32 ku35 tsɤw35pi41
catch turtle escape tortoise

‘Catch one turtle, lose tortoise.’

This saying describes individuals who lose one thing while attending to another.

13. sɤm33 put65 ɣɔ32 si22
three unlike five hour

‘More like three than five hours.’

This saying is used to describe something that happens very frequently.

14. fɤ33 ɣu22 sɤj35 fɛ51
no cow use horse

‘If there’s no cow, use a horse.’

This saying describes the need to adjust to the changing circumstances.

15. put65 sɤm35 su32 djɤŋ51
unlike three like two

‘More like two than three.’

This saying is used to refer to things or people that appear strange and are difficult to classify, are ‘neither fish nor fowl.’

16. pi35 ts^hju35 ʔwɤ32 tɔ35
gesture hand draw knife

‘Use hands to draw a knife.’

This saying describes an individual who likes to use body language and also indicates that some individuals like to involve themselves in others’ business.

17. ʔu32 ʔjən22 bə33 ts^hjən22
have fate no decline

‘Don’t decline a person who has a predestined relationship.’

To express that people emphasize a predestined relationship in their social activities.

18. ts^hẽ33 t^hɛw33 ts^hɛ33 ɸin33
immature head immature face

‘Youthful face, youthful mind.’

This saying describes an individual who is indifferent and arrogant.

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