

# PROVERBIAL FUTURES: PROVERBS AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN AFRICA

FUTUROS PROVERBIAIS: PROVÉRBIOS E O DISCURSO POLÍTICO NA ÁFRICA

FUTUROS PROVERBIALES: PROVERBIOS Y DISCURSO POLÍTICO EN ÁFRICA

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*Our motto: Lume ling'ompela alikombi chiwulu – Kalanga proverb*

ABSTRACT: Examining references to proverbs in African political discourses in light of Integrational semiology and Southern Theory, we find not fossils of ancient wisdom but the creative construction of desired futures that may grow out of the present situation in light of what has been learned from the past. Proverbial discourse, always speaking to the present situation and commenting on available possibilities while being open to multiple interpretations, suggests an important argument about the provisional and contextual nature of all our knowledge. Beginning with the assumption that each of us is in a better position to

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understand our own situation than any foreign observer or abstract schemata could ever be, we argue that the indeterminacy of creative proverbial discourse can present a better epistemological foundation for dealing with the uncertainties of natural events. We suggest that proverbial discourse as it is practiced in various African societies can be utilized as a way of framing and approaching Southern Theories.

KEYWORDS: Proverbs. Africa. Indeterminacy. Global South.

RESUMO: Analisando o uso de provérbios em discursos políticos africanos à luz da semiologia integracionista e da Teoria do Sul, não encontramos fósseis de sabedoria antiga, mas a construção criativa de futuros desejados que podem surgir da situação presente à luz do que foi aprendido com o passado. O discurso proverbial, sempre falando sobre a situação presente e comentando as possibilidades disponíveis e ao, mesmo tempo, aberto a múltiplas interpretações, sugere um importante argumento sobre a natureza provisória e contextual de todo o nosso conhecimento. Partindo do pressuposto de que cada um de nós está em uma posição melhor para compreender nossa própria situação do que qualquer observador estrangeiro ou esquema abstrato jamais poderia estar, argumentamos que a indeterminação do discurso proverbial criativo pode apresentar uma base epistemológica melhor para lidar com as incertezas dos eventos. Sugerimos que o discurso proverbial, tal como é praticado em várias sociedades africanas, pode ser utilizado como uma forma de enquadrar e abordar as teorias do sul.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Provérbios. África. Sul Global. Indeterminação.

RESUMEN: Al examinar las referencias a los proverbios en los discursos políticos africanos a la luz de la semiología integracional y la teoría del sur, no encontramos fósiles de sabiduría antigua, sino la construcción creativa de futuros deseado que pueden surgir de la situación actual a la luz de lo que se ha aprendido del pasado. El discurso proverbial, siempre hablando de la situación actual y comentando las posibilidades disponibles mientras está abierto a múltiples interpretaciones, sugiere un argumento importante sobre la naturaleza provisional y contextual de todo nuestro conocimiento. Partiendo de la suposición de que cada uno de nosotros está en una mejor posición para comprender nuestra propia situación de lo que podría estarlo cualquier observador extranjero o esquema abstracto, argumentamos que la indeterminación del discurso proverbial creativo puede presentar una mejor base epistemológica para lidiar con las incertidumbres de eventos naturales. Sugerimos que el discurso proverbial, tal como se practica en varias sociedades africanas, puede utilizarse como una forma de enmarcar y abordar las teorías del sur.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Proverbios. África. Indeterminación. Sur global.

## 1 INTRODUCTION, PROVERBIALY SPEAKING

Speaking (or writing) in proverbs and speaking (or writing) about proverbs are not the same activities; the first is a linguistic activity, while the second is both a linguistic and a metalinguistic activity. The great difficulty when engaged in a metalinguistic discourse (such as this paper) is to avoid reification, to keep ourselves from assuming that the things/practices/concepts which we have named have a reality that precedes (and presumably persists beyond) the life or our empirical examinations and theoretical explorations.

Proverbs, Ruth Finnegan (1994 [1970], p. 1) noted, “[...] are not always distinguished by a special term from other categories of verbal art.” This indicates a critical problem for the lexicographer and the paremiologist: are the “categories of verbal art”, such as “proverb”, scholars’ fictions, artifacts of a particular analysis, or the lexicon of a culturally biased perspective? Are proverbs widespread linguistic-cultural phenomena, or is the identification of some speech act/image as “proverbial” a widespread form of metalinguistic or semiological analysis, either of folk origin or in an academic discipline known amongst professional students as *paremiology*? Later in the same chapter as that quoted above, Finnegan elaborated upon the matter:

The close connection of proverbs with other literary forms raises a difficulty. How, particularly in an oral culture, can we distinguish proverbs from other forms of oral art? or, indeed, from ordinary clichés and idioms, and from such related but different forms as maxims and apothegms?

Most of the published collections ignore this point of definition and by merely entitling their works “Proverbs” often give the misleading impression that these sayings are clearly differentiated from other expressions or that they are in all ways equivalent to our idea of proverbs. (FINNEGAN, 1994 [1970], p. 14)

Dundes (1994 [1975], p. 45) went straight to the heart of the matter in his remark about “[...] the inevitable controversy as to whether the units of analysis are really in the data (God’s truth) or are only a heuristic device found exclusively in the mind of the analyst (Hocus-Pocus),” but he immediately set the controversy aside in order to offer his structural analysis and a corresponding definition, concluding his paper with the caveat “[...] insofar as proverbs are traditional propositions, they should properly be studied by scholars with expertise in symbolic logic and related disciplines” (DUNDES, 1994 [1975], p. 61). Apparently he did not count himself among such scholars.

Some paremiologists and others writing of proverbs attempt a definition of “proverb”<sup>1</sup> but many more either offer someone else’s definition or offer (as Finnegan did) “some general agreement as to what constitutes a proverb” (FINNEGAN, 1994 [1970], p. 14). Dundes (1994 [1975], p. 45) believed that a “proverb may best be defined in structural terms” and gave as his definition “[...] the proverb appears to be a traditional propositional statement consisting of at least one descriptive element, a descriptive element consisting of a topic and a comment”. Villers (2019) wrote “As for the term *proverb*, it will be used to refer to self-sufficient utterances with a generic meaning involving Mankind that are not associated with a specific author and that are current among the folk (and consequently have a stable form)” while Omenya (2019, p. 2) stated only that proverbs are “tested wisdom with considerable authority” and Ademowo and Balogun (2014, p. 38) wrote “Proverbs are the simple truths of life that contain the moral values of a society,” referring the reader to Taylor. Vellasco (2000, p. 127) came to the conclusion that “[...] os provérbios são itens tradicionais do folclore de uma comunidade, frutos da experiência do povo; são afirmações concisas e impessoais de verdades gerais — a sua formulação é genérica e o seu valor de verdade é universal, atemporal e alocativo” while Widbäck refrained from coming to conclusions, offering instead a list of “[...] criteria that can be used to distinguish proverbs from most other phraseological units” (WIDBÄCK, 2015, p. 162) and a working definition: “Min arbetsdefinition av ordspråk är alltså att ordspråk är relativt korta, självständiga enheter som uttrycker sanning och livsvisdom. De är dessutom generaliserbara, anonyma och har hävd” (WIDBÄCK, 2015, p. 55).

Mieder and Dundes (1994), commenting on Ruth Finnegan’s discussion of proverbs in her book *Oral Literature in Africa* (1970), noted that we find in her remarks “[...] many of the critical issues found in proverb studies generally: definition, structure, style, context, function, and meaning” (from the editor’s introduction to her chapter in the 1994 reprint, p. 10). From that comment alone we can see what is, from an Integrationist perspective, the chief failure of what Rose Marie Beck has called ‘the classical notion of ‘proverb’ ’ (BECK, 2005, p. 132): the one glaring omission is the one speaking in proverbs.

Just as Beck sought to reinterpret several of the issues given prominence in paremiological studies – “out-of-context”, citation, fixedness, style – so we seek to reconsider proverbial communication in light of Integrational theory, with particular reference to speaking proverbially in political contexts. By considering proverbs to be the products (oral, written, drawn, painted, pantomimed...) of someone in an always unique communication situation, our research proceeds with a reorientation towards the proverb maker and can thus dispense with the need to define the term “proverb”. Insofar as what paremiologists call “proverbs” can be closely related to riddles, stories, maxims, parables, allegories, poems, fables, moral tales and in some cultures identified locally with the same term, we have no wish to force a foreign analytical framework onto a variety of differing local cultural-linguistic practices. Finnegan reminded her readers that the decision as to “[...] whether or not some attractive saying is really a ‘proverb’ depends on the local evaluation of it” (FINNEGAN, 1994 [1970], p. 15) and that attitude towards lay understandings is exactly in line with the Integrational approach to the layman’s understanding. Later in that same paragraph, Finnegan herself suggested the approach that we have adopted: “Therefore to differentiate those sayings which are merely idiomatic from those which the people concerned consider to have that special flavour which makes it correct to call them proverbs, we need more precise information about context and attitude than we are usually given” (FINNEGAN, 1994 [1970], p. 15). With plenty of context and at least as much attitude, we are going for broke.

<sup>1</sup> See Bhuvanewar (2015a) for 50 of these definitions, from Aristotle to Mieder, and discussions of them in terms of Karimic Linguistics, an un-Integrational but exuberantly Hindu and defiantly post-colonial theory of language.

## 2 THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS AND AXIOMS OF INTEGRATIONAL SEMIOLOGY

Roy Harris used the term “Integrational semiology” partly in response to a complaint by the Berlin linguist Hans-Heinrich Lieb who claimed the phrase “Integrational linguistics” for his own theory several years before Harris began using it, and partly because Harris’s theoretical perspective rather quickly moved towards a more encompassing theory of sign making and the diverse forms of human communicative activity. Although he coined a few neologisms and phrases, his theoretical discussions rely very little on technical terminology for he offers no theoretical entities in need of names. Instead of PRO and MERGE and a growing number of hypothesized cognitive structures and operations, in his writings we encounter people speaking, hearing, writing, reading, drawing, singing, questioning, answering, debating, performing music, misunderstanding, repeating, restating, contradicting, imploring, interpreting road signs, responding to body language, applying the law, making peace and pronouncing some couple husband and wife. Harris used lay language for an approach to communication that takes communication as we experience it as its object of study.

With its focus on the language maker, Integrational semiology rejects the notion that our object of study is or should be “a language” that exists independently of us and which we use for communicational purposes, as well as the more extreme claim that such a language is an “organical structure” (Chomsky) for generating syntactic structures that has evolved within the human brain and which the human species at some point accidentally discovered could be used for communicational purposes. Instead of the language (words, proverbs) meaning something, “the language” is understood to be the product of our making something (sounds, marks, gestures) mean what we hope our interlocutor will understand in a particular situation. In Hutton and Pablé’s words,

Linguistics and many other disciplines rely on the idea of languages as fixed codes that are held to make meanings available for us to use in particular contexts (the “language myth”). Integrationism denies that our communicational activity has any underlying guarantee or set of fixed reference points – we are always in the middle of a temporal and communicational stream, and the reference points we use are shifting along with us. (HUTTON; PABLÉ, 2011)

One consequence of making language a product of communicational activity instead of an autonomous system used for communicating is that communication and language-making are both understood to be necessarily creative processes, and creativity in this view is not the Chomskyian generation of an infinite number of well-formed strings. The sort of creativity that Integrationists have in mind is one which brings us and our worlds together, in fact a making of worlds and all the relationships that they require in order to bring times and spaces, people and things, memories and dreams into an active, conscious life. As Hutton and Pablé put it,

Communication is a creative process which involves an unbounded and unknowable number of factors and viewpoints, and through which individuals constantly adjust, assess and contextualize and recontextualize their experiences and practices in the light of the unfolding situation. In communicating, we integrate aspects of the situation we are in, including the on-going behavior of people present, with our past, present and anticipated experience in ways that are not knowable in advance, even by ourselves. Nothing is given in advance in communication; signs are created in the here-and-now; the relationship between words and ideas, and words and things, is not fixed... (HUTTON; PABLÉ, 2011)

Harris argued that all communication takes shape within a world constrained by three kinds of factors: biomechanical, macrosocial and circumstantial. The tongue, the ear and the hand are the main biomechanical factors providing the possibilities and limits for certain forms of language, though one can also communicate by nods and winks and shimmers and shakes. That this essay is written in what some would call Standard English is due to the fact that none of the three authors is comfortable writing in Portuguese or Estonian as well as the unlikelihood of tenure committees in the United States giving much weight to a paper written in Swahili (shame on them!) – all matters relating to the larger social worlds in which the authors live and write, i.e., macrosocial factors. The fact that we can and are writing one paper though living on separate continents is due to the circumstance that we are all able to communicate using email—a circumstantial factor.

Alongside these three factors in the shaping of communication, Harris proposed what he termed the “principle of cotemporality”. Hutton and Pablé describe this principle thus:

This principle is based on a simple lesson of linguistic experience: that what is said is immediately applicable to the current situation, unless there is reason to suppose otherwise. But this holds not only for what we say but for everything we do. In other words, in this respect there is a complete parity of status between linguistic acts and other acts. Linguistic acts do not have some special temporal status of their own, which somehow puts them outside the sequentiality of the rest of our existence. This might be thought to be an extremely banal observation, and in one sense it is. But it is perhaps worth calling a “principle” when we realize how far-reaching its implications are for linguistic inquiry. (HUTTON; PABLÉ, 2011)

To our orientation towards the language maker, the related recognition that language is the product of a person communicating, the three constraints on communication and the principle of cotemporality, we need only add two theoretical axioms to have the fundamental orientations and assumptions that underwrite an Integrationist approach to language and communication.

Integrationist semiology is based on two theoretical axioms: “(1) What constitutes a sign is not given independently of the situation in which it occurs or of its material manifestations in that situation. (2) The value of a sign (i.e. its signification) is a function of the integrational proficiency which its identification and interpretation presuppose” (*After Epistemology*, p. 73). In this sense, “[e]very act of communication, no matter how banal, is seen as an act of semiological creation” (*After Epistemology*, p. 80). (HUTTON; PABLÉ, 2011)

In these axioms especially the relevance of Integrational theory to paremiological issues, theories and debates should be readily apparent. In particular, we point out that the problems associated with discussions of decontextualized proverbs, the indeterminacy of proverb meaning and the numerous calls for more context in paremiological research closely parallel these same issues in Integrational discussions of language and semiology. In Integrational semiology, however, “context” ceases to have any theoretical basis since “text” and “context” cannot exist independently, and meaning is always and everywhere necessarily indeterminate. And with that *Bon voyage*, we leap into the political arena.

### 3 INTEGRATIONAL LINGUISTICS, SOUTHERN THEORY AND PROVERBIAL DISCOURSES

How might languages start to look if an alternative conception were mapped back to the center from the periphery? (MAKONI; PENNYCOOK, 2005, p. 152-153)

One of the unpredictable properties of the modern world is its seeming unpredictability and unrelenting uncertainty. We argue that the uncertainty of contemporary times creates a need to articulate innovative interpretations and use proverbial discourses, particularly in political contexts. This paper seeks to explore the nature of Southern Theory and Integrational Linguistics in the new millennium, particularly in political contexts, as seen in the case of RO analyzed in this paper.

Complexity and creativity in the use and interpretation of proverbs is typical of Southern Epistemologies, which emerged in reaction to colonialism, rationalism, and monocausality. The defining features of Southern Epistemology are the multiple connections among the many components that constitute reality of formerly colonized persons. Southern Epistemology is, by definition, a form of “solidarity epistemology”, as it seeks to establish interconnections between many dimensions, including history, culture, society, and communicative biography, among others. In terms of a “solidarity epistemology”, proverbial discourses, like other forms of language practices, must be analyzed in a relationship to power, history, culture, and identities. The critique of language that we draw upon in Southern Epistemologies is, to a large extent, founded on the notion of the disinvention and reconstitution of language (MAKONI; PENNYCOOK, 2005; PENNYCOOK; that is compatible with Integrational Linguistics in the ontological perspectives it adopts toward language.

In this framework, language should not be construed as something natural that simply exists as an autonomous system disconnected from private and public lives. Rather, language is a form of invention legitimized by metadiscursive regimes. For Makoni and Pennycook (2005, 2020), colonialism and Christianity influenced the ways that language is taught and understood. In Southern Epistemology, we start from the assumption that both the languages and the metadiscursive regimes used to describe them as fixed codes were originally embedded in colonial discourses and practices. Further, it was through these discourses that these languages were regulated through description. In Southern Epistemologies, we explore the role of “resistance”, “disruption”, and “disciplinary disobedience” (MIGNOLO, 2008). The decolonization of sociolinguistics is part of the broader effort to develop Southern Epistemologies through cultivation of a decolonial imagination (SAVRANSKY, 2017).

This article should be understood as part of a tradition of anti-imperial scholarship from the perspective of voices frequently excluded in Global North scholarship. In the paper, we seek to challenge what Cornel (2018) refers to as “extraverted sociolinguistics”. “Extraverted sociolinguistics is the tendency to understand colonial and postcolonial societies through concepts proposed in the metropole for understanding the metropole, using methods developed in the metropole” (CORNELL, 2018, p. 402). The emphasis on interconnectedness is part of our general interest in developing a “solidarity-based epistemology”, or what is referred to as “connected sociolinguistics”. The ultimate objective of this sociolinguistics is to fight “epistemic injustice” (SHILLIAM, 2016) by causing us to recognize that colonialism led to an erasure of cultural memory as part of epistemicide, which is one of the consequences of colonialism. A decolonization of communication is feasible if communication and the use of proverbs are construed as an integration of human activities that are contextually integrated by employing signs.

#### 4 REVISITING “JAMAA WA VITENDAWILI”

The attentive reader of Khasandi-Telewa and Barasa’s 2018 paper “Jamaa wa vitendawili” will note that the cognitive analysis provided therein implies that the proverbial discourses investigated are better understood through positing a hypothetical abstract mental form that is not available to the speakers themselves, and furthermore that this abstract level is provided in the English language. Yet the explanatory value of that paper is found not in the analysis based on Lakoff and Johnson’s Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) but in Khasandi-Telewa and Barasa’s discussion of situations and attitudes. The reader must also admit that it is either an astounding coincidence that the purportedly universal cognitive structures found in African minds exactly match the English language of two professors from the United States; or else identifying universal cognitive structures as English language structures is an artifact of a peculiarly North American science fiction. The authors of this paper are inclined to think that the latter rather than the former is the case. The “universal trope” masks the fact that we are dealing with an interpretation of the world from a very specific locus articulated through Standard English. In fact, any cognitive analysis of African linguistic practices eliminates the African from the picture entirely, and this should be of great concern to anyone interested in the utter specificity of each and every linguistic interaction in Africa (or anywhere else). The elimination of the African from the analysis runs contrary to the ontological convictions of Southern Epistemology in which the aim is to reintroduce (in this case) Africans into the analysis.

In this section we revisit the riddles and proverbs discussed in Khasandi-Telewa and Barasa (2018) but unlike that paper we use Integrational Linguistics to develop a decolonial/Southern Epistemology with which to understand proverbial discourse. Decolonial/Southern Epistemology is founded on an analysis of a unique context rather than on some supposedly universal cognitive structures from which metaphors take their form. Here we are critical of the universalism implied in cognitive linguistics and Conceptual Metaphor Theory because we regard its universalism as being a barely concealed imperial imposition and interpretation produced by a group of Euro-American scholars which by its very abstractness and claim to universalism erases the experiences of ALL speakers.<sup>2</sup> It is from “this grand erasure” of other people’s experiences (as Mignolo, a leading decolonial scholar, puts it) that this paper seeks to depart.<sup>3</sup> The present rereading of that earlier paper aims to demonstrate that a deeper

<sup>2</sup> “Metaphorical thought and the metaphorical understanding of situations arises independent of language. [...] There is a language-independent system in which abstract thought is understood metaphorically” (LAKOFF, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps not without political and historical interest that Lakoff named his list of Cognitive Metaphors “The Master Metaphor List”.

understanding of the political discourses investigated therein can be arrived at by dispensing with abstract theoretical fictions and by looking more closely at the social and political origins of speaking in African societies, in this case specifically, Kenyan society in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

“Jamaa wa vitendawili” (fellow of riddles) is a phrase with which the Kenyan politician Raila Amollo Odinga (hereafter RAO) is often derided, since riddling is usually associated with children, not serious matters of state. Yet Khasandi-Telewa and Barasa note that RAO’s positioning of riddles is anything but childish:

It would appear RAO’s riddles are actually preludes to stories he wants to tell. In all the three instances found in the sampled speeches in this paper, for instance, though RAO tells some riddles, he follows them with extensive stories of serious political discourse highlighting issues of immense political concern affecting citizens. Thus, though the riddles per se may appear childish, they are mostly preludes to stories that are adult and serious in nature. Indeed, the riddles serve to capture and sustain the audience attention in preparation for the main stories. Their interactive nature that requires audience participation captures people’s attention and allows him to raise his serious concerns with some humour as in political satire. (KHASANDI-TELEWA; BARASA, 2018, p.193)

As is often the case in African communities, riddles and proverbs are closely related and often discussed together, the distinction between the two genres being a matter of a mode of analysis rather than a necessity forced upon the hearer/reader. Riddling and proverb saying in RAO’s speeches are integrated into story-telling and interpretations of political conditions in Kenya in 2017 in a manner that shows no significant differences between proverbs and riddles. The present authors have therefore chosen the examples in Khasandi-Telewa and Barasa as providing both an excellent introduction to our topic, as well as a revealing juxtaposition of western/universalistic approaches to language scholarship as opposed to more specific approaches to analysis. Those are in fact two vastly different ways of looking at the language of political speeches in Kenya.

The first riddle discussed is the following, which RAO introduces by asking if his listeners would like a riddle (and they do): *Alibisha akafunguliwe mlango alipoingia akanyakua nyumba kuwa yake - nani?* Khasandi-Telewa and Barasa translate the riddle into English as “He knocked to be allowed in but when he entered he took over the house. Who is it?” and they then put the riddle and its associated story into the context of Kenyan politics. They remark “According to CMT, the source domain here is an animal and the target domain is human relationships as well as politics [...]” (KHASANDI-TELEWA; BARASA, 2018, p.194-195). This analysis assumes that in our minds “[...] something that is concrete is taken as a source domain to help us understand something more abstract” (p. 191) and it is this cognitive or thought process that is then given a linguistic formulation. Thus RAO appears to move from his and Kenya’s political circumstances to the thought of the universal conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A CONTAINER to a riddle then a story about camels and tents and finally to remarks on his activities in Kenyan politics.

From an integrational point of view, it would appear that positing an abstract universal concept underlying RAO’s riddle cannot survive Ockham’s Razor, but more significantly the abstraction removes RAO’s thought process away from his and his audience’s participation in Kenyan politics toward a mental construct in which neither RAO nor Kenya has any existence. Khasandi-Telewa and Barasa’s paragraphs explaining the political events that serve as the background known to everyone in the audience give us what we need to know in order to understand the riddle and its relevance; CMT theory may supply LIFE IS A CONTAINER, but we doubt that RAO or anyone in his audience would have summed up the riddle that way.<sup>4</sup> In short, we can say that Khasandi-Telewa and Barasa could dispense with CMT and their discussion would lose nothing needed for understanding RAO’s riddle, his story and his entire speech.

When later in the same speech RAO offers a proverb in reference to alleged corrupt practices, Khasandi-Telewa and Barasa offer no CMT analysis, nor do they need to:

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<sup>4</sup> The Americentric and English language bias in this particular Conceptual Metaphor can readily be seen by comparing this view of a house (LIFE IS A CONTAINER) with the Saami view noted by Tim Ingold (2019, p.116): “In the North”s history *from*, however, houses and vehicles take on a significance different from that which the history *of* the West has accorded to them. The house in history *from* is not so much a container for life as a place of convergence – a knot in a mesh of comings and goings.”

The proverb “*Waswahili husema mkuki kwa nguruwe kwa mwanadamu mchungu*” [Literally, “an arrow is used to shoot pigs but is painful for a human being”] is also used. This is equivalent to “what is good for the goose is good for the gander”. In this text, he complains about alleged looting of taxpayers’ funds in the National Youth Service saga and insists the allegedly protected looters must be brought to justice as happens to other thieves. (KHASANDI-TELEWA; BARASA, 2018, 195)

A third example of a proverb from that speech is quoted, again without a CMT analysis:

*Tumekuja kupiga mbiu ya mgambo; mbiu ya mgambo ikilia kuna jambo.*

We have come to blow the warning horn. When the warning horn is sounded, there is an issue. He uses the Swahili proverb that is equivalent to “Where there is smoke there is fire”. RAO then goes on to explain the various failings of Jubilee including unfulfilled promises. (i KHASANDI-TELEWA; BARASA, 2018, p.196)

One could, of course, seek (or propose) some abstract universal cognitive metaphor that would bring together arrows, pigs, pain and people, or smoke and fire, but is there a need to do that? Must we assume that intelligence and understanding must proceed through or end in abstraction?<sup>5</sup> What RAO is doing seems to be something much more direct than going from something concrete to an abstraction and asking his hearers to do the same: he is asking them to understand a concrete situation, the very situation they are all in, and he wishes them to understand it in a certain manner. The riddle about camels in tents, the proverb about pigs and people getting shot with arrows and the proverb about warning horns are all integrated into his speech because he could count on his audience knowing the proverbs and eagerly trying to solve the riddle, and in each case easily able to grasp how these related to the political events of the day, a relationship that he would in any case set out in more detail in the manner in which he wanted those events to be understood.

The second riddle discussed by Khasandi-Telewa and Barasa is based on a proverb. The form in which it appears in RAO’s speech is “*Alitaka yote mwisho akaanguka majini*” which the authors translate as “He wanted it all; in the end he fell in the water.” The answer is a dog who looking in a river saw a dog (his own reflection), and wanting that dog’s seemingly bigger bone, jumped into the crocodile infested river to get it. The authors explain the political context in Kisii to which the riddle was directed, and the explanation seems sufficient. Yet in the next paragraph they offer a CMT analysis in which “we are called upon to map the dog’s greed and folly” (the source domain) to a defecting Kisii politician (the target domain).

The last riddle examined, “*Alikimbia uchi, akalala akamuka asubuhi akapata aibu kubwa*”. “He ran naked, he fell asleep; he woke up and was greatly shamed”, is also followed by a story which the authors summarize in English rather than presenting in RAO’s words. A CMT analysis follows: “[...] the source domain is the human body—here it is the state of human nakedness, while the Target domain is, once again, politics and morality” (KHASANDI-TELEWA; BARASA, 2018, p. 198).

In the final section (before the Conclusion) the authors ask the question “How do the riddles help RAO to attain his aims?” and it is to just such a question that our integrational approach should focus its attention. The concluding sentence of this section is “The hidden meanings to be unravelled by the recipients also sustain audience participation.” Those “hidden meanings,” as Khasandi-Telewa and Barasa explain, are the publicly known facts of Kenyan political life in 2017, and audience participation is what electoral campaigns are all about. But why proverbs and riddles? The authors quote RAO from a television interview: “I used to listen to the elders—one way of bringing a point home – you look at a real life situation then you liken it to what you want to explain.” It is not clear what he meant by “a real life situation” as distinct from “what you want to explain”, but what is clear is that his “way of bringing a point home” was learned from listening to the elders in his community. While Khasandi-Telewa and Barasa demonstrate in detail that what RAO is dealing with are real life situations, matters in need of explanation, and a political constituency to whom he wishes to make himself understood, by divorcing RAO’s cognitive activity from all of these matters, CMT leaves Kenya’s political life as nothing more than LIFE IS A CONTAINER and a few other sources and target domains somehow activated within RAO’s brain. Does an integrational approach offer anything more revealing?

<sup>5</sup> See Jones (2017, p.189) for a critical discussion of the common discourse in which “[...] language is said to enable an intellectual ascent from the lowly *concrete* of existing particulars to the lofty *abstract* of general or universal principle, law or essence”.



The starting point for an integrational understanding of language is that people speak (write, sign, sing, listen, read...) for a reason<sup>6</sup>. And we learn to speak from those who speak to us; in RAO's case, we have his own testimony that this involved listening to the elders in his community. Thus we have the origin of our language always in a social relationship within which we are named and placed as *mwana* or *binti*, *mjukuu*, *kaka* or *dada*, *mpwa*, *binamu*, *jirani*, *mwanafunzi*, *mrithi wa kiti cha enzi*, etc. (using Swahili terms for the authors' and readers' convenience only, with no intention of ethnocentrism), and therefore the analysis must always try and capture the social context in which the language originated. The reasons for our speaking will be conditionally related to the time and place of our speaking as well as the time(s) and place(s) of our intended audience or readership. In the case of RAO's political speeches, they are prompted by an upcoming election in which RAO is running for office, they are in English and Swahili (or broken Swahili as *Khasandi-Telewa* and *Barasa* indicate) due both to RAO's linguistic abilities and the presumed linguistic capabilities of the audiences in Bomet, Kisii and Runyenjes, and the riddling and proverbial remarks are directly related to his own initiation into public speaking in the presence of the elders as well as to his expectation that his listeners will respond knowledgeably and appreciatively to those well known ways of speaking. RAO's practice of following his riddles with a story and relating both to the current political situation is rooted in his need to ensure that he is understood (and not misunderstood and perhaps subsequently misrepresented in the press) and that he can convince the audience members to cast their votes for him. He is attempting to bring about, through his speaking, a change in the political direction of his country. His choice of where to speak, when to speak, how to speak and what to say are all dependent upon what he finds when he arrives at each particular destination, and most importantly, how the audience responds to his promptings, questions, riddles and stories. There is therefore a high degree of sociolinguistic dexterity in his use of language. It is this high degree of creativity which underpins his use of proverbs.

What the integrational approach insists upon is an understanding that proceeds from the speaker's history and current circumstances as much as from his listeners and respondents: the communicational biography is an essential element to consider. The event that is a RAO speech is therefore in origin and in essence a matter of a Kenyan man in a world of Kenyan politics. The political and historical contexts that *Khasandi-Telewa* and *Barasa* provide for each of the riddles and proverbs examined are exactly the matters that illuminate RAO's language, and they involve Kenyan men and women and politics from start to finish. If we ignore the CMT analysis, we conclude that *Khasandi-Telewa* and *Barasa* have provided a fairly concise description of how RAO integrates his world and his plans with those of his listeners. In contrast to their description, the CMT analysis which they also provide adds only a series of cognitive metaphors originally conjured up in an office in Berkeley that has nothing to do with Kenya, politics or gender, a theoretical position that will always raise the eyebrows of integrationist oriented linguists as well as Southern Theorists, for, as they say in Kenya, *Tumekuja kupiga mbiu ya mgambo*. We will have more to say about integrational and Southern Theory approaches to proverbial speech after we have looked at some more examples taken from other sources.

## 5 POLITICAL THEMES IN LUHYA PROVERBS

The Luhya are the second largest ethnic community in Kenya, a country in East Africa. In Kenya, as in in many African countries, demographics play a large part in the politics. Many people count on ethnic affiliations and loyalty to garner votes during presidential and other elections. The large ethnic groups are usually wooed into political associations to produce even larger numbers of voters.

In spite of this ethnic advantage, the Luhya have never produced a president for Kenya. They have been given three vice presidency positions which is with the aim of collecting votes for presidential candidates from other communities and propelling them to power. This has led to their votes being split since they might have running mates for vice president for different parties.

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<sup>6</sup> In CMT, "language expresses thought" and "The neuroscience of concepts leads to a general principle: **You can only understand what the neural circuitry in your brain allows you to understand.** (LAKOFF, 2014) emphasis in original). What Lakoff claims to be studying is "embodied metaphor circuitry" and "embodied metaphorical thought" and his "general principle is that regular correlations in real-world embodied experience leads to primitive conceptual metaphors—*embodied primary metaphors using embodied primitive concepts*" (LAKOFF, 2014, emphasis in original). In spite of the author's emphasis on embodiment and experience, here language and thought are independent of communication; in this view, what we think and say and how we say it can be studied and understood without reference to why we speak, to whom, when or where.

Where there can be a presidential candidate, they end up splitting the votes and ultimately not winning the presidential race. They are often urged that:

### **Eshienyu neshienyu**

*Yours is yours.*

meaning that they should vote for their fellow Luhya even if he is not the best, as other communities are known to do, but in vain. In fact, divide and-rule tactics are used to divide the community along dialects whereby, for example the Maragoli sub-tribe would support their own candidate Mudavadi while the Bukusu would support Wetangula or Wamalwa. When the same proverb is used for dialectal differences then the vote is split even further as their loyalties split the vote additionally since “Even if it is rotten it is yours”. This proverb was heard a lot during the campaigns for the 2017 presidential election especially among the Kikuyu, the largest ethnic community in Kenya. Unlike the Luhya, the Kikuyu prefer to present a presidential candidate in each election and vote for him or her no matter what odds there are against him/her. In the 2013 campaigns their favorite presidential candidate Uhuru Kenyatta, was facing a serious case in the ICC court at the Hague yet they still preferred to vote him in. As the Swahili say “**Zimwi likujualo halikuli likakwisha**” (The ogre that knows you will not eat you up completely” meaning “We prefer our own even if s/he is terrible”). This was much to the exasperation of the rest of the ethnic communities who thought this time the path was clear for them to present a president for the country.

Emotions run high during elections and many of the candidates do not win elections due to development agenda or strategic plans for the country but on the strength of ethnic affiliations. This is a pity as strong potential presidents are left aside and tribal giants take the seat, much to the detriment of the country’s development. In order to foment their strength, it is necessary for candidates to enter into alliances with other large groups under some arrangement of power- sharing once elections are won. Unlike in the USA where people are either Republican, Democratic or Independent, in Kenya alliances are so fluid that on one day people can be hurling insults at each other and on the next day they are bed fellows. What matters is which side the bread is buttered on for the particular season.

These political associations involving forming alliances and shifting here and there are accompanied by a lot of debates, many of them laced with apt proverbs summarizing one’s displeasure, mocking or justification for their choices including the consequences. A common theme in these proverbs is one to do with consumption: eating or drinking. In these sections we examine some of the proverbs used among the Luhya to express the various political tides, especially during election campaigns. It is a worthwhile to note that most of these proverbs center on metaphors of eating, drinking and marriage or sexual liaisons and make use of animal metaphors as well. The proverbs we discuss here are based on the theme of shifting political alliances: from the view of those that defect or shift alliances and from the perspective of those left behind.

### ***Defecting to other parties***

Every five years after elections are over, victories have been celebrated by winners and tears shed by losers, it is time for new alliances in preparation for the next elections. Even though politicians are always urged to “leave politics and focus on working together for the development of the nation” there can never be said to be a time when presidential elections are not a factor in Kenyan discourse. Especially in the case of losers, people start realigning themselves in preparation for the next five years. Thus, the agenda of wooing voters is permanent in Kenya. It is an adage that in Kenya there are no permanent political friends or foes. There are only political interests. Therefore, it is common for people to quarrel and call each other names in one political era and the next day they are shaking hands.

These political scenarios are well captured by diverse proverbs.

### ***When the signs of shifting alliances begin to show***

Having fought together during elections and won or lost, it is expected that the alliances that went into the election during an election year will continue throughout the five years and live to fight together in another election five years later. However, this does not easily happen in Kenya. The winning team hopes to hold onto their victories and gain more strength by bringing

onboard those that gave them a hard time and that are perceived to be future threats. Therefore, surprises occur when such virulent opponents start showing signs of softening their hard stance towards the opponents. When these scenarios emerge, the Luhya are heard to quip:

**“Enjendekhwo ebulebe”, abetsanga nende eshimuyilayo”**

*When you hear someone talk of going somewhere, there must be a reason for this.*

So, for example when an opposition leader goes to State House it is not for nothing. It is the harbinger of something sinister.

This is what happened in the run-up to the 1992 elections when the erstwhile hot-headed passionate opposition critic of president Moi was surprisingly spotted leaving the president’s residence. At first it was denied as rumors but later confirmed as true when the late Luhya leader, Martin Shikuku was confronted with evidence of his visit to State house. He said he was invited there and only took some *ugali*. Unfortunately, for him, eating “*ugali*” in Kenya is synonymous with receiving corrupt gifts and it was assumed that apart from the actual *ugali*, he must have also taken some metaphorical *ugali*. The result of these “*ugali*” eating sessions was a split in the opposition Ford party which now had Ford Asili and Ford Kenya, easily handing over the election victory to Moi. The Luhya say:

**Otembelesia wateshia**

*If you want to marry you have to woo the girl.*

Even if a girl appears to hate you if you want to marry her you must devise some strategy that will win her over. This must be done by use of sweet, persuasive words:

**Omunwa omulayi kuchira walia eshikhongo**

*A good mouth will make you eat great things.*

Carrot goodies must be dangled to the desired individuals, to win them over. In the aftermath of elections many will be hurting from the loss of elections and will decry the millions of shillings they have lost in campaigns. They are, therefore, more amenable to “eating something” and will easily rationalize their defections and argue that:

**Owomufukoamanya okukwe**

*Everyone must first take care of his own pockets.*

Martin Shikuku did not turn politically to the president’s KANU party but it became evident that the sharp edge from his criticism was smoothed out and he succeeded in denying the opposition victory by splitting up FORD.

Former colleagues of defectors, either out of principle or jealousy will not let them go without enough invectives. They will accuse them of minding their own stomachs and betraying the cause. You often hear:

**Amakumba kabili kakanakania imbwa**

*The two bones confounded the dog.*

This proverb is an extract from the tale of how a dog thought his reflection in a river was another dog carrying a bigger bone. In the process of trying to reach out and grab the bone from the shadow dog, his own bone fell into the water and he lost all. They are also reminded about how the legendary hyena split into two while trying to eat from two diverse feasts. He smelt some delicious food but when he reached at a crossroads, the alluring smell of a roast meat appeared to be coming from both sides of the road. He decided to use two legs to go to one feast and the other two to the other feast. Since the delicious smells kept beckoning him and he could not decide which one to give up he stretched himself until he split into two.

Defectors will be reminded of how previously they abused the opponents and called them vile names – how can they now sit with them at the same table? Truly:

**Tsifwa tsioleka nitsio tsiawikurira**

*The vegetables you despise are the same that will satisfy you.*

When someone is given a huge serving of *ugali* and a small amount of vegetables to eat with, they may complain that those vegetables will not suffice to make them satisfied. However, it is believed that this may only be an illusion but once he/she starts eating s/he will find the vegetables quite sufficient. Thus, this proverb means that one should never underrate anything just by looking – never judge a book by its cover.

Similarly, “**Owekana omurwe niye owakuchinga**”

*He who declined to carry the head did carry it in the end.*

The story is told about how at a feast, a cow was slaughtered and the meat equally shared out among the celebrants. There was someone who swore that they had had enough meat and could never carry the head, but ironically, they were the ones given the head and had to carry it to their homes. Thus, it is good never to say never as you might be forced to eat humble pie. However, these insults are often not directed at the strong leader in the open, for fear of the consequences but whispered behind their backs. Care must be taken as these leaders are still very powerful and have many supporters:

**Inzofu ifutara khoyanyekwa**

*An elephant is insulted only when it has turned its back.*

When Martin Shikuku went to State House it was a shock for all including the Luhyas. Why? He was a renowned straightforward opposition leader who apparently had nothing in common with the corrupt president. After the *ugali*-eating session his criticism of the ruling party KANU and its leader, the president, was much subdued. So, it was alleged that Shikuku must have received some thick brown envelope for his silence and softening. To these accusations his supporters would reply:

**Eshiolilekhwo nishioeshishio**

*Only what you have eaten can be counted as yours: you cannot be sure of owning anything else.*

After such visits where opposition leaders go to Statehouse, and are always accused of taking some tea or eating “*ugali*” they may begin to show some disloyalty to their hard stance colleagues and might even say a good word about the erstwhile archenemy. Indeed, with time they may be appointed to an office and become friends with the administration. This is a case of wooing in courtship. Those left behind are heard to complain that:

**Amache kabeyeresia tsiswa**

*The crawling termites deceived the flying white ants that all was well outside.*

The Luhya consider a dish of flying white ants to be a treasured delicacy and source of protein. When it is raining, sometimes white ants fly out of their holes. They may be caught for dinner as they fly about. But often even when it is not raining some Luhya children prepare traps for white ants and beat some sticks to woo them outside. Before the white ants come flying out some crawling termites from the same anthill come out, ostensibly, to spy if all is well. Since these are not considered a delicacy, they are not picked; so the white ants get the false message that all is well and it is okay to fly out. As soon as they come out of their holes, they are caught for drying or frying. Thus, this proverb is used to warn people not to follow others blindly.

Indeed, some people who follow defectors find that the political cake has all been shared out and there is no slice left for them. For example, all ministerial positions may already be filled up including the ambassadorships. They may regret that they got nothing in

return for their defection unlike those who went before and persuaded them to follow suit. Nevertheless, they are reassured that they will not miss out on the goodies altogether since:

**Eyulilemwo shiifwa obuloo**

*The animal that gets to the river cannot die of thirst.*

They may not be satisfied with what is left on offer though and feel bitter. Defections lead to bitterness since after taking tea or eating *ugali* one is expected to dance to the tune of the provider. They put themselves in embarrassing situations, for example defending corrupt officers in the system when previously they would have lashed out at them. They are thus often ridiculed and compared to frogs:

**Ometa lishere; kumala okhulia khokwaruma**

*[Look at how] Ometa the fat frog jumps about when he has eaten!*

This defection proclaims doom for their former parties; and when they decamp, they do not just leave in peace. Like Shikuku's departure from FORD to form FORD Asili with Matiba left the political party in disorder and much weakened. They would be told:

**Imbongo ikhasi ahayirula yisakula obukono**

*The female deer destroys her lair before departing*

And also:

**Owenyaomuseasambulaahamenyele**

*He who wants to start a new home must dismantle the old one.*

This taunting is meant to elicit an exchange of insults. But sometimes they have lost so much face that they do not want to answer anything back. Yet, if even under provocation they say nothing they are further goaded than if they had kept the insults they received. They are reminded of the fox who tried to provoke the rock but the rock would not respond:

**Ing'u yaboolera olwanda kata noholela ekhunielekhwo**

*The fox said to the stone that even if the stone chose to remain silent, the fox had excreted on it.*

To this they may retort that they had to decamp even if they had been formerly allied to their former parties since those parties no longer served their interests:

**Eshibi shifutswa, Ingokho yafutsa lisa**

*A bad thing must be spat out: even the hen spat out the caterpillar.*

Their opponents will still insist that they are former beneficiaries of these parties and compare them to a woman seeking divorce who will invent all manner of excuses to justify her desire for departure.

**Omukhasinakhulobireakhuambaliloko**

*When your wife refuses you and wants to leave, she will accuse you of witchcraft.*

It is similar to the case of giving a dog a bad name before killing it.

More recently, Kenya has also experienced a great political shaking. It was the clincher for the shifting of alliances, when president Uhuru Kenyatta and his arch rival, the opposition leader Raila Amollo Odinga (RAO), after years of political tussles with much bitterness and even deaths of followers shocked the country by entering into a secret "Handshake". After the bloody and very violent elections of 2017 that were so flawed that the Supreme Court nullified them and ordered a re-run, there was a lot of adversity in Kenya. It was largely believed that RAO won those elections with his coalition called the National Super Alliance

(NASA) which comprised Amani National party, led by Musalia Mudavadi, Ford Kenya of Moses Wetangula, and the Orange Democratic Party (ODM) led by RAO. The run-off was boycotted by the opposition who insisted that they had won the elections and were not going back to the ballot box for “computer-generated” election results unless certain conditions were changed for a level playing field. When Uhuru Kenyatta was sworn in as president RAO also swore himself in as the “people’s president”. His followers made the country virtually ungovernable. It scared the ruling coalition and they seemed at a loss on what to do to end the violence since even if RAO’s supporters were shot at they still persisted with their riots.

Thus, on 9 March 2018, the whole country was woken up to the sensational news that president Uhuru and RAO had buried the hatchet and resolved to work together, ostensibly for the good of the country. They were pictured engaged in the now famous “Handshake” outside State House. Even their ardent supporters seem to have been taken aback as they were in the dark concerning the negotiations or what the terms of the handshake were. However, the government side was much relieved as they would now be able to have some peace and move their agenda forward. Some within the diverse camps however, felt betrayed, especially those that had made enemies across the board. Also, the Deputy president and his allies were at a loss since, having RAO in the government posed a risk to their 2022 presidential bid. No one knows for sure what agreement the two arch rivals made behind closed doors but when they came out and shook hands the political arena changed completely. They pledged to work together and Kenya was virtually left without an opposition as RAO had previously led the strongest opposition. Their terms of the handshake have never been disclosed to the public but it certainly achieved some calm and peace, though temporarily. The riots ceased from the streets and there was a calm-albeit an uneasy one with both sides not knowing how to interpret the situation.

The USA leaders seem to have been glad at the move and invited the two leaders to address the 68th National Prayer Breakfast meeting in Washington and share their handshake story which could hopefully be applied to other nations for peace. RAO’s speech at the breakfast begun in his characteristic way with a saying:

“Here in America you say that **“any jackass can kick down a barn but it takes a good carpenter to build one”**”.

He then went on to explain that for the sake of the peace they had agreed to lay aside their differences and work for the prosperity of the country. Uhuru also explained the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) which is an attempt to expand top leadership positions for a more inclusive government.

The 2018 handshake is the most illustrious example of the scenario where one’s mouth is silenced because of being invited to *ugali* -eating sessions. Situations that would have called for the harshest of criticisms from RAO and team have caused awkwardness since they are supposed to be the custodians of non-corruption. However, now, in 2020 there is a big scandal whereby government officials are alleged to have looted millions of shillings meant to fight COVID-19. All we hear from the erstwhile loud opposition politicians is stone silence, therefore, they are compared to hens which are given some grains and easily captured for slaughter:

### **Botsa okaale**

*Feed and be complacent*

Protests and demonstrations for the corrupt to be brought to book seem to have fallen on deaf ears and even the futile attempts have been lukewarm, nothing compared to the erstwhile passionate demonstrations led by RAO and his team. This calls to mind two proverbs:

### **Oukhulisia akhupa mao nolola**

*He who feeds you can beat your mother in your presence.*

This points out the awkwardness the former self-appointed fighters of corruption are faced with. They are required to look aside as suspected corruption cases thrive and even to justify their newfound cooperation with suspected thieves. The term “mao” means “your mother” but is used in an insulting way unlike the neutral or endearing “mama”; (mummy). It is enough to cause a fight,

when one says “Mao!” But when one is under the control of others that are feeding them, they are useless and cannot even defend their beloved mothers from attack. And they have already been insulted just by the use of the term “mao” instead of “mama wuwo” (your mother). The second, similar proverb is:

**Oukhumechera akhwayakhumoni.**

*He who slices a piece of ugali for you can graze his cattle at your door step.*

Meaning that whoever has control of feeding you makes you powerless before him. It is a form of emasculation since you depend on him for food. Any murmuring or signs of discontent on the part of defectors will be met with the rejoinder that:

**Okhulia khwera isuna**

*Eating caused the mosquito to die. (The mosquito was so keen on sucking blood from someone that he got slapped to death)*

They will also be reminded that they will ultimately receive the shorter end of the stick so they should not be overexcited. All they will get is a big bone but no real meat:

**Olasangalira okhukabwa likumba**

*Do not be excited by the big bone that you have been given.*

This simply means that defectors will be given a few political crumbs such as some appointment to minor offices here and there but the not big things they were made to believe they would receive. This was a common situation whereby the former president, the late Daniel Arap Moi was known to promise many different communities that he would give them the vice president slot if they rallied their communities to vote for him and his party, KANU. During the era of his presidency the old constitution gave the president powers to select a vice president, unlike in the new constitution in that one selects a running mate right from the beginning and so cannot change them anyhow. So, Moi promised around seven large ethnic communities that their man would be vice president and, in the hope, that the national cake would trickle down to them they would be persuaded to vote for him. When the elections were over and he appointed one vice president there would be around six communities weeping and feeling very deceived and betrayed. Moi was heard to cite the equivalent of the proverb:

**Olulimi luserera shilulilwo oluteshia ta**

*[Literally, the tongue that woos is not the one that marries]* meaning, the language of courtship is not the same as the language in marriage. Once you have been won over and married, you do not have to be promised goodies anymore; you have no choice but to take what you are offered.

He shamelessly defended his lies and explained that when one is courting a girl they are expected or allowed to woo them with sweet promises including lies. When the girl finally agrees to get married, they might be shocked to discover that the prince charming is actually nothing but an ugly frog. He, therefore had no apologies to make. After all, this is a hunting strategy and one has to be blinded with false promises to be won over:

**Oureka elilola lipulukha**

*If you trap a bird while it is seeing you it will surely fly away.*

He needed votes from all those communities and he was not expected to lay the trap when they were looking. So, justifiably he had to lay his traps secretly. Those who felt betrayed were reminded that:

**Oulonda omwalo ashira oulonda omwami***He who follows the course of a river is better than he who follows a king*

It is better to follow one's course of life and mind one's own business than waste time following these political leaders since many of them are liars and will disappoint unashamedly.

What Moi usually did was dishing out some appointments such as sending them off to be ambassadors in diplomatic embassies or perhaps some ministerial appointment but these were considered mere crumbs compared to the vice presidency that was used to hook them up with. The Luhya say:

**Owabeya ebunyahufiala imukhupanga nabira***The person who lied to his in-laws is rained on rather than shelter at the in-law's place.*

This means principally that one should be straightforward especially to those who are important to them. This proverb is used when one's lies cause them inconvenience. If someone lied to their in-laws, they lose face and miss out on opportunities. If such a person is known to have lied to his in-laws and the rain started falling, he would be unable to seek shelter in their homes. So, he has to continue walking in the rain for the shame of his lies. Thus, for a short while those in office are expected to feel ashamed to visit the communities they lied to since lies are not easily forgotten:

**Wikumula emwalo olekumula emukulu***Better stumble in your steps than stumble in your mouth.*

Indeed, some communities were very bitter and lamented that they were lied to and complained that:

**Owoliam ninaye niye oukhwira***The one you eat with is the one who kills you.*

One would expect that when the five-year cycle was over and Moi would need votes from the communities he had deceived, he would be ashamed to go back and lie to them again. But, Moi, the self-proclaimed "professor of politics", would unashamedly still make inroads. He reckoned it is better to be bold and come out and not be like the rabbit that died in its den because of shame:

**Tsisoni tsierera akhatuyu mubukono***Shame made the little rabbit to die in its den.*

He would strategically appoint someone from those communities into some office towards the end of the electoral cycle and task them with convincing his community with more promises that "development" was coming and that the appointment would trickle down to them by close association since:

**Omechera oukhumechera***{Literally "you slice some ugali for him who also slices for you"} You give to him who gives you.*

Since many of these communities are very poor the promise of good roads, electricity, schools etc. being dangled before their eyes would make them easily forgive the president and await another deception come the next election. With these tactics Moi was able to rule Kenya for 24 long years until the opposition discovered that they had to unite if they were to defeat him at all, which they did in 2002 with a resounding victory over Moi and KANU.



## 6 DISCUSSION

Examining proverbial speech in political discourses in Kenya, we are led to see the disconnect between a theoretical understanding of proverbs which sees them as fossils, and a practice that judges the present in terms of the future towards which it points. Instead of abstracting proverbs from contexts, the Integrational perspective asks us to see communicative action, a social engagement that is NOT the sum of pre-given proverbs and situations, but a world in development, a world made up of “[...] the voluntary acts of individual linguistic agents within the coercive moral context of everyday life” (TAYLOR, 1997, p. 156). Theorizing proverbs, as all of communication, cannot be

[...] about boiling particular utterances, texts and documents down to some mythical residue of stable and constantly reproducible forms and meanings but about finding and understanding the distinctive contribution that the relevant parties make by their situated communicative conduct to a developing sphere of activity or engagement – local, regional, global. (JONES, 2007, p. 72)

Consequently, the refusal to make of proverbs an abstract linguistic entity entails rejecting an abstract sociality as well. Recognizing social abstractions and linguistic abstractions to be what they are – artefacts of a particular form of analysis – engages the Integrationist directly with the central preoccupations of Southern Theory. Again we can quote Peter Jones (2007, p. 71):

[...] to make sense of the communicational initiatives of another person requires nothing less than trying to make sense of what they are up to, of their motives and purposes in relation to whatever is at stake in the business at hand or in their engagement with us. And this is why we are able to pass judgement on what they say.

The examples discussed in section 5 above clearly demonstrate Kenyans “trying to make sense of what they are up to” and passing judgement on what has been said—and done. ]

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

The love of, and value of proverbs in African conversations cannot be gainsaid. Proverbs are an artistic genre that is used creatively for entertainment as opposed to long held beliefs that they are some fossils of wisdom stuck in the past. They are learned and drawn upon with great pleasure for both speaker and listener in a creative activity of bringing the past forward into some desired new future that will (hopefully) unite the generations (rather than bury the “nightmare” of Marx’s dead generations) by means of a proverbial language that they have made their own. They are also used to teach people the mores and values of a society as situations are analyzed and proverbs creatively adapted to ingeniously comment. In this paper we have examined political proverbs in several African communities using Integrationist Semiology and Southern theory. As the Swahili say “*mwacha mila ni mtumwa*” [whosoever leaves their tradition is a slave]. Thus theories from the Global South can more relevantly be used to examine uncertainties of natural events from their own perspective instead of relying on northern and western totalitarian discourses of knowledge as power and Theories of Everything such as the ostensibly universal Conceptual Metaphor theory .

We have tried to illustrate the extent to which an Integrational approach to proverbs is able to more accurately capture the dynamics, and creative language use of proverbs in contemporary African politics than cognitive orientations which tend to be asocial, ahistorical and aspire towards fictitious abstract universalisms. The Integrationist approach adopted in this paper is compatible with a Southern/ decolonial approach to linguistic analysis. Southern Theory and decolonial approaches to proverbs constitute a radical challenge to the metalanguage of linguistic analysis, an area which has rarely been systematically studied (see Hutton forthcoming). On the one hand, a detached, disembodied approach to linguistic analysis may be construed as creating opportunities for an objective analysis consistent with the aspirations of linguistics as a science, on the other hand, from a Southern/decolonial perspective such a detached approach may be construed as lacking in social legitimacy and is alienating. Consequently, a linguistic analysis of proverbs grounded on metalanguage as used in ordinary discourses is a more legitimate as a

source of social critique than a detached metalanguage in spite of the postmodern fluidity and unpredictability of ordinary discourse from which such a metalanguage is drawn.

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