

## **Some international proverbs**

These examples are from the Spoken Language section of my *As They Say in Zanzibar: Proverbial Wisdom from around the World* (2006).

### **LANGUAGES**

You are as many a person as languages you know (*Armenia*)  
Who knows the language is at home everywhere (*Netherlands*)  
The eyes have one language everywhere (*England*)  
A nation without a language is a nation without a heart (*Wales*)  
The echo knows all languages (*Finland*)  
Don't talk Latin in front of the Franciscans (*France*)  
God is better pleased with adverbs than with nouns (*England*)  
Not even a schoolteacher notices bad grammar in a compliment (*USA*)

### **WORDS**

Words will pay for most things (*Spain*)  
Many speak a word which if it were a florin they would put back in their purse (*Germany*)  
Words shake but examples attract (*Serbia*)  
'Tis a good word that can better a good silence (*Netherlands*)  
Good words make us laugh; good deeds make us silent (*France*)  
Small cares make many words, great ones are mute (*Germany*)  
Words do not make flour (*Italy*)  
Words are good, but fowls lay eggs (*Germany*)  
An ox is bound with ropes and a person with words (*Italy*)  
A proverb places the words in one's mouth (*Switzerland*)  
A kind word warms for three winters (*China*)  
Where hands are needed words and letters are useless (*Germany*)  
A true word is not beautiful and a beautiful word is not true (*Japan*)  
A word flies away like a sparrow and returns to the house like a crow (*Germany*)  
Many books do not use up words; many words do not use up thoughts (*China*)  
Actions speak louder than words (*England*)  
Better one living word than a hundred dead ones (*Germany*)  
A word and a stone let go cannot be called back (*England*)  
A good word never broke a tooth (*Ireland*)  
A bad word whispered will echo a hundred miles (*China*)  
To kill with words is also murder (*Germany*)  
Every word has three explanations and three interpretations (*Ireland*)  
Say kind words to hear kind words (*Korea*)  
Promise is a bridge of words, unsafe to walk across (*Germany*)  
Many a true word is spoken in jest (*England*)  
The second word makes the fray (*Japan*)  
Words and feathers are taken by the wind (*Spain: Basque*)  
Who does not understand half a word will not be wiser for a whole word (*Finland*)

### **NAMES – TITLES**

Those who own the boat should give it a name (*Norway*)  
Good painters need not give a name to their pictures; bad ones must (*Poland*)  
A good child has several names (*Estonia*)  
A name doesn't harm us if we don't harm the name (*Estonia*)

Call out a name in a crowd and somebody is sure to answer (*China*)  
No nickname, no wealth (*China*)  
A dog with money is addressed 'Mr Dog' (*USA*)  
Don't call the alligator a big-mouth till you have crossed the river (*Belize*)  
You come with a cat and call it a rabbit (*Cameroon*)  
The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right names (*China*)  
Bad is called good when worse happens (*Norway*)  
Good silence is called saintliness (*Portugal*)  
When you are chased by a wolf you call the boar your uncle (*Slovenia*)  
Proverbs are so called because they are proved (*Italy*)  
If he calls it a silly and childish game, that means his wife can beat him at it (*USA*)  
Call a spade a spade (*England*)

### **SPEECH**

It is easier to speak than to say something (*Ukraine*)  
They that love most speak least (*Scotland*)  
Speak of the miracle, but don't mention the saint (*Philippines*)  
Turn your tongue seven times before speaking (*France*)  
Those who have a great nose think everyone speaks of it (*Scotland*)  
When everyone speaks, no one hears (*Scotland*)  
Wine and children speak the truth (*Romania*)  
Where paper speaks, beards are silent (*France*)  
Those who speak much must either know a lot or lie a lot (*Germany*)  
Those who have not seen a hare run, must not speak of fear (*Italy*)  
Who speaks of it commits it not (*Italy*)  
Speak, lest tomorrow you be prevented (*Kenya*)  
An untouched drum does not speak (*Liberia*)  
Many a true word is spoken in jest (*England*)  
The meaning is best known to the speaker (*France*)  
Speech is silver; silence is golden (*England*)  
A child learns quicker to talk than to be silent (*Norway*)  
Money talks (*England*)  
When gold talks, speech is useless (*Latin*)  
Beware the husband who talks (*Greece*)  
The tongue talks at the head's cost (*England*)  
A crow in a cage won't talk like a parrot (*USA*)  
Talk of the devil and he will appear (*England*)  
The frightened person has many voices (*Finland*)  
There is nothing so eloquent as a rattlesnake's tail (*USA*)  
Example is a great orator (*Czech Republic*)  
A lie has no legs, but a scandal has wings (*England*)  
Slander by the stream will be heard by the frogs (*Mozambique*)  
Death and proverbs love brevity (*Germany*)  
The town that parleys is half surrendered (*France*)  
Dead men tell no tales (*England*)

### **CONVERSATION**

An hour of play discovers more than a year of conversation (*Portugal*)  
Conversation is a ladder for a journey (*Sri Lanka*)  
A good conversation is better than a good bed (*Ethiopia*)

Too much discussion will lead to a row (*Côte d'Ivoire*)  
Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it (*USA*)  
It is possible to talk to cattle if you have common sense (*Switzerland*)  
Scholars talk books; butchers talk pigs (*China*)  
After three days without reading, talk becomes flavourless (*China*)  
Birds hear talk in daytime, rats hear talk at night (*Korea*)  
Don't talk Latin in front of the Franciscans (*France*)  
Don't tell all of your jokes on one program (*USA*)  
Never argue with someone who buys ink by the barrel (*China*)  
Gossip needs no carriage (*Russia*)  
Empty gossip jumps with one leg (*Estonia*)  
Gossip lasts but seventy-five days (*Japan*)  
Those who gossip about their relatives have no luck and no blessing (*Netherlands*)  
Gossips always suspect that others are talking about them (*Nigeria*)  
Lovers have much to relate – but it is always the same thing (*Germany*)  
What is said over the dead lion's body could not be said to him alive (*Congo*)  
The person who says it cannot be done should not interrupt the one doing it (*China*)  
Think much, say little, write less (*France*)  
Hunger doesn't say, 'Stale bread,' and cold doesn't say 'Old coat' (*Georgia*)  
'If I rest, I rust', says the key (*Germany*)  
'Virtue in the middle', said the devil as he sat between two lawyers (*Norway*)  
The fish said, 'I have much to say, but my mouth is full of water' (*Georgia*)  
Don't holler before you're hurt (*USA*)  
Before going to war say one prayer; before going to sea, two; before getting married, three (*Poland*)  
That which you would say to another, say to yourself first (*Estonia*)  
That which is said at table should be wrapped up in the tablecloth (*Italy*)  
Those who are silent do not say nothing (*Spain*)  
One may say what one has kept silent, but not keep silent what one has said (*Switzerland*)  
Least said, soonest mended (*England*)  
Little said is easy mended; nothing said needs no mending (*Ireland*)  
Everyone who says goodbye is not gone (*USA*)  
Never say 'whoopee' before you jump (*Canada*)  
Say kind words to hear kind words (*Korea*)  
A weasel comes to say Happy New Year to the chickens (*China*)  
It may be true what some say; it must be true what all say (*Scotland*)  
When everybody says you are drunk, go to sleep (*Italy*)  
People who do what they say are not cowards (*Nigeria*)  
Don't quote your proverb until you bring your ship to port (*Scotland*)  
A fault denied is twice committed (*France*)  
Put up or shut up (*USA*)  
The story is only half told when one side tells it (*Iceland*)  
If you don't hear the story clearly, don't carry it off with you under your arm (*Thailand*)  
An old story does not open the ear as a new one does (*Nigeria*)