

Expressions of Equalities, Similarities, And
Equivalence in Kpèlè

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In Kpèlè as in any other language, people express equality, likeness, similarity, inequality, dissimilarity, and so on. The expressions of these ideas are common to all human groups, because it is generally true that there are always, among people and other things, equalities, and inequalities; similarities and dissimilarities. For these reasons, therefore, I shall try to point out the various usages of the terms equality, similarity, and likeness.

Equality.

In Kpèlè, we express equalities through the use of the terms -pòorissè, -kàa sù, serié...pó. pòori (south western pòri) here basically means 'able or to be able'. One may say: /Da pòori gèi/ 'I can or am able to do it'. Or /bòorissè nà/ 'he is able with it or at it'. Hence the term pòorissè usually conveys the idea of capability, ability, and thus strengthen. For this reason, when we are comparing two or more things, whatever quality it may be, we are, in the real sense, comparing their capability or strength, although the native Kpèlè speaker may not be conscious of this fact. And from my own experience in the language, the Kpèlè speakers believe that two things of the same strength and ability must either have the same length or the same size. A tall man be believed to have greater strength than a short man. Likewise, a huge man may be said to have a greater strength than a small man. Therefore, to say that two things are equal means that they are equal in length or in size. We may say: /Fólomo dà Tòkpa dí pòorissè/ 'Folomo and Topka are equal'; or /ùrui ní dà ùrui tí kòon á kè dí pòorissè/ 'measure this stick and that stick if they are equal'. We may also use this word to measure the wealth, the beauty, etc. of two or more persons or things. For instance we can say: /Sumo dà kekúla dí fé pòori ní tso-lâa sù/ 'Sumo and Kkula are not equal in wealth'. We may also say: /Noai dà Kótoo dá fé pòori ní léle-lâa sù/ 'Noai and Kotoo are not equal in beauty'. Pòorissè in all of these statements conveys the idea of ability and strength. Sumo and Topka do not have the same ability or strength in height, size or in beauty.

Similarly, the phrase kàa sù (is inside) can be used in comparison.

Su with the initial low tone, zu, means "in it". But it is combined with káa to reflect the idea of "is in the same group or class". To tell a man that he is equal up to you either in height or size or in importance, you may say: /kwà yà kú káa zù/ 'you and I are in the same class or you and I are in it, meaning you and I are equal'. For further examples, one may say: /Kà Sumo ká fé zù/ 'you and Sumo are not equal'. This phrase, like pôrisse, is used to compare two things in height, strength, importance, etc.

In like manner, we use the word seri in comparing two or more things. The word itself means "reach or complete a certain level or stage of achievement". We can say: /gélei áa seeri/ 'the piassava tree has reached or is now ready'. Usually, people say this when they discover that the piassava tree is at the stage where it can produce wine. We may also say: /Kwáa seeri daai sú/ 'we have reached the town'. Hence this word is used to show a given destination. But as has been indicated above, we use this word in comparing two persons or things. For instance, I may say: /í fé seeri ní mbó/ 'you are not equal up to me or you have not reached the stage I am'; or /mòrci tí òwíe fé seeri ní mòrci ní òwíe pó/ 'the weight of that bag is not equal to this bag'. /Zev ní òkétci fé seeri ní nyíti òkétci pó/ 'the bigness of this thing is not equal to the bigness of that'. From here it immediately follows that the phrase seeri...pó, like pôrisse and káa...sù, is used in comparing the length, sizes, weight, as well as the importance of two or more people or things.

From the usages of these words and phrases, we can discover that, beside seeri, they cannot indicate exactly which of the persons or things compared is the bigger or the biggest, especially if it is a negative comparison. For instance, if one says: /kwá yà kú fé pôri ní/ 'you and I are not equal', he has not indicated which person is the bigger or who is the smaller person. But with seeri there is no doubt as to who is the bigger or smaller. For instance, if I say: /í fé seeri ní mbó/ 'you are not equal to me', the "you" is undoubtedly the smaller person. Hence, apart from seeri, unequality in Kpèle is completely ambiguous. However, in a comparison where two equal things are compared, such ambiguity does not exist, because all are, in all cases, equal.

Similarity.

To indicate similarity, we use the words mélenôî, gáa tonóo, di kúlái à gie, etc. Mélenôî itself (in western Kpèle mólenôî) means active, smart, and according to Liberian English, frisky. We can say: /í sélenôî/ 'you are active or frisky'; /or íí í fé melen à nyáa kpéni féi kwa yá kú fé pòori ní/ 'Don't be frisky with me, because you and I are not equal'. Usually people who feel superior over against the next man make such expression. However, we use mélenôî in showing similarities or likeness between two person or things. ~~For~~ For instance, we can say: /Tòkpa dà Sumo dí mélenôî dí kée mà/ 'Tokpa and Sumo look alike or literally Tokpa and Sumo are active or frisky with one another'. Here mélenôî indicates the appearances of the things compared, but it is not used regarding the height of the things. For instance, we do not say: /Tòkpa dà Fólomo dí mélenôî dí kée mà/ 'Tokpa and Fólomo resemble', if they are the same only in height, but we can say this if they have the same appearance, regardless of their height. However, we can use this word to compare two or more qualities or characters of people or things. We may say: /Tòkpa dà Fólomo dí sòp mélenôî gée mà/ 'the behavior of Tokpa resembles that of Fólomo'. Or /Tòkpa pòtíi kè-père sélenôî Fólomo mà/ 'Tokpa's manner of working resembles that of Fólomo'. Or /Tòkpa kóya-père sélenôî Fólomo mà/ 'the tallness of Tokpa resembles that of Fólomo, or literally the way Tokpa is tall resembles that of Fólomo'. It may, perhaps, appear paradoxical to say that this kpèle word is used in referring to appearances of objects when we can use it in comparing the height or behavior of people or things. But this paradox is inevitable, because if we say / Sumo dà nía dí sélenôî dí kée mà/ 'Sumo and his brother resemble', we are basically referring to their appearances instead of their height. At the same time, however, we can say /Sumo kóna-père sélenôî nía mà/ 'Sumo's height resembles his brother's. From here, it immediately follows that the word mélenôî is used in referring to the entire structure of a given object, including the height, the appearance, and other qualities.

Dí kulâi à gêe.

Like sélenôí, the phrase dí kulâi à gêe is used in expressing similarity; similarity, basically in the sense of appearance. However, it may be used to express similarities in the behavior and conduct of two or more objects. But for us to have a clear understanding of the meaning and the usage of this phrase, it is necessary for us to take it apart and let each word stand as it occurs in kpêle constructions. Here we will discover that dí, in the phrase, /dí kulâi à gêe/, is a personal pronoun of the third person in the plural form. We can say /dí pà/ 'they came'. And kula, in this series, means to go out, come out, move out, etc. We can say /í ímu séve é kúla/ 'get up and go out'. Or /Kula bérci mù/, 'come or go out of the house'. Finally, gêe-kêe, (Southwestern - kie) is a word used to indicate togetherness or "in combination". We may say, /kú kè gêe mà/ 'we did it together'. Or /kú dí à kè à gêe/, 'we did them at the same time'. This expression indicates the doing of something at the same time and not necessarily in the same space, although sometimes this may be the case. For instance, we can say /Sumo dà kekúla dí vli à gêe/, 'Sumo and kekula slept at the same time.' And at the same time we can say /Sumo dà kekúla dí dímolon pú gêe mà/, 'Sumo and kekula put their rice together'. Or /Sumo dà kekúla dí tíi kè gêe mà/, 'Sumo and kekula worked together, meaning Sumo and kekula were doing one piece of work together'. Therefore, if these words are put together to form the phrase dí kulâi à gêe, they will present the literal meaning "they are taken out or pulled out at the same time or together". This thus gives us the idea of similarity, because objects put in the same group or in the same class must, at least, have certain characteristics in common.

Here again we cannot avoid the use of paradox concerning the usages of the phrase dí kulâi à gêe. As has been indicated above, this phrase is used basically to indicate an appearance. That is, when we say /Noai dà kótoo dí kulâi à dí gêe/, we do not have any other idea in mind but their appearances or the manner in which their bodies are generally constructed without taking into consideration any specific body feature, such as height, face, hands, etc. But we can also say /Noai dà kótoo dí kôya-père kulâi à gêe/,

'the manner of the tallness of Noai and Kótoo is similar'. Or /Noai dà Kótoo dí sɔn kulâi à gêe/, 'the behavior of Noai and Kótoo is similar'. Therefore, it appears quite striking to me to discover that these two phrases, /dí séleŋôi and dí kulâi à gêe/, which basically refers to appearances, are also used in referring to such abstract ideas as behavior. How can one tell the appearance of something that does not have some physical structure or form?

Gáa tɔnɔɔ

/Gáa tɔnɔɔ/ is a phrase which is used to convey quite a different idea from the one presented by the two phrases as indicated above. This phrase literally means "it is one or they are one". But we can use it to show similarities between objects. One can say: /Tokpa dà Fólomo dí káa tɔnɔɔ/, literally Tokpa and Folomo are one, meaning they are the same. However, this expression of similarity does not indicate appearances, behavior, or other bodily features; it indicates a common source of the things compared. That is, if we say that /Tokpa dà Fólomo dí káa tɔnɔɔ/, we are indicating that they have a common parental background, or they have a common ancestry. And even if we say: /Dúŋ ní dà nyíti dí káa tɔnɔɔ/, this tree and that one are one', we are indicating that they have the same origin. However, gáa tɔnɔɔ can be used in a tremendous number of ways to indicate similarities. For instance, we can say /gáa à zii tɔnɔɔ/, 'it is or they are one kind'. Sii here is a general term which may refer to the common origin of the things or to the appearances of them. We can say /Kolo-sii tɔnɔ ká tí/, 'that is the same kind of book or these are the same books'. This statement can be valid if the books have the same color and also valid if they contain the same materials and sometimes, but not normally, if they have the same shape or sizes. And without the use of sii as pre fix tɔnɔ the idea of appearance or other body feature cannot be clearly seen, although it may be implied. Moreover, one may say /gáa a sùu tɔnɔɔ/, 'it is or they are of one lineage'. Suu here conveys the idea of lineages, but instead of merely indicating members of the lineage, it indicates the preservers of the lineage. For instance, we can say /kpai-sùu/ 'corn stored up for future planting'. Or /molor-sùu/, 'corn stored up for ~~future~~ the same purpose'. But at the same time we can say /núu-suu/ 'man's lineage'. For instance, one may say,

/Abraham-sũũ sũ wê dí yĩsè kãa naa/, 'it was in the family line of Abraham that they had Jesus'. Objects are often categorized by the use of this phrase, and any two members in the category are said to be the same. But this similarity is strictly based on common origin rather than on appearances or on any bodily feature.

The negative of all the words and phrases, beside suu, which are used to show similarities is the phrase tofo...mũ, 'fall under'. For instance, if two things are not the same in any qualities, it is said to be "fallen under". /sɛp feers à wàla kɛ à mèrɛnɔɔ gɛe mà kpàa mò dí pɔ̀riɛ̀e, dɔ̀nɔ toóòì mù/, 'if two things are not the same or equal, one of them is fallen under or is lowered in quality in which they are measured.'

To conclude, it is needless to discuss likeness and equivalence at this point, because these two ideas are implicit in the use of pɔ̀riɛ̀e, sɛrɛnɔɔ, kulɛ̀i a gɛe, etc? For instance, if we want to say that the bucket is equivalent to the basket, we will simply say /bòkii ní dà gbòlɔ̀i tɛ̀ dí pɔ̀riɛ̀e,/ or /dí kãa tɔ̀nɔ̀ɔ/, or /dí seeriɛ̀e dí ã̀e pɔ̀/, etc." I believe that these forms of Kpɛ̀le expressions seem to be logical, because if two things are equal (pɔ̀riɛ̀e) one can naturally be equivalent to the other one in many respects.

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