

A STYLISTICS ANALYSIS OF GICHUKA PROVERBS

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Abstract

Proverbs like any other genre of oral literature have form and content that enable them fulfill their intended purpose in any given society. While scholars have studied proverbs in literary texts and from diverse African communities, there is little focus on form and content of proverbs in Chuka ethnic community. Therefore, this study was necessary because it filled the existing gap by investigating how the interface of form and content in Gichuka proverbs enhances cultural expression in those proverbs. This study was guided by stylistic theory and adopted a qualitative research design. The population for this study included all the Gichuka proverbs in communicative events. Purposeful sampling method was used to select the proverbs performed in real life communicative events conducted in Gichuka. Participant observation was used, where the proverbs were recorded using an audio recorder. The collected proverbs were transcribed then translated into English before their analysis. Afterwards, the proverbs were assessed based on how form (stylistic aspects) and content (meaning) intersect in creating meaning. The study revealed that Gichuka proverbs are rich in syntactic features, phonological aspects, semantic devices and numerous lexical choices. Collectively, these stylistic elements illustrate how Gichuka proverbs encapsulate moral values, social critique, and several worldviews. The study is significant for it does not only provide forms of African orality such as proverbs an opportunity for scholarly study but also contributes to the development of stylistics theory.

Key Words: Stylistics, Interface, Form, Content, Gichuka proverbs, African Orality

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1. Introduction

All forms of orality have content which is packaged in a certain form. In Africa, these forms of orality are realized through dances, songs, stories, proverbs to mention just a few. Tongoi (2022) opines that oral literary forms such as stories, songs and proverbs are metaphors used to guide moral choice and self-examination. These forms of oral literature emphasize the African worldview setting and knowledge. Despite colonialism's significant impact, oral literature continues to exist in written form. Novels originated from ballads, proverbs, and oral histories that were also included into written works. They have been used in the writings of African authors like Achebe and Ngugi. African writers incorporated their oral traditions into their writing even though they had to write in the language of the colonists in order to make sure that even the colonizers valued their culture.

Proverbs, as integral elements of Africa's rich oral tradition, are often categorized based on their structural and abstract features. The concept of form, as articulated by Garner (2023), refers to a distinct type of object that manifests in various structural patterns. Similarly, Huemer (2016) describes form as the external configuration of a literary work, which reveals the underlying content it embodies. In the context of African proverbs, Njagi (2013) emphasizes that their formal properties emerge from the syntactic and semantic configurations of their constituent elements. Within the broader discourse on form and content, Mac Coinnigh (2015) identifies four primary functional types of proverbs-declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory, which can be grouped into two overarching communicative categories: affirmative and expressive. Although all these functions are evident in proverbial usage, some tend to be more dominant depending on context. The systematic study of such formal features falls within the domain of stylistics, which concerns itself with the expressive manner in which language is employed, whether in speech or writing. Leech (1967) defines style as the study and analysis of variation in linguistic form as used in actual communicative acts, encompassing elements such as figures of speech, lexical choices, and syntactic patterns.

Statement of the Problems

Proverbs function in a variety of ways in life and in literature. Their literary significance emerges not only in the beauty of words and form, their sense of impartiality and simplification, and their connections with other genres of artistic expression, but also in the appropriateness and intuition with which they are used in actual contexts. Proverbs summarize cultural values, tradition knowledge and jocularly. Their roles and

purpose are significant thus making them remain relevant to date. Proverbs like any other genre of oral literature have form and content that enable them fulfill this critical purpose in the society. While scholars have studied proverbs in literary texts and from diverse African communities, there is little focus on form of proverbs in Chuka ethnic community. Therefore, this study was necessary because it filled the existing gap by collecting Gĩchuka proverbs and analyzing them in terms of their stylistic features in the contemporary Chuka community. This study contributes to the preservation of Gĩchuka proverbs which would be lost to modernization in cases where they are not conserved and transmitted to the next generation.

I. Literature Review

Form refers to the style, structure, and method by which a text is presented (Burke, 2023). It shapes how content is organized and delivered across literary categories such as prose, poetry, drama, and non-fiction (Turco, 2020). From a Marxist perspective, form and content are inseparable, with art requiring harmony between the two to preserve meaning (Macherey, 1978). Mishra (2011) adds that form imposes order on a writer's ideas. This study applies the concept of form to Gĩchuka proverbs, examining stylistic components such as parallelism, ellipsis, metaphor, alliteration, assonance, and consonance.

Proverbs exhibit diverse stylistic devices including alliteration, parallelism, ellipsis, rhyme, repetition, and allegory (Kipury, 1983). They often communicate symbolic meanings, drawing on cultural heritage and community values (Mutonyi, 2016). Context is crucial, as proverbs may reference religion, politics, morality, or historical figures (Finnegan, 1970). Proverbs use figurative language such as metaphors, similes, sarcasm, and irony to convey meaning beyond the literal (Ndambuki, 2010). Such imagery often emerges from observations of human behavior, animals, and the environment, creating vivid mental pictures for the audience. Ellipsis omits familiar words, relying on shared cultural knowledge for interpretation, thus influencing thought and behavior (Njagi, 2013). Parallelism balances two parts of a proverb, enhancing rhythm, memorability, and aesthetic appeal (Severina, 2012). By analyzing these stylistic devices, the current study explores how the form of Gĩchuka proverbs shapes their meaning, preserves cultural identity, and reflects the Chuka community's worldview. Form and content of proverbs are inseparable.

The interface of form and content in proverbs refers to the dynamic relationship between the structural features of proverbs and the meanings they convey (Ombongi 2024). It involves analyzing how form influences the interpretation and reception of content and vice versa. For example, the choice of words, rhythm, and sound patterns in a proverb can enhance its memorability and impact, thus amplifying the message it carries (Komilova, 2022). Similarly, the thematic content of a proverb may shape its linguistic expression and stylistic presentation.

Many people employ proverbs in both oral and written communications in different aspects of life (Kobia, 2023). There is usually a profuse use of proverbs in social activities such as marriage ceremonies, burial ceremonies, age-grade initiations, and dispute or conflict resolutions, among others in Chuka. Additionally, Gĩchuka proverbs are influenced, to a large extent, by the linguistic and socio-geographical experiences and orientations of the diverse peoples that make up the sub tribe. The imagery in proverbs, their form and context of use as well as aesthetics reflect the peculiar natural environment of the users. Older people use proverbs to communicate meaning to the younger generations (Mieder 2018). Therefore, understanding the interface of form and content in Gĩchuka proverbs is crucial in Cultural Preservation since Gĩchuka proverbs serve as repositories of cultural wisdom and heritage (Kobia, 2023). Analyzing their form-content relationship helps preserve and transmit cultural knowledge to future generations (Onwe, 2023). Secondly, linguistic analysis which is studying how form and content interact in Gĩchuka proverbs provides insights into the linguistic richness and expressive capabilities of the Gĩchuka language, and lastly in sociocultural insights which involves examining the interface of form and content where the researchers can gain a deeper understanding of Chuka society, its values, beliefs, and social norms reflected in proverbs.

While studies specifically focusing on the interface of form and content in Gĩchuka proverbs may be limited, there is a wealth of literature on analysis of proverbs and cultural linguistics that provide relevant insights. Researchers have explored the interface of form and content in proverbs across various cultures and languages, examining how different structural features contribute to the conveyance of meaning. For instance, Severina (2021) in her studies on didactics of orality and its styles affirms that proverbs have their own distinguishing characteristics which enhance their effectiveness in content delivery. For instance, through their brevity and use of simple language they are easily remembered by audience and speakers making it easy for use for communication during the alternative rite of passage ceremonies. This study was pivotal in uncovering stylistic features such as parallelism in Gĩchuka proverbs, which predominantly utilize simple sentence structures. These constructions enhance accessibility, aiding both comprehension and retention across a broad audience.

Scholars have also investigated the role of form-content dynamics in comprehension and interpretation of proverbs. For example, Kobia (2023) argues that the use of word form to exhibit variation accords with the

view that the word is a more stable and solid focus of grammatical relations than the component morpheme by itself. According to Kobia (2023), the obvious familiar words in most of the proverbs mean much more than they seem on the surface. The deeper underlying level of meaning of the proverbs is filled with images and symbols that are aesthetically illuminating. This revealed the use of figurative language, such as metaphors, sarcasm, and irony in Gĩchuka proverbs to convey meaning beyond the literal level. Proverbs have distinguished features, for instance, the structure of proverbs is not like any simple sentence that everyone is familiar with. (Njagi 2013) Gĩchuka proverbs are philosophical, instructive and delightful and have the potentialities of enriching the indigenous knowledge base of the people. It was on the strength of the foregoing that the study examined the interface of form and content in Gĩchuka proverbs and explored its broader implications within the field of proverbial literature and cultural studies.

Stylistics Theory

The study was guided by stylistic theory. Stylistics as a distinct theoretical approach to language and literature emerged in the 20th century, evolving from earlier traditions in rhetoric, literary criticism and linguistics from the works of Jakobson (1896-1982), Shklovsky (1893-1984) and Halliday (1925-2018) among others. These scholars have each made significant contribution to the theoretical foundations and methodologies of stylistics, shaping the way we understand and analyze stylistic features in language and literature. According to Leech, stylistics is the manner in which something is written or spoken. Leech (1967) argues that style is the description and analysis of the variability forms of linguistic items in actual language use. It can also refer to the figures of speech, word use, or sentence structures. Leech (1967) contends that linguistic description and critical interpretation are distinct and complementary ways of explaining literary spoken words or texts. The concepts of style and stylistic variation in language are based on the general notion that within the language system, thus, it is possible for it to operate at all linguistic levels such as phonological, lexical and syntactic. Therefore, style may be regarded as a choice of linguistic means, as deviation from the norms of language use and as recurrent features of linguistic form. By applying stylistic theory, the study delved deeper into the linguistic features of Gĩchuka proverbs, uncovering nuances in form that contribute to their aesthetic appeal and meaning

II. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, which, according to Kombo and Tromp (2018), entails the detailed description and interpretation of data to conceptualize both structure and meaning. The approach was particularly suited to the investigation of Gĩchuka proverbs, as it enabled the researcher to capture their cultural and stylistic nuances within authentic communicative contexts. Data collection was grounded in participant observation, whereby the researcher attended various communicative events to witness the performance of proverbs in Chuka community. This immersion provided direct interaction with speakers and facilitated an understanding of how the proverbs' form and content function in real-life discourse. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to select proverbs performed in natural communicative settings within Chuka-Igamba Ng'ombe constituency. This method, as Campbell et al. (2020) note, allows the researcher to obtain information-rich cases aligned with the study's objectives. Proverbs were collected from a wide range of events, including land purchase procedures, political gatherings, chiefs' barazas, family and clan meetings, land negotiation ceremonies, religious functions, and dowry or bride price negotiations. Additional sources included digital platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and local radio broadcasts where Gĩchuka proverbs were used. The selection process prioritized proverbs of high cultural significance and semantic richness, continuing until data saturation was reached. The data analysis began with the translation of the collected Gĩchuka proverbs into English, ensuring fidelity to their original meaning so as to preserve cultural and stylistic integrity. The analysis then focused on identifying and interpreting the key stylistic features, phonological, semantic, lexical, and syntactic, most frequently occurring in the proverbs. Special attention was given to devices such as parallelism, ellipsis, alliteration, assonance, consonance, metaphor, irony, and sarcasm. This examination revealed how these features interact to shape meaning and enhance memorability in Gĩchuka proverbs.

Syntactic aspects of Gĩchuka proverbs

According to Wales (2011), Syntactic features refer to the structural patterns and arrangements of words in proverbs that enhance their effectiveness, clarity, and memorability. These features highlight the grammatical construction of proverbs and how they convey their messages succinctly and powerfully. This study examines the stylistic features evident in the selected proverbs focusing on elements such as ellipsis and parallelism to reveal how these techniques contribute to the proverb's stylistic impact. The analysis was done in reference to the stylistic theory.

Ellipsis

Ellipsis occur when a crucial part of a sentence or clause is intentionally omitted; requiring the audience to infer the missing elements by referencing the preceding text or context. According to Righam (2000), the sentence can only be fully understood when considered alongside the accompanying statement that provides the missing element). Njagi (2013) argues that although some words are omitted in elliptical proverbs, the speaker relies on the audience's ability to infer the intended meaning. This expectation is rooted in the assumption that the audience, as native speakers of the language, possesses the cultural and linguistic knowledge required to fill in the gaps and understand the proverb's full message.

(1) Gagwĩcũnia gatiũũrũ.

The stick one uses to beat oneself never pains.

In the proverb above ellipsis is employed to enhance its impact and engagement. The omission of the subject of the verb 'beat' specifically 'the cane' requires the audience to infer the missing element based on the context, making the message thought provoking and interactive. By leaving out the explicit mention of 'the cane' the proverb invites the audience to reflect and mentally fill in the gap. This active participation reinforces the moral lesson and ensures it resonates deeply. In addition, the omission creates a concise expression that is easier to remember and repeat, making the proverb more impactful and enduring.

By omitting specific details, the proverb shifts focus to the broader principle it conveys that individuals must take responsibility for the consequences of their actions, especially when they have ignored prior warnings. The absence of the explicit elements allows the proverb to be interpreted across a variety of contexts, extending its wisdom to scenarios involving accountability and self-inflicted outcomes. Additionally, the elliptical structure enhances the proverb's poetic and rhetorical quality, increasing its appeal and effectiveness as a powerful tool for communication. The alignment between the proverb's structure and content enhances its impact, paving the way for the use of ellipsis in the next proverb.

(2) Ya rwanio ikucaga na rwanio.

What bleats, dies bleating.

The proverb above effectively employs ellipsis by omitting the subject of the verb 'bleats' in this case 'the goat'. This deliberate omission invites the audience to infer the missing element based on the context, enhancing the proverb's engagement and depth of interpretation. Ellipsis fosters active participation by requiring the audience to mentally supply the omitted subject 'the goat', ensuring the message resonates more deeply.

The omission creates a concise and impactful expression, making the proverb memorable and easy to recall. By leaving out specific details, the proverb sharpens its focus on the core lesson: habitual complaining without action diminishes credibility and can lead to undesirable consequences. The absence of a specific subject also broadens the proverb's applicability, enabling it to be understood and applied in diverse contexts beyond the literal imagery of a goat, such as in social, political or personal scenarios. Additionally, the elliptical structure enhances the proverb's stylistic elegance by enriching its rhythm and poetic quality. This not only makes the warning more impactful but also ensures it effectively captures and retains the audience's attention. In Gĩchuka proverbs, ellipsis is a powerful tool for creating impactful messages, making its application essential in the following proverb

Parallelism

According to Soi (2014), Parallelism occurs when two or more parts of a sentence have similar form giving the whole structure a definite pattern. Parallelism in proverbs involves dividing the statement into two balanced and equally weighted parts, often separated by a comma. This structural symmetry creates a rhythmic and poetic quality, making the proverb pleasing to the ear. Typically, the first part of the proverb is delivered with a rising intonation, while the second part concludes with a falling intonation, signaling the end. This rhythmic variation captures the listener's attention and enhances the proverb's appeal.

Moreover, parallelism reinforces the memorability of the message by presenting it in two complementary parts: the first introduces a scenario, and the second provides the outcome or consequence. This dual structure ensures the message is perceived as cohesive and impactful, making it both engaging and easy to recall.

(3) Kari ĩgĩ, gatiũ ũrigũ.

The guilty are always known.

The proverb above employs parallelism to enhance the memorability of its message. This structural feature allows the disputants to internalize the conveyed wisdom in two distinct yet complementary parts. The first part 'kari ĩgi' 'the guilty', presented in the form of a proposition and delivered with a rising intonation, introduces the premise. The second part 'gatiũ ũrigu' 'always known', which completes the thought, is expressed

with a falling intonation, signaling resolution and finality. This dual structure ensures the message is perceived as cohesive and impactful, enabling the disputants to grasp and retain it in two interconnected and unforgettable segments.

The proverb's stylistic appeal lies in its structure, lexical choices and the underlying message. In reference to the structure, the proverb is a declarative sentence making it precise and easy to understand. This simplicity ensures the message is well understood and accessible to a wide audience. The subject in the proverb is the word 'guilty', the verb is the word 'are' and the complement is the phrase 'always known'. The proverb has an inherent balance between the subjects 'the guilty' and the predicate 'are always known' which creates a rhythmical and unified structure that enhances memorability.

(4) *Mwaria ciene, ati matuku.*

He who speaks ill of others does not live long.

The proverb above uses parallelism which divides it into two balanced parts *Mwaria ciene* 'He who speaks ill of others', typically spoken with rising intonation, serves to introduce the proverb and engage the audience, encouraging them to mentally complete the thought by creating a sense of anticipation for the second part. This engagement encourages the listeners to think actively about the proverb's meaning, making the message more personal and impactful. The second part, '*ati matuku*' 'does not live long', is delivered with falling intonation, signalling both the conclusion of the proverb and the inevitable consequence of the first part. This structure not only enhances the memorability of the message but also makes it more appealing to listeners, ensuring that the moral lesson is easily internalized and comprehended. The rhythmic flow and clear intonation help make the proverb both impactful and easy to reflect upon.

The proverb uses relatively simple sentence structure with clear subject 'he', verb, 'speaks' and the object 'ill of others' followed by straight forward consequence 'does not live long'. This simplicity of the structure ensures that the message is easily accessible to a wide audience, making it easy to comprehend the message and remember.

Semantic Aspects of Gĩchuka Proverbs

According to Crystal (2011), semantics refers to the study of meaning in the proverbs, focusing on how their structure, context, and cultural relevance convey deeper messages. Proverbs often use figurative language such as metaphors, similes or symbolism to express meaning that goes beyond their literal interpretations. The meaning of the proverb is deeply rooted in the culture from which it comes from and cultural beliefs shape their interpretation. In most cases proverbs get their meaning depending on the context of use and often convey meaning directly or indirectly.

In addition, some proverbs are ambiguous with more than one interpretation allowing for flexibility in meaning. The semantic aspects of proverbs highlight their richness in meaning, cultural significance, and linguistic creativity. This study focused on metaphors, irony, and sarcasm.

Metaphors

According to Njagi (2013), a metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that typically refers to one object or idea is applied to another, suggesting a resemblance or analogy between the two. It conveys meaning symbolically connecting seemingly unrelated concepts, enriching language with depth and creativity. Metaphors are figurative expressions where one thing is compared to another, not literally but symbolically, to convey deeper meanings. In proverbs, metaphors are used to encapsulate wisdom, life lessons, or cultural values in a succinct and impactful way. They make complex ideas easier to understand by relating them to familiar experiences or imagery. The adaptability of Gĩchuka proverbs in form and content allows for purposeful use of metaphor, as illustrated in the following proverb.

(5) *Mbiti yauragirwe nĩ mũchinko.*

The hyena was killed by its craving for delicacies.

The proverb above employs metaphor effectively by likening the hyena's fatal craving to human tendencies toward greed and indulgence, making the moral lesson accessible and easy to comprehend. The hyena is used metaphorically to represent greed, translating abstract ideas into ideas that relates to imagery that ensures the audience understands the message. Furthermore, the vivid image of the hyena succumbing to its greed is striking and unforgettable, particularly for young men. This ensures the cautionary message resonates deeply with listeners and remains ingrained in their minds. The metaphor compels reflection, urging young individuals to evaluate their choices.

By drawing parallels between the hyena's downfall and human behavior, it highlights the risks of short-term gratification, such as drug abuse or promiscuity, and the potential life-altering consequences that can follow. The hyena's death serves as a symbolic warning about dangers of neglecting self-control. Additionally,

by grounding the lesson in a natural and culturally familiar scenario, the metaphor enhances the message's relevance to young men in the community. Ultimately, the proverb cautions against the pursuit of fleeting pleasures at the expense of long-term well-being. It serves as a reminder that every choice has consequences, encouraging thoughtful decision-making and self-discipline. Metaphors enhance the relevance of the message, enabling their continuity in the following proverb.

(6) *Njogu ñĩremagwa ni mũguongo wayo.*

An elephant is never burdened by its tusks.

The metaphor in the above proverb is highly effective in conveying its intended message. By comparing parents' responsibilities to the elephant carrying its tusks, the metaphor simplifies the idea that challenges are natural and manageable and this makes the message easy to internalize. The elephant symbolizes resilience and strength, while the tusks represent responsibilities. The metaphor reminds the parents that just as the elephant carries its tusks with grace, they too should handle their duties without complaining. By drawing on a natural and culturally familiar image of the elephant, the metaphor resonates with the audience, making the message relevant and impactful (Adedimeji, 2010).

The imagery of an elephant carrying its heavy tusks is vivid and enduring. This ensures the message remains ingrained in the minds of the audience, especially when faced with challenges. Moreover, the proverb inspires the parents to approach their duties with positive mindset. It emphasizes that economic challenges are not insurmountable and should not deter them from fulfilling their obligations. The metaphor also reinforces the idea of accepting and owning one's responsibility regardless of the difficulties. It serves as a call to action for parents to prioritize their children's education and well-being. The ability of metaphors to resonate with the audience and maintain relevance enables their reuse in the next proverb.

Irony

Irony involves a deliberate contrast between the literal meaning of the proverb and its underlying message, often revealing a deeper, sometimes unexpected, insight or lesson, (Othman *et al* 2023). This technique is used to provoke thought, highlight contradictions, and impart wisdom in a compelling and memorable manner. When employed in proverbs, irony enhances the relevance of the message, emphasizing the complexities and paradoxes of life, and captivates the listener by introducing elements of surprise and reflection.

(7) *Ya mũri ñĩ ñĩ ñĩ me mũthenya.*

The deserted path gets dew even on a sunny day.

The proverb above employs irony to convey a deeper lesson about responsibility and the consequences of neglect. On the surface, it seems contradictory: a sunny day which is typically dry should not produce dew. However, the proverb highlights how neglect can create conditions that challenge expectations. When applied to leadership, the irony suggests that abandoning responsibilities 'deserting the path' leads to undesirable consequences 'dew forming even in unlikely circumstances'.

The proverb reminds the leaders that neglecting their duties, particularly towards those who depend on them, fosters dissatisfaction, unrest, and unforeseen challenges. This is because when leaders are absent or indifferent, small issues 'like dew' can accumulate and turn into larger, more difficult problems to address. Thus, the proverb serves as moral warning that responsible leadership requires consistent attention and care, or the consequences of neglect will manifest often in ironic ways. Irony strengthens the message's relevance, allowing for its seamless continuation in the next proverb.

(8) *Kabiu gatemaga mũnori.*

A knife cuts the sharpener.

Irony is evident in the above proverb to convey a warning about betrayal, particularly from those whom one trusts and has supported. On the surface, it is self-contradictory to imagine that something designed to sharpen or improve 'the knife' would harm the entity that aids it 'sharpener'. However, the irony emphasizes a deeper truth that those who benefit from someone's trust, help, or resources are often the ones most capable of causing harm or turning against them (Othman *et al* 2023).

In the leadership context, the proverb highlights the potentiality of danger of betrayal from close friends or those who have received significant support. It serves as a cautionary reminder that, just as a knife might wound its sharpener, those who have been helped or empowered may, in turn, betray their benefactor, often when least expected. The irony emphasizes the complexity of relationships and the potential risks even those closest to us. Irony in Gĩchuka proverbs amplifies the message's impact, ensuring a seamless flow into the next proverb.

Sarcasm

Sarcasm in proverbs refers to the use of irony, wit or sharp humor to express a meaning that is opposite to literal words (Soi, 2014). Sarcastic proverbs often highlight contradictions, foolishness, or flaws in human behavior or societal norms. They rely on subtlety and context to convey their true meaning, often requiring the listener to recognize the underlying irony. In addition, Sarcasm makes the message in the proverb more memorable or impactful while critiquing human behavior or societal norms.

(9) *Mbiti yaūragirwe nĩ mũchinko.*

The hyena was killed by its craving for delicacies.

The proverb above employs sarcasm to deliver a sharp critique of greed and reckless behavior. The sarcasm lies in the implied ridicule of the hyena's inability to control its desires, ultimately leading to its downfall. This figurative ridicule is extended to criticize youths who, driven by greed, engage in destructive behaviors such as promiscuity, drug abuse, or illegal activities to satisfy their cravings for wealth or pleasure.

By likening reckless individuals to a foolish hyena, the proverb starkly highlights the inevitable negative outcomes, such as imprisonment, addiction or even death. The sarcastic tone provokes a sense of shame or self-awareness, encouraging introspection about one's choices and behaviors. Additionally, it serves as a cautionary tale, urging restraint and responsibility by illustrating the dire consequences of unchecked greed and indulgence. The flexibility in the use of sarcasm in Gĩchuka proverbs, allows for their use in the following proverb.

(10) *ĩkaga kinatha twa ĩria.*

That which does not produce colostrum doesn't produce milk later.

The proverb above employs sarcasm to convey skepticism and disappointment regarding the state of leadership and economic struggles under Kenya kwanza regime. The sarcasm lies in the comparison of a cow's failure to produce colostrum –an early indicator of productivity to perceived inability of the leadership to deliver positive outcomes. This sharp critique underscores doubts about future improvements, given the poor start.

The sarcastic tone amplifies disapproval of the current leadership, making the criticism more poignant and hard hitting. It prompts listeners to evaluate the leadership's performance and consider whether early failures are indicative of long-term effectiveness. Additionally, it makes the critique more relatable and memorable, using humor to articulate serious concerns. By highlighting perceived incompetence, the proverb pressures leadership to address ongoing economic challenges and instill hope for change. The versatility of sarcasm in Gĩchuka proverbs allows for their seamless incorporation into the next proverb.

(11) *Ūkĩria bithagia rūgito.*

As you eat hide some in the rear.

The above proverb employs sarcasm to criticize individuals who lack financial discipline and consume everything without saving for future. The sarcasm lies in the implied ridicule of those who fail to exercise foresight, humorously suggesting the necessity of hiding resources as they indulge in the present. The sarcastic tone emphasizes the reckless in consuming all resources without regard for future needs, making the critique sharper and more impactful (Soi, 2014).

The sarcasm in the proverb provokes individuals to think critically about their financial habits and recognize the importance of saving and planning. By using humor to highlight the folly of wastefulness, the proverb encourages a culture of restraint and financial responsibility. Sarcasm usually makes the message more memorable effectively communicating the consequences of poor financial management which can lead to difficulties and depletion of resources. The impactful nature of sarcasm in enhancing memorability enables its reuse in the following proverb.

Phonological Aspects in Gĩchuka Proverbs

Phonological aspects of proverbs refer to the sound -based features that make them memorable, rhythmic and impactful. These aspects often contribute to the ease with which proverbs are remembered and transmitted orally. They include: Alliteration, assonance, rhyme, consonance, repetition, and onomatopoeia.

Alliteration, Assonance and Consonance

Wales (2014) argues that alliteration, assonance and consonance share several key features that enhance the rhythm, memorability, and aesthetic appeal of proverbs. They amplify the oral and rhetorical power of proverbs, playing a crucial role in the oral transmission of cultural wisdom. According to Wales (2025), each device relies on the repetition of sounds: alliteration involves the repetition of initial consonant sounds on the

same line, assonance focuses on the repetition of vowel sounds within words, and consonance emphasizes the repetition of consonant sounds, often within or at the end of words.

These elements create a rhythmic and harmonious structure, making proverbs pleasing to the ear. Furthermore, the repetition of sounds facilitates recall an essential aspect for proverbs transmitted through oral tradition. This repetition also underscores key ideas or themes, reinforcing the core messages of the proverb.

(12) *Mbiti yaŭragirwe ni mŭchinko.*

The hyena was killed by its craving for delicacies.

The above proverb employs alliteration through the repetition of /m/ sound in *Mbiti* 'hyena', and *muchinko* 'delicacies'. This stylistic feature enhances the proverb's rhythmic and memorable quality, ensuring its effective transmission in oral tradition. (Benczes, 2013). When used in a gathering to warn young men against reckless behavior, the alliteration stresses the seductive but risky nature of greed, promiscuity, and substance abuse. The proverb's rhythmic appeal ensures the message resonates deeply, cautioning the youth about the consequences of such actions. By highlighting the hyena's fate as a metaphor, the proverb uses alliteration to make the moral lesson vivid and memorable, encouraging self-control and responsibility in the audience.

From a stylistic standpoint, the /m/ sound's repetition creates a smooth, harmonious flow that reflects the picture of the hyena's craving-enticing yet dangerous. This deliberate phonological structure reinforces the cautionary nature of the message, drawing attention to the hyena's greed and poor choices, which ultimately lead to its demise. The flexibility in form and content of Gĩchuka proverbs allow for effective use of alliteration, as demonstrated in the following proverb.

(13) *Wana ũĩkwania nithauragirirwa.*

Even that which does not bleat requires changing of the tether.

Consonance is evident in the proverb above where consonant sound /n/ at the middle of the words *itĩkwania* and *nithauragirirwa* is repeated to enhance its meaning. The repeated consonance sound /n/ creates a flowing rhythm that mirrors the act of ongoing care and attention, emphasizing the need to care for the vulnerable, even if they do not explicitly ask for it. Moreover, the repeated consonant sound makes the proverb more melodic and memorable; ensuring that the advice given to take care for society's overlooked members stays with the audience.

The linguistic agreement created by consonance ties the proverb to the oral traditions of the community, making the message culturally reverberating and easier for congregants to accept and reflect upon. Through the consonance, the proverb effectively reminds the congregants that responsibility extends beyond responding to visible needs. It calls for positive care and compassion for the vulnerable members of society, ensuring no one is neglected. The repetition of consonant sounds in the proverb enhances its memorability, ensuring the message is retained (Njagi, 2013). This adaptability in Gĩchuka proverbs also allow for the use of consonance in the next proverb.

(14) *Ūkĩria bithagia rŭgito.*

As you eat hide some in the rear.

The above proverb employs assonance which involves repetition of vowel sound /i/ in the words *ũkĩria*, *bithagia* and *rugito*. The repeated /i/ sound establishes a rhythmic flow that makes the proverb pleasing to the ear and easier to remember. This musical quality is essential in oral traditions, where the proverbs are passed down through generations. Additionally, the /i/ sound has a soft contemplative quality, which encourages reflection. It invites the audience to think carefully about their habits and actions, aligning with the proverb's cautionary message.

The assonance makes the proverb more impactful and easier to recall. The repetition of the vowel sound ensures the message stays with the listener, promoting long-term understanding of the wisdom conveyed. By reinforcing the connection between actions and outcomes, the assonance subtly urges individuals to consider the consequences of their behavior, whether it's in resource management or personal conduct. In addition, the smooth recurring /i/ sound symbolizes the continuous cycle of saving and spending, underscoring the need for balance. It reflects the importance of maintaining resources to secure future stability and prosperity. Assonance enhances the proverb's impact and memorability, enabling its seamless transition into the next proverb

Lexical Aspects of Gĩchuka Proverbs

According to Herianah *et al* (2024), lexical elements in literature involve language that deviates from everyday usage or is distinctive to literary discourse. She argues that various forms of linguistic deviation -such as neologism, which introduces new words and meanings; connotation, which allows for variations in meaning;

and diction-, which pertains to word choice –serve as tool for linguistic exploration, enhancing the beauty of literary work.

Leech (2014) similarly contends that Lexical deviation occurs within the realm of vocabulary and word choice. In proverbs, lexical elements enable speakers to bend or even deliberately violate linguistic conventions to achieve elegance and aesthetic impact. A deeper understanding of these lexical aspects reveals how proverbs encapsulate cultural knowledge, moral lessons, and worldviews in a linguistically efficient and memorable manner. This analysis focuses on examining specific word choices within proverbs and how these contribute to their overall significance.

(15) Muntu atĩmiaga kīraro.

One doesn't soil where they sleep.

The above proverb is rich in lexical, cultural and moral significance. A lexical analysis of this proverb focuses on taboo words and how they shape the meaning. The key word *atĩmiaga* 'a vulgar term for soiling', is central to the proverb's meaning, its usage is deliberately provocative, as it conveys a strong moral message. Although taboo in formal settings, its inclusion in the proverb emphasizes the gravity of the act being condemned. Additionally, in African tradition, the use of vulgar or taboo words is generally avoided in polite discourse. However, their inclusion in proverbs often serves a didactic purpose, drawing attention to critical moral lessons or warnings.

The concept of 'soiling where one sleeps' is metaphorical, symbolizing acts of disrespect, betrayal or dishonour especially in personal or communal relationships. It highlights the cultural value placed on respect, cleanliness, and harmony. Moreover, the use of this proverb serves as warning against actions that harm one's immediate environment, relationship, or community. It emphasizes the consequences of disrespect and the importance of maintaining integrity and self-respect. In addition, the word *kīraro* 'sleeping place' contrasts with the vulgarity of *atĩmiaga*, reinforcing the idea of purity and cleanliness associated with one's sleeping area. The lexical composition of this proverb makes it an effective tool for teaching values and cautioning against dishonourable actions (Njagi, 2013) The fluidity of lexical elements in Gĩchuka proverbs enables their smooth integration into the next proverb.

(16) Mbũragani iĩĩ matina.

A killer does not have buttocks.

Lexical significance is carried in the above proverb, especially due to the use of the vulgar tem *Matina* 'meaning buttocks'. The term *Matina* is central to this proverb, and its vulgarity plays a crucial role in conveying the message. In formal setting, *Matina* is taboo due to its crude and disrespectful connotation, its deliberate use in the proverb aims to emphasize the harshness of the message and grab attention. In African tradition, the use of vulgar language especially in a formal context is considered inappropriate and offensive. However, their use in proverbs often reflects deeper cultural and moral lesson (Njagi, 2013). In this case, the use of *matina* undermines typical decency to highlight a serious point: it warns against judging or despising others based on physical traits.

The core lesson of this proverb is that physical appearance should not be used to judge someone's worth or character. By linking the absence of buttocks to a killer, the proverb suggests that judgments are both shallow and morally misplaced. Instead what matters is a person's actions and integrity, not their appearance. In addition, the vulgarity of *Matina* 'buttocks' serves to intensify the message, creating a contrast between physical appearance and moral behavior. The use of such crude word in the proverb forces the listener to reconsider their values, as it challenges the idea of superficial judgment by using language that is normally avoided in polite discourse. The dynamic nature of lexical elements in Gĩchuka proverbs facilitates their seamless progression into the next proverb.

III. Conclusion

The use of syntactic, lexical, phonological, and semantic aspects in Gĩchuka proverbs demonstrates how form and content work together to reinforce the communicative power of these proverbs. The aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of these proverbs enhance their impact, ensuring that they are not only memorable but also emotionally muffled with the audience. This study highlights the dynamic relationship between language, culture, and meaning in the Gĩchuka -speaking community.

The study revealed that the stylistic features work together to enhance the aesthetic appeal, emotional resonance, and communicative effectiveness of the proverbs. The findings demonstrate that the linguistic choices in Gĩchuka proverbs are not arbitrary but are carefully crafted to convey cultural messages, express

philosophical ideas, and reinforce social values. Through the use of these stylistic devices, Gichuka proverbs serve as powerful tools for preserving and transmitting cultural wisdom, ensuring that the values and worldview of the Gichuka-speaking community continue to thrive.

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