

**PROVERBS AND MASCULINITY: A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECT GENDERED
PROVERBS**

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Abstract

Chinua Achebe once said and rightly observed that proverbs serve as the palm oil with which words are eaten in Africa. In the past, hardly could an African make expression without the use of proverbs to elucidate the point(s). Though this trend is fast changing, yet proverbs still serve as a repository of wisdom for contemporary usage by language users and scholars. This paper examines some 'gendered' proverbs and their meaning. It also investigates features of masculinity as presented in the select gendered proverbs. The study demonstrates that gendered proverbs are bias with tendencies to portray women in 'dark colours', which are not truly representative of women. It opines that the concept of masculinity is not exclusive to men. The study posits that features of masculinity are those traits that are prominent in a person and which make a person unique. These characteristics propel the person to overcome restrictions and challenges. These features of masculinity can be found in proverbs. Thus, the study centres on the stylistic analysis of gendered proverbs with linguistic approach to meaning. It concludes on the ground that gendered proverbs portray masculinity qualities as peculiar to men only. Hence, there is the need for a critical and contemporary re-examination of African gendered proverbs.

Introduction

Proverbs as a form of art are short witty and concise expressions that exhibit opinions, perception and attitude of a particular language user(s). Proverbs are an important part of African culture because they provide vivid imagery for the expression of a people's worldview. Senkoro (2000) states, "a work of art is a consequence of the social milieu". Proverbs are works of art that are constructed by the members of a society. They are usually figurative expressions that are often used to teach morals and to guide the younger ones. Proverbs to a great extent reflect the social attitude and the world-view of the people that make and use them from one culture to another. But these days, scholars need to be careful in the use of gendered proverbs in order not to transmit wrong, archaic or outdated information to the younger generations. Hence, there is a need for the re-examination of proverbs as they affect our lives and society.

Literature Review -Proverbs, Gender, Masculinity And Stylistics The Concept of Proverb

Asade (2000) explains that 'proverbs constitute a universal linguistic phenomenon and play multifaceted roles'. The study of proverbs cannot be exhaustive. Proverbs are dynamic as they can be used to portray the relationships that exist between things, person or ideas. Paczolay (1996), buttresses that proverbs express "a relationship or a characteristic of a certain category of static or dynamic system(s)." In other words, a society's dynamism, thinking and behavioural patterns are reflected in their system of language through proverbs. They are often used to instigate rules in families, marriages and societies at large. Kolawole (1998), demonstrates that marital norms, codes and women's roles are entrenched in proverbs.

Proverbs are a source of knowledge. They have instructional and pedagogic attributes. However, Yusuf (1998), caveats that to associate proverbs with wisdom and truth would inadvertently be to believe that misogyny is wisdom and sexism is a truth." In essence, it would be fallacious to say proverbs exhibit 'whole' or 'total' truth in all circumstances without a conscientious and considerate analysis of their implications. Hussein (2005), buttresses this with the observation that "to state that proverbs are value-carrying instruments is to understand cultural practices uncritically, but to look into the ideological tones they carry is to intervene in cultural practices in order to produce socially transformative cultural understandings. Hence, this study makes an attempt at identifying the

implications of some select gendered proverbs and their underlying gender ideologies and perceptions.

The Concept of Gender

The concept of gender is central to every culture and it is variegated from culture to culture. It reflects in a people's use of language and the attitude of the people are thus portrayed. Steady (2002) surmises that gender can mean different things to different people since it carries the ideologies of the socio-cultural context in which it is constructed. Also, Craig (1993), affirms that the definition of gender requires reference to the changing conventions of culture and that we need a conceptualization of gender that recognizes multiple cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity as well as research that exceeds traditional analysis. This demonstrates that the concept of gender is culture specific. It also reveals the need to extend the content of contemporary research beyond traditional dichotomies of being female or male.

in the field of gender research, Oyewumi (2002), opines that in feminist gender discourse, African social categories are fluid, they do not rest on body type and positioning is highly situational. Likewise, Kolawole (1998), apprises that 'much of on-going research reveals basic attitudes and beliefs about women which validate women's liminal space in specific societies or trivialize women's achievements in areas of visibility and power'. This indicates that the concept of gender in Africa could depend on several variables that are not necessarily based on body type, and that women are not justifiably represented in terms of their roles and achievements in the societies. However, in order not to be bias in our opinion and investigation, there is need for gender analysis with the study of masculinity as an offshoot of gender studies

The Concept of Masculinity

Several scholars have attempted to describe the concept of masculinity. Craig (1993), observes that Chavetz (1978), describes being 'masculine' as associated with being athletic, breadwinner, objective, sexually aggressive, unemotional, logical, dominating etc., while 'feminine' traits as being weak, domestic, sexually passive, emotional, intuitive, dependent etc. In the same vein, Craig noted that Thompson and Pleck (1987), associate masculinity with 'status' which relates to men's need to achieve status and other's respect'; 'toughness' which means that men should be mentally, emotionally and physically tough and self-reliant, and 'anti-femininity' which is the belief that men should avoid stereotypically feminine activities and occupations.

However, Connell (1995), cautions that masculinity is not a property of men, and reminds us to be weary of using the terms 'men', 'male' and 'masculinity' interchangeably. Likewise, Sedgwick (1995), declares: "As a woman, I am a consumer of masculinities, but I am not more so than men; and like men, I as a woman am also a producer of masculinities and a performer of them. " This buttresses the fact that women too possess and exhibit features of masculinities.

Hence, masculinities can be described as the totality of the innate characteristics in a person that enhance the survival possibilities of the person. Masculinities are qualities such as boldness, fearlessness, determination, honesty, selflessness, tactfulness, wisdom, brilliancy, understanding, courage etc. These are positive traits that could promote peaceful co-existence of humans and development of humanity. Hence, this study focuses on the examination of masculinity as portrayed in the select gendered proverbs.

The Concept of Stylistics

Catano (2005, 1988) defines stylistics as the study of style used in literary and verbal language and the effect(s) the writer or speaker wishes to communicate to the hearer. He reveals that stylistics attempts to establish principles capable of explaining the particular and social groups in the use of language such as socialization, production and reception of meaning, literary criticism and critical discourse analysis, hi support of this, Bradford (1997) states that stylistics enables scholars to identify and name the distinguishing features of literary texts and to specify the generic and structural sub-divisions of literature.

Esser (1993) describes style as a 'notational term' that is, one that must be defined and not a 'linguistic prime'. This implies that style is related to actual concrete individual texts. Also, Deirdre (1996) posits, "stylistic analysis is not just a question of discussing 'effects' in language and texts, but

a powerful method for understanding the ways in which all sorts of 'realities' are constructed through language." *This buttresses the importance of stylistics as an approach of language study for textual analysis. This study of language is vital to our investigation of proverbs as it is a code that is used for the propagation of ideologies that are multigenerational.*

Halliday, (1996) observes that language is required to serve in the establishment and maintenance of all human relationships. He reveals that, language is a means whereby social groups are integrated and the individual is identified and reinforced. In the same vein, Yusuf (1998), reinforces the importance of language with the observation that 'language is an important tool that can be used to entrench gender bias in any society. Widdowson (1996), states that, by investigating the way language is used in a text, it can reveal the linguistic patterns upon which an intuitive awareness of artistic values ultimately depends. This portrays that the analysis of the select proverbs would enhance our understanding of the ideologies that can be found in the proverbs.

Research Method

This research is aimed at identifying the features of masculinity as portrayed in some select gendered proverbs. Hence, the research questions include: do the proverbs possess any feature(s) of masculinity? Are the masculinity features peculiar to both female and male genders or not? Are women presented in the proverbs to possess features of masculinity? Also, the study investigates to what extent are women presented as possessing masculinities? It asks whether the gendered proverbs are unbiased in their presentation of gender. Finally, it intends to find out whether both genders are adequately portrayed in the proverbs.

In order to provide answers to the above questions, a total of forty-two gendered proverbs are randomly selected from written sources. In order to explore the meaning of the proverbs, our stylistic analysis employs the linguistic theory of meaning, which states that meaning could be descriptive, expressive or evocative. This could generate lexical evocations, which are associated with secondary properties of words, and are also properties of the referent of words. Cruse (1988), observes that language and thoughts are connected. He explains that language, which is used to say things about the world, is an aspect of behaviour. Also, Deirdre (1996), explains that if the analyst is interested in explicating the power-relationships that obtain in socially constructed world, it is the realization of processes that should concern us. Halliday (1985), explicates that 'transitivity specifies the different types of processes that are recognised in language, and the structures by which they are expressed. The select gendered proverbs are: Proverbs

S/No.	Proverbs	Source
1	A Tyron woman will never buy a rabbit without a head for fear it is a cat	1
2.	Take a gift with a sigh, most men give to be paid	1
3.	A boy's best friend is his mother	1
4.	Men are like bagpipes, no sound comes from them	1
5.	She would drink the cream and say the cat she had was an old rogue	1
6.	He who spies is the one who kills	1
7.	The waiting man thinks the time long, trusts a spiteful man	1
8.	A shamefaced man seldom acquires wealth	1
9.	Sweet is the voice of a man who has wealth	1
10.	A man of one cow is a man of no cow	1
11.	A dishonest woman cant be kept in and a honest woman won't	1
12.	There is nothing wickeder than a woman of hot temper	1
13.	A bad woman drinks a lot of her own bad butter-milk	1
14.	Never trust a spiteful man	1
15	It is as hard to see a woman cry as it is to see a barefooted duck	1
16	A foolish woman knows a foolish man	1
17	A whistling woman and a crowing hen will bring no luck to the house they are in	1
18	Wherever there are woman, there is talking and whenever there's geese there's crackling .	1

19	<i>Women are shy and shame prevents them from refusing a man</i>	1
20	<i>Everything dear is a woman's fancy</i>	1
21	<i>Women are stronger than men, they do not die of wisdom</i>	1
22	<i>It is difficult to trust a woman</i>	1
23.	<i>Man to the hills, woman to the shore</i>	1
24	<i>Beat a woman with a hammer and you'll have gold</i>	1
25	<i>Where comes a cow, the wise man lays down and where comes a woman follows trouble</i>	1
26	<i>An excuse is near to a woman than her apron</i>	1
27	<i>There is nothing sharper than a woman's tongue</i>	1
28	<i>A woman without, is she who has no child</i>	1
29	<i>A woman can beat the devil</i>	1
30	<i>A bald man never aggravates bees.</i>	2
31	<i>A child who is fearless is going to bring tears to his mother's eyes.</i>	2
32	<i>A girl does not realize that she's married until her mother dies.</i>	2
33	<i>There is not enough of a thing for one man, if two men eat it, it is starvation</i>	2
34	<i>A poor man has no size</i>	3
35	<i>One man can't fill a woman's box</i>	3
36	<i>A strong man does not provoke arguments</i>	3
37	<i>If you look into the bride's face, you'll know that the bride is crying</i>	3
38	<i>A vehicle is not big for its driver. A small man can handle a big woman</i>	3
39	<i>No matter how big a child is, he'll never be bigger than his father</i>	3
40	<i>A bad husband is better than an empty bed</i>	3
41	<i>It only takes one woman to spoil the waterside path</i>	3
42	<i>A man does not lean on his wife</i>	3

Sources of Proverbs

1. *The "proverbial" knowledge of Ireland. (Internet: retrieved 31st March, 2005)*
2. *Sierra Leonean Proverbs on the Sierra Leone Web by Anonymous Compilation, (retrieved 17th May, 2005).*
Proverbs from Sierra Leone Proverbs on the Sierra Leone Web compiled by I. C. Anderson. Retrieved 17th May, 2005.

Analysis on Findings

Using Halliday (1985), used in the proverbs linguistic approach, it is necessary to identify the processes that are

Prov- No.	Actor	Process	Process Types
1.	<i>A tyron woman</i>	<i>Will never buy</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>
2.		<i>Take</i>	<i>Material</i>
3.	<i>A boy's best friend</i>	<i>Is</i>	<i>Relational</i>
4.	<i>Men</i>	<i>Are</i>	<i>Relational</i>
5.	<i>She</i>	<i>Would drink, Say</i>	<i>Behavioural Verbal</i>
6.	<i>He, who spies</i>	<i>Is</i>	<i>Relational</i>
7.	<i>The waiting man</i>	<i>Thinks, Trust</i>	<i>Mental Mental</i>
8.	<i>A shamefaced man</i>	<i>Seldom acquires</i>	<i>Material</i>
9.	<i>Sweet</i>	<i>Is</i>	<i>Relational</i>
10.	<i>A man of one cow</i>	<i>Is</i>	<i>Relational</i>
11.	<i>A dishonest woman An honest woman</i>	<i>Can't be kept Won't</i>	<i>Behavioural Behavioural</i>
12	<i>There</i>	<i>Is</i>	<i>Existential</i>
13	<i>A bad woman</i>	<i>Drinks</i>	<i>Material</i>

14		<i>Never trust</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>
15.	<i>It</i> <i>It</i>	<i>Is</i> <i>Is</i>	<i>Relational</i> <i>Relational</i>
16	<i>A foolish woman</i>	<i>Knows</i>	<i>Mental</i>
17	<i>A whistling woman and a crowing hen</i>	<i>Will bring</i>	<i>Material</i>
18	<i>There</i> <i>There</i>	<i>Is talking Is crackling</i>	<i>Relational</i> <i>Relational</i>
19	<i>Women</i> <i>Shame</i>	<i>Are</i> <i>Prevents</i>	<i>Relational</i> <i>Relational</i>
20	<i>Everything dear</i>	<i>Is</i>	<i>Relational</i>
21	<i>Women</i> <i>They</i>	<i>Are Do not die</i>	<i>Relational</i> <i>Material</i>
22	<i>It</i>	<i>Is difficult to trust</i>	<i>Relational</i>
23	<i>Man</i> <i>Woman</i>	<i>(go) to</i> <i>(go) to</i>	<i>Material</i> <i>Material</i>
24	<i>You</i>	<i>Beat 'll have</i>	<i>Material</i> <i>Material</i>
25	<i>The wise man</i> <i>Woman</i>	<i>Lay down</i> <i>Follows</i>	<i>Material</i> <i>Material</i>
26	<i>An excuse</i>	<i>Is</i>	<i>Relational</i>
27	<i>There</i>	<i>Is</i>	<i>Existential</i>
28	<i>A woman</i>	<i>Can beat</i>	<i>Behavioural</i>
29	<i>A woman</i>	<i>Can beat</i>	<i>Behavioural</i>
30	<i>A bald man</i>	<i>Never aggravates</i>	<i>Behavioural</i>
31	<i>A child who is fearless</i>	<i>Is going to bring</i>	<i>Relational</i>
32	<i>A girl Two men It</i>	<i>Is not</i> <i>Eat Is</i>	<i>Existential</i> <i>Material</i> <i>Relational</i>
34	<i>A poor man</i>	<i>Has</i>	<i>Material</i>
35	<i>One man</i>	<i>Can't fill</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>
36	<i>A strong man</i>	<i>Does not provoke</i>	<i>Material</i>
37	<i>A cunny man</i> <i>It</i>	<i>Dies</i> <i>Is</i>	<i>Material</i> <i>Relational</i>
38	<i>A vehicle A small man</i>	<i>Is not Can handle</i>	<i>Relational</i> <i>Behaviour</i>
39	<i>A child</i>	<i>Will never be</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>
40	<i>A bad husband</i>	<i>Is</i>	<i>Relational</i>
41	<i>It</i>	<i>Takes</i>	<i>Material</i>
42	<i>A man</i>	<i>Does not lean</i>	<i>Material</i>

In the forty-two (42) gendered proverbs examined, fifty-six (56) processes are identified. Eighteen are material processes of doing and happening; eleven are behavioural processes of behaving; three are mental processes of 'sensing'; twenty are relational processes of 'being'; and three are existential processes of existing.

Out of the eighteen material processes identified, nine refer to women as the actor or the goal; three specifically refer to men, while the remaining six uses the generic gender 'man' or its equivalent. The generic gender in this context refers to the referent that is applicable to both men and women. Six of the behavioural processes identified have women as the behavior, while four refer to men and one describes a general behaviour. Out of the three mental processes, two use the generic referents 'man' and 'you' for the senser, while one uses the female referent 'foolish woman' in a derogatory manner. This implies that men prefer to be associated with mental processes to portray themselves as entities that make more use of cognition than women.

The only verbal process (of saying) identified is associated with a woman. This portrays women as 'verbal' entities that are fond of talking. Out of the twenty relational processes (of 'being') twelve of them relate women to various objects and ideas. Three refer specifically to men while the remaining five use the generic man to refer to ideas and activities common to both genders. Finally, three existential processes are identified, among which two describe the existence of a woman's 'hot temper' and 'wicked tongue', while the remaining one refers to the generic man.

Discussion and Findings

The study demonstrates that most gendered proverbs with the male referent 'man' or 'he' are usually generic in meaning. The generic referent encompasses both male and female genders. It also reveals that their counterparts, men, who in their stereotypic and chauvinistic manner generate derogatory proverbs about women and women's activities, must have propounded proverbs about women. Gendered proverbs as shown above, possess few features of masculinity because most of the proverbs are associated with women. Masculinity features as demonstrated in the proverbs are not common to both male and female, rather the features are restricted to men only.

Also, the study reveals that women are not portrayed in the gendered proverbs to possess masculinity tendencies that include fearlessness, boldness, honesty, confidence, generosity, consideration, modesty, etc. that could be of benefit to humanity. Women are presented as possessing masculinities in the barest minimum.

The study also reveals that almost all gendered proverbs are stereotypic and sexist proverbs. None of the gendered proverbs has really portrayed with sincerity, the contributions of women to their families, homes and communities. The proverbs are biased in their presentation of the female gender in particular. Hence, both genders are not adequately portrayed as women are presented negatively, while generic referents to 'man' or 'men' are emphasized to exaggerate the representation of men, thereby downplaying women's specific roles and activities.

Conclusion

With the above findings, one can confidently argue that the era of proverbs, that is, the age that proverbs were prominent in the expressions of Africans (like other races) reflected primitive thoughts and conceptions of people about women. These conceptions and representation of women are no longer valid. Thus, it is high time, linguists developed proverbs that will reflect the functions, activities and abilities of women and their contributions to the development of Africa (as well as other parts of the world).

These gendered proverbs could be deliberately improved to portray gender neutrality, equality, and contemporariness such as in these few examples:

A tyron woman will never buy a rabbit without a head for fear it is a cat; can be changed to:
One never buys a rabbit without a head for fear that it is a cat.

A bad woman drinks from her own bad buttermilk; can be changed to: *A bad person also drinks from its own bad buttermilk.*

Women are shy and shame prevents them from refusing a man; can be changed to: *When one is shy, shame prevents the person from refusing uncomfortable offers.*

A bald man never aggravates bees; can be changed to: *A bald person never aggravates bees. A man does not lean on his wife; can be changed to:* *One does not lean totally on one's spouse.*

In conclusion, in order to promote and salvage the declining trend of use proverbs, it is pertinent to examine and answer questions such as: How are proverbs generated? Can the existing proverbs be modified to suit contemporary usage? Are there possibilities of introducing the study of proverbs into school curriculum at different levels of education? All these would enhance the preservation of the golden tradition of the use of proverbs that is at the verge of extinction.

Finally, there is need for scholars, not only women, to create contemporary proverbs, just as demonstrated above, that will portray the honest and 'uncoloured' pictures and contribution of women as well as their male counterparts in the development of humanity.

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