Nyanja/Chewa proverbs as didactics: Recontextualising indigenous knowledge for academic writing

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Abstract

The paper explores how Nyanja/Chewa proverbs as stores of indigenous knowledge can be used to teach Nyanja/Chewa morphology and grammar, and as a tool to sensitise learners on aspects of academic writing. Using systemic functional linguistics and selected Nyanja/Chewa proverbs, the researchers illustrate how the patterning and the realisation of proverbs as texts in social contexts scaffold interpersonal meanings including appraisal and attitude, and stance. In turn, the researchers argue that proverbs typically have two thematically related parts, which can be used to teach aspects of academic writing in respect to appreciation of textual cohesion and coherence in meaning making. The researchers show that proverbs are typically structured to express evidentially, absolute truth and flawless logic, all of which are characteristic of academic writing. The researchers conclude that proverbs can be used as resources in the teaching aspects of pervasive language and, critical and cognitively demanding analytical skills.

Introduction

Proverbs are a dying feature of African discourse. Very few Africans still use proverbs in their speech and such use is mostly confined to the rural areas and a few elders. The demise of African proverbs will mean the death of a vast body of knowledge and wisdom embedded in them, ranging from social commentary to knowledge of astronomy, physics, biology, etc.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe (1994), the undisputed father of African literature, describes African proverbs as the palm oil with which words are eaten. Proverbs are a critical ingredient for effective verbal communication and human interaction. Proverbs can be said to embody knowledge gained over years and they are also vehicles to disseminate such knowledge. They give life-lessons to new and wider generations of people. The aim of the paper is to show how proverbs can be used to teach aspects of Nyanja/Chewa grammar as well as techniques of academic writing such as stance, persuasive language and critical appreciation of evaluative language. Using the typical structure of proverbs which has two parts, which the researchers identify as *topic* or *thesis statement* followed by logical argumentation for support or 'proof,' the researchers argue that this is also the basic structure of the construction of academic discourse.

Chewa also known as Nyanja is one of the most widely spoken language in South-Central Africa, especially in Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, as a first or as an additional language. The name Nyanja is widely used in Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique to avoid the ethnically charged word Chewa. In Malawi the name Chewa is more prominent than Nyanja, especially after the personal instigation of the 'Life President' Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who elevated his own 'Chewa' ethnic group over other groups in Malawi. The neutral label 'Nyanja' was slowly and surely replaced by 'Chewa' in the media, books and teaching material published in Malawi. However, the researchers want to argue that its increasing role as a lingua franca in Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe means that it has outgrown its ethnic baggage, and that its role in socio-economic and education development of speakers, a significant number of whom are not ethnic Chewas, cannot be ignored. The researchers shall use the term Nyanja/Chewa to capture how the language is named differently where it is spoken.

At the beginning of 2014 the Zambian government proclaimed that Zambian languages should be used as languages of teaching and learning for the initial first 3-4 years of schooling. Two large provinces, Eastern and Lusaka, the latter also happens to host the capital city, have been zoned to use Nyanja/Chewa as the primary language of initial education. Lusaka city and province attract people from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The new government initiative puts a spotlight on the teaching of Zambian languages, and in this case, the teaching and learning of Nyanja/Chewa. This means that the teaching and learning of Nyanja/ Chewa language and indeed grammar is critical, as mobility of children in as far as education (and subsequently, socio-economic) is concerned depends on the language skills they would have acquired. Children with poor language skills whether in African languages or former colonial languages cannot be expected to excel educationally, let alone socio-economically.

It is ironic that Malawi has gone in the opposite direction and has abandoned Nyanja/Chewa as the language for initial literacy and opted for English. However, it is unlikely that the situation will change significantly as Nyanja/Chewa has penetrated the entire fabric of Malawians' socio-cultural and economic spheres. In other words, the role of Nyanja/Chewa in Malawi is unlikely to be diminished by the policy change. There is still a huge debate as to whether the decision by the Malawian government on language policy should go unchallenged considering that research findings (such as Williams 1996) showed that the Malawian children who stated learning in English later after starting off with Nyanja/Chewa as their language of instruction did better in English and Nyanja/Chewa tests conducted than the Zambian counterparts who started all learning in English and learnt Nyanja/ Chewa as a subject later.

In his analysis of Nyanja/Chewa proverbs, Banda (2008) describes proverbs as 'capsules' of wisdom. They have also been described as 'libraries' of wisdom, norms and beliefs (Kamanga 1996). They are dynamic and are not bound by time or place. In addition to inculcating into adolescents what the elders consider as 'truths,' proverbs have been

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described as functioning to warn, offer advice, praise, teach morals, rebuke and so on (Banda 2008; Kambanda 2004).

Kamanga (1996) classifies proverbs into three broad groupings: (a) *Miyambi yoweluzila milandu* 'Proverbs used in judicial cases', (b) *Miyambi ya mikhalidwe* 'Proverbs for character formation and for inculcating good morals', and (c) *Miyambi yosiyana-siyana* 'Proverbs for miscellaneous purposes'. More often, in interaction between an elderly person and a younger one, the educational characteristic of proverbs is provided in the accompanying 'life lesson' or narrative. This may explain why Majasan (1969) calls proverbs suppressed stories.

In his study of Kinyarwanda proverbs, Kambanda (2004) concludes that proverbs can provide authentic teaching material on which African languages and former colonial languages such as French and English can be based. In this respect, he argues that proverbs can provide the platform on which learners can hone their writing and speaking skills.

The paper shows that the typical structure of proverbs constituted by two thematically related parts, 'the beginning' and 'the end' can be used to teach aspects of academic writing and particularly how to recognise and value textual cohesion and coherence in meaning making in discourse.

Defining Indigenous Knowledge

The problem of what constitutes indigenous knowledge (IK) or local knowledge has been discussed by a number of researchers (Banda 2008; Banda et al. 2013; Hoppers 2004; Jackson 2014). The researchers' review of literature on the subject shows that different scholars define IK differently making the concept illusive to operationalise. The International Council for Science (abbreviated as ICSU) Study Group (2002) associate IK with traditional knowledge. IK is thus seen in terms of cumulative knowledge acquired over time, which includes knowledge related to 'language, naming and classification systems, resource use practices, ritual, spirituality and worldview' (ICSU 2002: 3). Basically, IK is about a people's know-how, practices and interactions with others and their environment as passed on from one generation to another. Such a definition is too wide and too encompassing to be operationalised, and it seems to suggest that subsequent generations accept such knowledge without question.

Hoppers (2004), however, suggests that subsequent generations do not just accept the knowledge passed on as they engage with it and oftentimes alter it to suit their current needs. At the same time, Hoppers (2004: 2) links IK with traditional knowledge, which she contrasts with cosmopolitan knowledge, that is, culturally anchored in 'Western cosmology, scientific discoveries, economic preferences and philosophies.' Hoppers (2004: 3) further categorises IK as constituted by the following: agricultural, meteorological, ecological, governance, social welfare, peace building and conflict resolution, medicinal and pharmaceutical, legal and jurisprudential, music, architecture, sculpture, textile manufacture, metallurgy and food technology. These find focus as situated knowledge and skills in

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songs, rituals, dances and fashion; as well as in a range of technologies such as in 'garment weaving and design, medicinal knowledge (pharmacology, obstetrics), food preservation and conservation, and agricultural practices – including animal husbandry, farming and irrigation - to fisheries, metallurgy and astronomy.' It is interesting that Hoppers does not include 'education' in her categorisation. It is not clear how such knowledge and skills could be achieved without some form of education or apprenticeship. The researchers believe 'education' is a critical component in any categorisation of IK. Education is not categorised in the formal Western kinds of 'learning', but includes those forms of education that are part of the culture of growing up in society.

Boven et al. (2002) describe IK as local knowledge and as a complete body of knowledge, as practiced and maintained in rural areas in particular. It is non-formal and is handed down 'orally from generation to generation, and … seldom documented.' (Boven et al. 2002: 6). Thus for Boven et al. (2002: 6), IK is ethnic-cultural knowledge on which everyday localised decisions are based. Although they do recognise that IK is not static, Boven et al. (2002) appear to maintain that it is community and local culture based. The idea that IK should be ethnic-cultural bound and centred on local-level decisions runs counter to the globalised and opening up of societies. It also limits its appeal as it cannot claim its rightful heritage as transcultural capital. There is no doubt that IK is also found in urban areas of Africa and the Global South generally.

In essence, Boven et al. (2002) take on IK appears oblivious to the transnational trade based on IK systems spearheaded by China and India. In fact, as Jackson (2014) notes as countries in sub-Saharan Africa become more socio-economically integrated, they will find voice in the changing global economy. Indeed, there is growing interest in IK not only in sub-Saharan Africa but the world at large as people question the omnipotent wisdom in Western-based education and knowledge systems, which have failed to solve many of the world's problems. As people look to alternative knowledge systems and solutions to problems, they are increasingly looking at IK to provide solutions.

However, IK as a concept is rather elusive. Jackson (2014) argues that what some scholars have been describing as IK is in fact what he calls endogenous knowledge. He distinguishes endogenous and indigenous knowledge. He refers to endogenous knowledge as 'specific characteristics, values, ideas, knowledge, institutions and practices that pertain within a society' (Jackson 2014: 137). This is distinguishable from exogenous knowledge which comes from outside a society. Jackson (2014) defines IK from a political and materialist perspective as a representation of local marginalised people's voice in their resistance of national and global cultural flows, interests and forms of control.

Finally, the researchers agree with Jackson (2014: 136) that IK should not be viewed as fixed or a replication of the past, but as 'a dynamic within a cultural interface that constantly produces new knowledge and social forms (Jackson, 2011) albeit through geopolitical power dynamics that have a profound effect on this production.' Further, the researchers agree that research in IK should attempt to unravel and make transparent the 'global–local

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dynamic driven by power relations that seeks to impose a dominant view' that marginalises local indigenes, rather than 'contextualized local knowledge and practices' (Jackson 2014: 136). This means a consideration of political dimensions of IK is critical in determining the effects of national and global policies and practices on local communities' agency.

A number of studies have already followed this path and have sought to explore ways of empowering marginalised voices in the education system in Africa, which is mostly based on Western education, and oftentimes using a European language as the language of teaching and learning. Banda (2008) concludes that a more efficacious system is one that combines IK and Western-style education systems. This entails the following mainstreaming and incorporation of aspects of IK into the formal school curriculum; establishing IK as a core subject with a structure similar to those of other core subjects in the curriculum, and teaching IK as a component of the African languages that are taught in schools (Banda 2008).

Kaino's (2013) study shows how IK insights from the Tchokwe people found in Zambia, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo can be integrated into formal (Western) mathematic teaching and learning. Specifically, Kaino (2013: 88) demonstrates that 'indigenous knowledge extracted from traditional artefact structures [can be] used to generate concepts in … the school mathematics curriculum at high school level…[and] to develop ideas that lead to the determination of mathematical rules and principles.'

One problem with dissemination of education in Africa is that oftentimes learners find the Western-style classroom practice engendered by the school system far removed from their everyday cultural practices. In this regard, Banda et al. (2013) suggest that 'folklore, as a reservoir of indigenous knowledge and norms, might still be drawn upon to help solve problems of social cohesion in schools...'

The current paper's contribution relates to using proverbs as a capsule of IK to generate knowledge about Nyanja as a language and also to illustrate the structure and logical flow of academic discourse.

Methodology and analytical framework
The proverbs used in this paper are from personal recollections from the authors as they are used in everyday discourse, and some have been adapted from a book on a collection of Nyanja/Chewa proverbs, *Chinyanja China* (Gwengwe 2004). The use of the collection of these proverbs expedited the process of data collection. The database contains more than 100 proverbs and those that are used in this paper are selected on the basis of projecting and illustrating particular arguments.

Theoretically and analytically, the paper draws on systemic functional linguistics (SFL) as it enables us to relate the clause, text, culture and socio-context (Martin et al. 2004). In analyzing language and parts of speech, it is important to distinguish a clause complex and a clause simplex. The researchers start their analysis with a clause as it is the basic meaningful

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structure of message, and clauses combine to form clause complexes. In this way they are able to account for both spoken and written discourses, and meaningful texts that may not qualify as sentences in traditional grammar. Thus, a clause complex refers to the semantic and grammatical unit formed when two or more clauses combine in a meaningful manner (Eggins 2004: 254). Clause simplex refers to single unit clauses (or utterance constituted by a single clause). Clause or clause simplex can refer to a phrase or simple sentence in traditional grammar while a clause complex can be compared to a complex sentence, as it is constituted by a combination of clauses. To account for the structure of a clause, the researchers need to examine language as a system with different levels. In SFL, the different levels are known as rank scale whose building blocks are called constituents (Droga et al. 2002). Using rank scale enables them to identify the different units at each level (rank) in the formation of clauses and ultimately of co(n)texts. From the rank scale they can determine that a clause is made up of one or more groups of one or more words.

In Bantu languages such as Nyanja/Chewa, the agglutinative nature of the languages as described below means the clause complex can be made of one word as constituted by a stem or root to which meaning carrying affixes are attached.

The five groups recognised in SFL are: the verbal group, the nominal group, the adverbial group, the prepositional group and the conjunction group. The verbal group is made up of finite or non-finite verbs, and it may also have auxiliary verbs to denote tense or opinion. The main element in the nominal group is the noun or pronoun. In English, nouns or pronouns may be preceded by other words such as the determiner 'the', numerals and adjectives (Droga et al. 2002). The adverbial group is fronted by an adverb but can also have modifiers. The adverbial group is linked to the verbal group. The main element in the prepositional phrase is the preposition, but it is linked to the nominal group. The conjunction group is often constituted by a conjunction and linking clauses. In short, the clause as a grammatical unit comprises three main components, the nominal, the verbal and the adverbial groups, and hence the participants/actors, the process and the circumstance. The paper mainly focuses on the nominal group (the actors/ participants) and the verbal group (the action being done or taking place/ process), and to a less extent on the adjectival group (factors related to when, how, why in time and space of the action and participants/circumstance) since the last is associated with the second group. The conjunction group is linked to the other groups, and hence the researchers shall not treat it as a unique group in the analysis.

The advantage of using SFL rather than traditional grammar is that language as a system is simplified according to the functional structure of word-groups. The other advantage of using SFL is that the analysis of textual meaning is simplified by demarcating a clause into two major thematic parts: the starting point or beginning of a clause message called Theme, and the rest called the Rheme. Gerot et al. (1994: 102) argue that 'where we put information in a clause tells us about where the clause is coming from and where it is going to.' In constructing a clause, the two points of departure are the beginning and the end. Significant to this paper is that the two parts, the beginning called Theme and the end called Rheme in SFL enable us to account not only for cohesion and coherence in a clause

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simplex or clause complex but also in the accompanying discourse or text. This is because in SFL discoursal cohesion and coherence, that is, textual meaning is articulated by the thematic structure: the identity of Theme, what is being talked about, and the information structure and what is being said about it, Rheme (Deterding et al. 2001: 106).

Results and discussion
Teaching Nyanja/Chewa Morphology

One major downside to current education in Africa generally is that it is premised on formal aspects of Western education. It is also the case that Africans may be familiar with formal aspects of English, French, Portuguese and other colonial languages, but not of African languages, which they may speak very well. This is because the school systems in Africa have been structured in the image of Western education in terms of curriculum and delivery of content. In the majority of cases, even where African languages are taught, it is done in a foreign language. What we find is that formal aspects of English, for example, are taught from primary school, while grammatical aspects of African languages are often neglected. There is a mistaken assumption that since African children already speak African languages, they are also familiar with the grammar of the languages. Another mistaken assumption is that anybody who speaks an African language can teach it in school. Thus people without formal training and certification to teach African languages are often put in charge of classroom practice, often with disastrous consequences.

The researchers are mindful that teaching literature is very important for the development of linguistic skills and appreciation of cultural aspects of a particular speech community. However, in Africa, there is an over-reliance on teaching literature often at the expense of synta-grammatical and lexical aspects of African languages. The problem here is that African languages are appreciated only for pleasure and aesthetic value, rather than as capsules of knowledge, including 'linguistic' scientific knowledge. Crepeau (1985: 11) notes that proverbs appear independent of the linguistic aspects in a particular discourse. In this paper the researchers argue that the nature of proverbs could make it easy to teach grammatical aspects of languages. This is because although proverbs appear as isolated sentences or clauses, they always carry the socio-cultural contexts in which they are used. At the same time Crepeau (1985: 12) and Greimas (1970: 310) have described proverbs as presaged statements. Thus, their significance does not lie only on surface level meaning alone, but more so, on the socio-cultural contexts in which they are used. In this sense, proverbs may have multiple meanings depending on the communicative contexts. Hence proverbs can be looked at in terms of literal meaning, referential meanings and deeper implied and connoted meanings. This means interpreting and deciphering their meanings require analytical and cognitive demanding skills.

The next question is how do we teach 'grammar' using proverbs? One of the problems with teaching Bantu languages spoken South of the Sahara is that children's writing habits are often influenced by the writing conventions of European languages such as English and French, which dominate the school curriculum. The issue here is that whereas English, for example, tends towards isolation in terms of verbal morphology, Bantu languages are

agglutinative. By agglutinative, the researchers mean that majority of words, clauses and sentences are formed by joining several morphemes together (Miti 2006). Below we demonstrate using Nyanja/ Chewa how proverbs can be used to teach morphological aspects of the language.

Let us consider the following proverb:
1   *Mbalame zomwela cigobi cimodzi, zidziwana*
Nthenga 'Birds that drink from the same dish, [they] know each other['s feathers]'

The above clause complex is constructed from agglutinative words, which are in turn made up of different morphemes. It is made up of two main parts which are held together by the verb phrase *zidziwana* ('[they] know each other'). Nyanja/Chewa like other Bantu languages is governed by the nominal or noun class system, which also governs concord and 'grammatic arrangement of the clause, as shown below.

Class	Example	Verb agreement
1	mw-ana 'child'	u-/wa-
2	a-na 'children'	a-/wa-
3	mu-tengo 'tree'	u-
4	mi-tengo 'trees'	i-
5	di-so 'eye'	i-/li-
6	ma-so 'eyes'	ma-
7	ci-nthu 'thing'	ci-
8	zi-nthu 'things'	zi-
9	njuci 'bee'	i-
10	njuci 'bees'	zi-
12	ka-nthu 'tiny thing'	ka-
13	tu-nthu 'tiny things'	tu-
14	ululu 'pain'	u-
15	ku-dya 'to eat/eating'	ku-
16	pa-mwamba 'on top'	pa-
17	ku-bwalo 'outside'	ku-
18	mkati 'inside'	mu-

Source: Adapted from Simango (2012: 173)

The researchers can tell that the proverb construction is governed by the noun class 10 with the singular as class 9. This they can tell from the morphological analysis of the proverb as in: Mbalame **zo**-mwel-a **ci**-gobi **ci**-modzi, **zi**-dziw-an-a nthenga

Like *ng'ombe* 'cow,' the noun 'bird' is non-count and is located in classes 9/10 and this is also indicated by the prefixes *zo-* and *zi-*. The researchers also see that *zomwela* and *zidziwana* are agglutinated and are written as one word, but in English they constitute phrases 'That drink from...' and 'They know each other...' respectively. In Nyanja/Chewa, 'each other' is denoted by the affix –*an*-. They have the prefixes *zo-* and *zi-*, and the suffix –*a* being affixed

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to the verb roots –*mwel-* 'drink' and –*dziw-* 'know' to create meaningful clauses. Thus, *zomwela* and *zidziwana* are agglutinated words but also function as verb phrases as per traditional grammar. From an SFL perspective they constitute the verbal
group while the noun group or the actors are constituted by *Mbalame* 'birds,' *cigobi* 'cup' and *nthenga* 'feathers.' The researchers discuss the functional groups in more detail in the next section.

The researchers also know that the noun *ci-gobi* 'dish' is in class 7 whose plural form is in class 8, that is, *zi-gobi* 'dishes'. There is concordial agreement between prefixes for dish –*gobi* and number –-*modzi*, with both taking the prefix *ci-*. It is not just that each noun is assigned a class with an accompanying prefix (or non-prefix), each noun also has particular verbal and adverbial agreement affixes:

1. **Mw**-ana **u**yu ndi **w**a-**m**-tali. 'This child is tall'
2. **A**na **a**wa ndi **a**-tali. 'These children are tall'
3. **M**-kango **u**yu **u**li ndi njala 'This lion is hungry' [lit. This lion has hunger]
4. **Mi**-kango **i**yi **i**li ndi njala 'These lions are hungry' [lit. These lions have hunger]

The items in bold-type show the various agreements among the prefixes, demonstratives, adjectival and adverbial phrases.

Similarly, the following proverb can be morphologically analysed as follows:

2. Kuculukana nkwabwino, kuipila kuthesa mcele/msuzi [Ku-culuk-an-a n-kwa-bwino, ku-ipil-a ku-thes-a mcele] 'Being many is good, it is only bad in finishing salt/soup'

The clause is constructed around the verb roots –*culuk-* ('many') and –thes- ('finish'), and adjectival roots -*bwino* ('nice') and -*ipil-* ('bad'). It is also interesting to note that the form *n-kwa-* is made out of the coalescing *ndi kwa-bwino* 'is of nice' into an adverbial phrase. It is possible to extract the context in which this proverb can be used. It extols the virtues and advantage in number, but at the same time there is a warning that not everything can be shared if there are too many of you. No doubt such contrasts within a complex clause can be used to highlight and teach how to construct 'contrasts.'

The proverb below illustrates both the morphology and grammatical aspects of Nyanja/Chewa and also how the speaker's judgement and attitude can be expressed through choices in lexis rather than explicit use of attitude verbs, adjective and adverbs, which open up the possibility of the message in the proverb being rejected by the hearer.

3. Fisi akagwa m'buna sayankhula kanthu [Fisi ak-a-gw-a mu-mbuna si-a-nkhul-a ka-nthu] 'When/if a hyena has fallen into a hole, he does not say anything/has nothing to say'

The researchers see the various morphemes combining to form a meaningful clause complex. The speaker's judgement and attitude to the hearer is expressed in choice of lexis *Fisi* 'hyena' which is culturally associated with negative attributes. The hearer or person has been 'caught,' that is, 'has fallen into a hole' as expressed by the morphemes -*gw-* 'fall' and –*mbuna* 'hole.' In this case, s/he cannot avoid retribution, and s/he cannot talk himself out of trouble, as expressed by the negative prefix morpheme *si-* 'not' as in *si-a-nkhul-a* ('not

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he/she speaks'). The whole clause complex is stated as a fact which is premised on a condition of someone having already been caught out red handed. There is also implied a warning to the hearer that trying to 'dig' oneself out of the problem would only worsen the situation, as one might find oneself in a deeper hole, hence in a deeper problem. What is also interesting here is that the speaker is able to express disagreement, frustration and surprise without appearing to do so. In turn, the speaker is able to take a definite stand and (moral) value position while maintaining solidarity with the hearer. The researchers illustrate this further when they look at attributes of academic writing later.

Complex Grammar

The researchers make use of notations used in Halliday's (1994) SFL, in which the clause is the main carrier of the message. Thus, in functional linguistics, the clause is the basic unit of meaning (Droga et al. 2002: 10). As noted earlier, clause simplexes and clause complexes can be said to be formed by one or more groups comprising one or more words. Below the researchers look at a few proverbs to illustrate how the two main functional groups – the nominal and the verbal groups, in academic discourse, can be taught using Nyanja/Chewa proverbs. In turn, it is about teaching and learning how to maintain a logical flow in clauses, and thus how to achieve textual cohesion and coherence in discourse. A clause as transitivity can be said to be about Participant, Process and Circumstance (linked to Process) while a clause as message is constituted by the logical information flow, relating Theme to Rheme. In the examples below, we show the interaction between the nominal group and the verbal group.

4. **Kalulu adatuma njovu 'A hare sent an elephant'**

-kalulu	a-da-tum-a	njovu
(a) hare	(s/he) sent	(an) elephant
Nominal group	Verb group	Nominal group

Source: Author

The researchers see the nominal group being constituted by 'hare' and 'elephant' and the verbal group by '(s/he) sent'. In Nyanja/Chewa, the nominal pronoun *a-* 'I,' 'he,' 'she', honorific/ plural 'you' and so on are bound morphemes and –da- is tense marker morpheme. Gender identity is not marked. It is also interesting to note that explicit circumstance, such as where, when and how, is left out of the proverbs, and it does not affect the grammaticality and meaningfulness of the structure. Issues related to circumstance are carried by the communicative contexts, which include the co(n)texts in which the proverb is embedded. It is this feature of proverbs which makes them unbounded to time and place.

5. Calaka nyani cili ndi khambi 'What the monkey does not like, has a bitter taste'

Ci-a-lak-a -nyani	ci-li	ndi khambi
What the monkey does not like	has	a bitter taste
Nominal group	Verbal group	Nominal group

Source: Author

This proverb illustrates that the nominal group can be constructed by verbal, adjectival and linking words as shown in the first part of the clause complex above.

6. Mcikuta mulibe namwali 'In a labour/maternity ward, (there) is (found) no virgin'

M-cikuta	Mu-libe	-namwali
In a labour/ maternity ward	(there) is (found) no	virgin
Nominal group/ prepositional phrase	Verbal group	Nominal group

Source: Author

As noted above preposition groups are found together with nominal groups. In example

(6) above 'In a labour/maternity ward' can also be said to be a prepositional phrase. This illustrates how a clause may function as one of the constituents of another clause. The prepositional phrase is part of the nominal group in this case.

However, a clause may 'function as a constituent of one of the groups/phrases in a clause' (Droga et al. 2002: 13). Consider also the following proverb:

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7. Mwana wa mbuzi anaonela kwamake ukodzela mkhola 'The baby goat learnt from the mother to urinate in the kraal'

Mu-ana wa mbuzi	a-na-on-e-l-a	ku-a-make u-k odz-e-l-a m-khola
The baby goatLit. 'Child of goat'	(saw) learnt	from the mother to urinate in the kraal
Nominal group/ prepositional phrase	Verbal group	Nominal group/ prepositional phrase

Source: Author

In example (7), the prepositional phrase 'in the kraal' functions as a constituent of the wider prepositional phrase which also constitutes the nominal group.

To reiterate, explicit description of circumstance is avoided, so too is explicit modifications of verbs, adverbs, and adjectives. Consider the following modified proverbs, which as a result, lack logic and coherence.

5. *A **small** hare sent a **big** elephant
6. *What the monkey **likes**, has a **sweet** taste
7. *In a **big** labour/maternity ward, (there) is (found) no virgin
8. *In a labour/maternity ward **in our village**, (there) is (found) no virgin
9. *The goat learnt from the mother to urinate in the kraal'
10. *The baby goat learnt from the **father** to urinate in the kraal'

In (8) modifications through adjectives make sense and are grammatical as an ordinary statement. However, it ceases to be a meaningful proverb immediately 'small' and 'big' are added. The other problem is that it brings in a possible contradiction as it implies that if the hare is 'big' and an elephant is 'small' then the proposition would be fine. Such a proposition would lack logic and coherence as the proverb makes sense only when one younger or in a weaker position asks someone older or in a more powerful and authoritative position to do something for them. (9) has no cultural capital to go with it as it is the 'bitter taste' which is important and logically connects with 'does not like.' On the hand, (10) and (11) incorrectly assume that one could find 'virgins' in a 'small maternity ward' and 'other villages', respectively. The components of the structures in the proverbs may not be changed, and thus, (12) also fails by generalisation. It is not just any 'goat'; it has to be a 'baby goat.' The logic and coherence in (13) is lost through change in gender-related identity, as per speech community agreement, it is the 'mother' and not the 'father' (or 'aunt') that teaches the child to urinate. The child spends so much time with the mother, who breastfeeds and cares for it in its infancy.

In relating proverbs to academic writing we need to be cognisant of the fact that both are subject to community of practice. A community of speakers to which the hearer is also positioned as belonging premises the communicative effect of proverbs on the speaker presenting an authoritative voice on the topic as an accepted fact. This curtails any possible objections from the hearer, unless the latter counteracts with a different proverb. Since the 'voice' is constructed as emanating from an accepted common community of speakers' truth, there is no direct self-authorization as the speaker positions the hearer as sharing similar ways of seeing of things or interests as the community to which s/ he belong. This enables the speaker to present the 'voice' and the argument being presented as unimpeachable and to which the hearer needs to acquiesce without question.

Therefore, just like proverbs are constructed in a particular culture and follow a particular pattern agreed upon by a community of users, the same is true for academic writing, which follows a particular pattern and has been agreed upon by its community. Modifications to the structure and thematic pattern can have consequences. This is what makes proverbs an integral part of persuasive language, which is also a feature of academic writing. The researchers illustrate this argument further below.

In arriving at textual meanings, SFL has come up with notations Theme-Rheme to account for how languages organise and order information in a clause and to account for the connections within a text (Droga et al. 2002). The researchers noted earlier, that in languages such as English and French, the Theme is the element that comes in the first position in the clause and it is the starting point for the message. The rest of the clause is the Rheme. In teaching Nyanja/ Chewa grammar, however, it needs to be emphasised that unlike English and French, the language is agglutinative in that the Theme itself might appear as one word and carrying many conjoined morphemes, and the same is true of the Rheme. In fact, it is conceivable that the entire clause complex is constructed as one word. Thus in Nyanja, and it requires a more delicate morphological analysis to assign to each morpheme its function, than in English or French.

The researchers shall start this analysis by focusing on three kinds of starting points or Themes of a clause complex. Theme can be topical, that is, a participant, circumstance or process as indicated already. Topical theme may be preceded by a textual theme such continuative, contrastive, conjunction elements (for instance 'however,' 'moreover,' 'if/when' or interpersonal theme elements (for example, 'Surely,' 'fortunately/unfortunately'). Since proverbs do not allow modifications, the textual themes do not form part of the structure of proverbs but may be embed in the communicative co(n)texts.

However, in certain marked themes, conjunction elements 'if' and 'when' may be found fronting a clause. Consider the structure of the following Nyanja/Chewa proverbs.

14. Wakhungu akati nikutema waponda mwala 'When/if a blind person threatens to stone you, he/she has/must have stepped on a stone'

Wa-khungu a-kati ni-ku-tem-a	wa-pond-a mu-ala
When/if a blind person threatens to stone you	he/she has/must have stepped on a stone
Theme	Rheme

Source: Author

15. Mukaona khoswe aseka cona, pali dzenje pafupi 'When/if you see a rat laugh at a cat, there is/must be a hole nearby'

Mu-ka-on-a -khoswe a-sek-a -cona	pa-li -dzenje pa-fupi
When/if you see a rat laugh at a cat	there is/must be a hole nearby
Theme	Rheme

Source: Author

The above examples can be used to teach dependent and independent clauses, as well as techniques of textual organisation. Competent writers and speakers 'often choose marked Themes to give emphasis to important information, or to signal aspects of text organisation.' (Droga et al. 2002: 104). In examples (14) and (15) the dependent clause is being used as Theme to foreground the 'logical' relationship that exists between the two clauses. The first clause (Theme) is dependent as way of logical reasoning on the presence of 'stone, or 'hole' respectively.

The two examples can be analysed at two levels. First, each clause has its own Thematic structure and another structure where the dependent clause functions as the Theme of the whole clause complex (Droga et al. 2002: 104). The researchers illustrate this below:

It needs to be remembered that typically in declaratives, the subject of the clause complex is also the topical Theme, which also means that the Theme is unmarked. However, in the above examples, the typical pattern is reversed and it is designed to help the reader understand that the Theme in each case is different from the 'familiar' unmarked choices.

Proverbs as Persuasive Language

ne thing that traditional proverbs as discourse and academic writing share is that both are designed to be persuasive. In relating proverbs to academic writing, learners can be sensitised about the importance of 'logical induction and the role of communities in constructing knowledge' (Hyland 2011: 198). The idea here is to focus the learners on the fact that like in academic writing, proverbs are presented as 'flawless logic, representing … the discourse of "Truth"' (Hyland 2011: 198). In this regard, stance is just as important in analysing proverbs as it is in academic writing; and equally important is accounting for speaker/writer attitudes about particular information, 'how certain they are about its veracity … and what perspective they are taking to it and to the reader' (Hyland 2011: 198). As a way of illustration, the proverbs below, like the ones discussed above are presented as facts or absolute truths, whose veracity, as argued elsewhere is unimpeachable.

Wa- When/if	-khungu a blind person	a-kati ni-ku-tem-a threatens to stone you	wa- he/she	-pond-a mu-ala has/must have stepped on a stone
textual Theme	topical	Rheme	Theme Rheme	Rheme

Source: Author

Mu-ka- When/if textual Theme	-on-a khoswe you see a rat topical	a-sek-a cona laugh at a cat Rheme	pali there Theme Rheme	dzenje pa-fupi is/must be a hole nearby Rheme

Source: Author

1. Kugona pakati, nkuyambilila 'Sleeping in the middle is being the earliest'
2. Pagule, fumbi ndiwe mwini 'At the dance, dust is/depends on you the owner/dancer'
3. Walila mvula, walila matope 'When you cry for rain, you cry for mud'
4. Wakwatila kwa mphenzi, saopa kung'anima 'One who marries thunder, does not fear lightning'
5. Nkhanga zinapangana, kusanaphye 'Guinea fowls made a pact, before there was [bush] fire'

Evidently, proverbs are structured in a particular way to enhance their believability. Typically, proverbs are structured in two parts, which are logically connected. The first part presents a proposal or case, which is resolved by the second part. It is also the case that the second part provides a logical explanation, argument or solution to the issue or topic introduced in the first part. Thus, the second part in most cases also functions as 'evidence' or support argument for the proposition or topic contained in the first part. In this respect, the proverbs come across as fact or truth that cannot be questioned. *Evidentiality*, is thus one of the critical aspects of proverbs just like in academic writing. This is where the speaker expresses commitment to the reliability of propositions and their potential impact on hearer(s) (Hyland 2011). A change in the structure or lexical choices would render the proverbs incoherent or presenting something which is false and unbelievable, or

incomprehensible and unacceptable discourse by the community of practice as shown in (8-13) above. The examples (16-20) shows the speaker using evidentiality as contained in the proverbs to express an attitude on the topic in a 'professional,' rational and detached manner. There is no doubt that proverb (16) is meant to chastise lethargic behaviour; (17) is meant to promote self-reliance, (18) and (19) are warnings that 'you reap what you sow' and (20) extols the virtues of working together as a team or community in pre-emptying problems.

Rather than based on personal opinion, proverbs come through as authoritative based on plausible reasoning and knowledge. This means that like in academic writing, *Presence,* that is, 'how far writers choose to project themselves into a text' (Hyland 2011: 199), is minimised or avoided in the structure of the proverb. There are no explicit *hedges, boosters, attitude markers,* and *self-mention* in proverbs. The non-use of hedges allows the speaker to commit to the proposition in the proverb allowing information to be presented as a fact rather than one's opinion. Use of hedges would also imply that the speaker does not have confidence in what they are putting forward and thus 'open a discursive space for readers to dispute interpretations' (Hyland 2011: 199), which would be self-defeating as proverbs are not supposed to be questioned unless through presentation of an opposing proverb. The same argument can be used as to explain the absence of boosters as part of a proverb structure. Avoiding redundancy is an attribute of academic writing. Since proverbs are presented as self-contained facts or evidence, they do not need boosters such as 'definitely', 'surely', 'clearly,' 'in fact' and 'evidently' as part of the structure. These are often already embedded in the communicative co(n)texts in which the proverbs are consumed. In fact, adding boosters to proverbs makes them appear as ordinary statements. Consider the following non-proverbs:

1. ****Nzoonadi**, Mwana wa mbuzi anaonera kwamake ukodzera mkhola 'Truly, the baby goat learnt from the mother to urinate in the kraal'

2. ****Motelo**, kugona pakati, nkuyambilila 'Evidently, sleeping in the middle is being the earliest'

Adding boosters makes the structures lose their role as proverbs as they are at best transformed into ordinary sentences, and at worst they are not meaningful to the community of practice. In fact, they bring about uncertainty to the proposition and over-involvement with the readers, and rather than solidarity with the readers/hearers. Moreover, the statements or propositions are opened to contestation and unlike what often happens when confronted with a proverb, the restrictions for alternative voices are lifted and the assumption of shared information and group membership are scuppered. The possibility of the 'proverbs' above being rejected are elevated because of the addition of boosters.

In the proverbs as discussed above, attitude is expressed indirectly rather than through attitude markers. Attitude markers indicate the writer's emotional attitude to propositions through expressions of 'surprise, agreement, importance, frustration, and so on, rather than commitment.' (Hyland 2011: 199). Overt attitude marking is avoided to enable the speaker to present the attitude as if it were the speech community's 'voice.' By presenting the

evaluation in a detached manner, the speaker indirectly takes a definite stand and achieves the high moral and value positions as if that was what the community of practice expected. This also means self-naming, for example, the use of 'I' is avoided, as is also often the case in academic writing. However, the researchers need to note that increasingly, 'we' and 'our' are used in academic writing in order to project- 'an impression of ourselves and how we stand in relation to our arguments, discipline, and readers' (Hyland 2011: 199). The researchers want to argue that in as much as hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mention are not part of the thematic structure of proverbs, this fact can be used as a point of departure to teach how these are utilised in academic writing.

Conclusion

In this paper the researchers have tried to show that proverbs can be used to teach grammatical aspects of Nyanja as well as aspects of academic writing. Thus, in addition to socialising people into a particular speech community's culture, proverbs have the potential to socialise learners in academic culture and critical thinking and writing.

Proverbs are organised pieces of texts, just like academic writing is organised discourse. Clear argumentation, logical flow and coherence and cohesion in the different parts are critical elements of both proverbs and academic writing. The researchers have tried to show that proverbs show a clear and logical link between word, functional groups of words, clauses and co(n)texts, which is also the cornerstone of effective academic writing.

Recommendations

If worthwhile learning is about culture, the content of education will only have value if it is embedded and indeed associated with a particular culture, as a way of life, which includes particular ways of knowing, knowledge and wisdom, as well as ways of communicating these. Producing and consuming proverbs require one to be part of a community of practice in which the proverbs are used. Similarly, being successful in producing and consuming academic discourses require one to acquiesce and be part of the community of practice as demanded by academic gate keepers. This means that teachers need to be well-versed in use of proverbs and the different contexts in which they produced and consumed. Teacher-training and curricula need to include proverbs as a pedagogic tool for classroom practice. Thus, proverbs as IK may prove critical to the socialisation of Nyanja/ Chewa speakers not only into Nyanja/Chewa culture, but also introducing learners to the academic community of practice.

It is therefore recommended that proverbs should be incorporated into the school curricula designs and in narratives of classroom practices, not only as a way to acculturate learners into Nyanja/Chewa culture, but also as means to introduce and develop their critical writing academic skills.

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