

A Classificatory Study of Siswati Idioms

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Abstract: *This is a classificatory study of Siswati idioms that is informed by functional and communicative approaches. Idioms are one of the major part-perspectives of folk sayings that are fundamental in any language discourse. The dual purpose of an idiom, namely; the primary level of meaning and the secondary level of meaning are the central mode of operation of this study. The shift of idiomatic meaning depicts a connotative sense. An idiom can however, be a word, phrase or clause that reflects explicit or implicit meaning. The classificatory view entails various parts of speech, namely: substantives, predicative, qualificative, descriptive and connectives. Idioms are examined by looking at their origins, structure, syntactical patterns and semantic applications. Their scientific observation accomplishes a complete application of research processes and theoretical underpinnings. Idioms are part of indigenous knowledge system, traditional and heritage. Their focus is on developing sensitivity to a special use of language in a more figurative, literary and symbolic manner. They further broaden the horizons of understanding cultural beliefs, principles and ideologies.*

Key Words: *connotative sense, folk saying, indigenous knowledge system, semantic applications, syntactical patterns.*

I. Introduction

Folk saying are made up of proverbs, idioms and riddles. They are oral or verbal lore aspects that are as old as human folk. Since the dawn of man it has been a struggle to understand the environment, skills and the knowledge passed from one generation to another through oral means called oral literature. The society relies on the experience of its old members as the foundation on which to build what is recreated, innovated and coined. Since the birth of human race, our unique ability to pass on our knowledge of the world, our experience in life and our achievements to our offspring has enabled our young not only to survive but to prosper. Ruse and Hopton (1992:206) describe oral literature as follows:

...is a spoken and not written down. It developed before literature and was being passed from one community to another by traveling paddlers, singers and rites or passed down from one generation to the next. Each story, poem or song went through many changes since it was not fixed form and imagination and skill of the actor or singer had enormous influence on the script.

Vail and White (1999:132) cite Axtell James from the study of European Relations with the Native Americans in the Colonial Era where they state:

An oral culture is intensely communal...knowledge and truth are not an individual matter so much as a corporate position. Accordingly, oral man psychologically faces outward, toward community from which he derives the meaning and veracity of his thought: a break with social values is to feel the shame of the popular disapproval.

They also emphasise that oral literature is owned by the whole society or community, not by an individual. Vail and White (1999:132) further state that:

By some token, oral knowledge is relatively authoritarian, depending on tribal consensus rather than personal analysis. Meaning is not a simple term to define because of its peculiar nature.

O' Sullivan et al (1998) suggest the following:

Meaning is the product or result of communication. The content level refers to factual information about the topic or message. The relation level determines how the participants understand their relationship.

Meaning plays a significant role in idioms. It can be looked at literary or figuratively, denotatively or connotatively, but ultimately reveal a communicative process which is linked by communicator-recipient or encoder-decoder. An idiom is expression which has a distinct, specific meaning of its own, often incompatible

with or even contrary to the individual meaning of words which composed it. The word, idiom derive from the Greek word *idios*, meaning private, peculiar to oneself. It is a form of expression or a phrase peculiar to a language and approval by the usage of that language, and it is often has a signification other than its grammatical or logical one. (Nitschke, 2010).

II. Research Methodology

The study is informed by both functional and commutative approaches Fiske, (1989) demonstrates that in all languages semantic learning depends on the cognitive development and that sequences of development are determined by semantic complexity than structural complexity. The emphasis is on two pacesetters to language development with the poles of function and of form: (1) on the functional level, the development is paced by growth of conceptual and communicative capacities, operating with innate schemas of cognition; and (2) on the formal level, the development is paced by the growth of perceptual and information-processing capacities, operating innate schemas of grammar.

Communication is regarded as a combination of acts, a series of elements with purpose and intent. It is not a mere event, but it is a functional, purposive and designed act to bring about some effect and change, however subtle or unobservable on the environment of hearers and speakers. Communication is a series of communicative acts or speech acts for both the production and comprehension of an utterance.

Benati and Angelovska (2016:68) contend that functional approach view language as a means of communication. It describe language as an interactive and interpersonal phenomenon. The term function has been variously interpreted by Lutrin and Pincus (2007) who provided one of the best expositions of language functions, used the term to mean the purposive nature of communication and outlined different functions of language.

The instrumental functions serves to manipulate the environment, to cause certain events to happen. It communicates acts which bring about particular condition. The personal function allows a speaker to express feelings, emotions and personality reactions. A person's individuality is usually characterised by his or her use of the personal function of communication. In the personal nature of language, cognition, affect and culture all interact in ways that have not yet been explored. The heuristic function involves language used to acquire knowledge, to learn about the environment. Heuristic functions are conveyed in questions-answers form. Inquiry is a heuristic method of eliciting and differentiating the representations of reality from others. The imaginative function serves as creative imaginary systems or ideas. It uses a language for the sheer pleasure of using it as language of poetry, tongue twisters and puns. Idioms are indigenous expressions whose meaning cannot be ordinary deduced or inferred from knowledge of the individual words that make them up. They are basic to a language and have the stylistic effect of giving it a characteristic of its mode of expression. Baldick (1990:106) defines an idioms as:

A phrase of grammatically construction that cannot be translated literary into another language because its meaning is not equivalent to that of its component words. By extension, the term is sometimes applied more loosely to any style or manner of writing that is a characteristic of particular group movement.

Trask (1997:109) sees an idiom as follows:

...an expression whose meaning cannot be straightforwardly guessed from the meanings of the words in it.

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1997:571) defines idiom as:

...a phrase which means something different from the meaning of the separate word from which it is formed.

Ruse and Hopton (1992:145) provide the following as a definition of an idiom:

An expression with a meaning that is different from the meanings of the individual words. The meaning of an idiom has to be learned as a set of words. The usage of a language that is correct and natural to people who speak it as their first language.

Idioms can be based on animals, humans and their behaviour. They originate from the folk narratives and other folk sayings. Cuddon (1979:321) defines an idiom as follows:

A form of expression, construction or phrase peculiar to a language and often possessing a meaning other than its grammatical or logical one.

Guma (1967:66) describes the structure of idioms as follows:

Unlike proverbs, idioms do not have a fixed and regular form to which they adhere at all times. They are changeable and are seldom, if ever, used in their basic form. They are based on a predicate, which is built on a particular verb stem and which may be found associated with large number of idioms.

He further indicates that the main differences between an idiom and proverb lies in their main functions, by highlighting the didactic, moral implications and basic truth or wisdom with general bearing on life.

The functions of idioms are nearly the same with those of proverbs. Our forefather used body parts, animals and acts of human beings to construct idioms. They are used by young and old when they communicate to each other. Idioms are phrase that say one thing, but mean something entirely different. Idioms as lexical items have two main implications. They are words that are metaphorical in nature (Harris and Hodges 1995). An idiom is an expression whose overall figurative meaning cannot be derived from the meaning of its parts. However, there are many idioms that allows syntactic operations without losing their idiomatic meaning. There idioms are syntactically flexible.

Idioms incorporating identifying copulatives

Idioms	Meaning
<i>Kuba yinyoka</i> (to be a snake)	To be untrustworthy
<i>Kuba lilulwane</i> (be a bat)	To sit in the fence
<i>Kuba yinkhukhu</i> (to be a chicken)	To go to bed early
<i>Kuba yingwenya</i> (to be a crocodile)	Powerful, famous, of many virtues.
<i>Kuba liphela</i> (to be a cockroach)	To be very greedy
<i>Kuba yingwenyama</i> (to be a lion)	To be brave and very strong
<i>Kuba lingce</i> (to be a vulture)	To be voracious
<i>Kuba sikhova</i> (to be an owl)	To be lonely or to like to go out at night (commonly used for people who are doing night duties)
<i>Kuba litje</i> (to be a stone)	To be hard nut to crack or be very slow at understanding
<i>Kuba yimvu</i> (to be a sheep)	To be humble
<i>Kuba ngumzwilili</i> (to be a canary)	To be a good singer

An identifying copulative is an aspect of part of the speech that is noted for its functional domain of classification, recognition and classification. Taljaard and Bosch (1988:91) define copulative as follows:

A non-verbal predicate or a construction which is not informed from a verb stem, but functions as a verb the sentence.

It is, however, noted that the copula construction can be formed from a variety of words or stems such as quantifiers, adverbial forms, adnominal stems and substantives.

There are living and non-living phenomena that are figuratively and copulatively used to give a specific meaning. Their animate and inanimate functions, behaviour, procedures and modes of operations are noteworthy.

Inyoka (a snake) is associated with untrustworthiness.

Lilulwane (a bat) is associated with indecisiveness.

Inkhukhu (a chicken) refers to early sleeping in the cited idiom.

Ingwenya (a crocodile) depicts a powerful person.

Liphela (a cockroach) is used to mean greediness.

Ingwenyama (a lion) is an animal that symbolizes to be strong, energetic and brave. It is also referred to as a king of all animals.

Sikhova (an owl) is a bird that sleeps during the day and go out at night. People are likened to an owl if they behave or resemble that life.

Litje (a stone) it depicts to be hurtles and callous.

Imvu (a sheep) is associated with a humble and always a cool person.

Umzwilili (a canary) is a good singing bird. Any good and melodious singer is likened to a canary.

Idioms incorporating infinitive formatives

Idiom	Meaning
<i>Kubeka libala</i> (to put a mark)	To make a false accusation (with an aim of stigmatising)
<i>Kucela emehlo</i> (to ask for eyes)	To show off
<i>Kucela indlela</i> (to ask for the road)	To ask to be released to go

<i>Kucela indlebe</i> (to ask for ears)	To ask for attention
<i>Kuyibamba ishisa</i> (to catch it while it is burning)	To go away in a journey without delay
<i>Kukhotsa iluma</i> (to lick and bite)	To praise and criticize in the same breath
<i>Kutfota ubekelela</i> (to collect and pack firewood at the same time)	To do things hurriedly
<i>Kupheka utfulula</i> (to cook and dish up)	To give somebody no rest

The verbs that are used are the following: *beka* (to put) and *cela* (to ask for). They are used as nouns *kubeka* and *kucela* to put forth the meanings. They precede the nouns that make them give the comprehensive primary and secondary meanings.

Idioms incorporating identifying copulatives

Idiom	Meaning
<i>Kuhlekwa yinyoni</i> (to be laughed by birds)	To be a laughing stock
<i>Kukhahlelwa yimbongolo/yinshe esifubeni</i> (to be kicked by a donkey/ostrich on the chest)	To be bad in keeping secrets

The two selected idioms use animate phenomena, *inyoni* (the birds), *imbongolo* (donkey) and *inshe* (ostrich) to bring about their meanings. The selected animals are preceded by the nouns that are formed from the verbs, *hlekwa* (be laughed) and *khahlelwa* (be kicked). This type of copulative is characterised by descriptive language which is mostly expressive, illustrative and explanatory.

Idioms Incorporating Noun and Noun

Noun and noun	Meaning
<i>Inyoka nesicoco</i> (a snake and a frog)	Enemies
<i>Ligundwane nelikati</i> (a mouse and a cat)	Enemies
<i>Ingwe nengwenyama</i> (a tiger and a lion)	Opponents

The animals are selected for their characteristics and behaviour. The two animals are paired to make metaphoric phrases. They can be used as expressions to denote both primary and secondary meanings.

Idioms Incorporating Possessives and Nouns

<i>Kuba nenyoni</i> (to be a abird)	To be scared
<i>Kuba nesibindzi</i> (to have liver)	To be brave
<i>Tinyembeti takhwini</i> (tears of Victoria)	Liquor
<i>Inkhani yeselesele</i> (the check of a frog)	Too be stubborn
<i>Kuba nesandla</i> (to have a hand)	To be bully
<i>Emabala engwe</i> (the colours of a tiger)	A very brief talk
<i>Umsila wengwe</i> (the tail of a tiger)	Summons
<i>Sandla semfene</i> (the hand of a monkey)	Left-handed
<i>Ematse emphungane</i> (the saliva of a fly)	Very slight drizzle
<i>Emacandza elituba</i> (the eggs of a dove)	Two children
<i>Kudla kwendlebe</i> (the food of ears)	Good news or good music
<i>Kuba nelitfumbu lelidze</i> (to have a long intestine)	To eat to much
<i>Kungabi nesifuba</i> (not to have a chest)	To be unable to keep secret
<i>Kuba nemlomo</i> (to have a mouth)	To be talkative
<i>Kungabi netindlebe</i> (not to have ears)	Unable to pay attention
<i>Kuba neminwe lemidze</i> (to have the long fingers)	To be a thief
<i>Kuba nemehlo</i> (to have eyes)	To be very cautious
<i>Kube neliso lelibukhali</i> (to have a sharp eyes)	To be very watchful
<i>Kuba nemsila</i> (to have tail)	To always forget to shut the door behind you when you enter or leave the house.
<i>Kuba nelitsambo</i> (to have a bone)	To be tall

The idioms that are selected for the above-mentioned section depict sacredness, braveness and unbecoming practices such as theft, gossip and talkative. Imagery play a vital role in idioms or idiomatic expression because of the extension of the meaning and content-bound dimensions. The words that form an idiom stimulate and

delight imagination. Although they are ordinary words used in prose or everyday speech, but in the context of poetry or figurative language.

III. Discussion

Idioms are specific forms of expressions which are used during formal and informal communication. They are imaginative and creative forms that explain certain experiences, aspects of life and thematic variations as means of effective communication. Idioms are the aspects of a language that promote a broad creativity concept which concerns thought process, aptitude, psyche and intelligence. Fluency and proficiency in a language discourse is determined and measured through the idioms. They are colourful linguistic spectrum of expression. Idiomatic constructions show the following:

- ✓ Semantic characteristics.
- ✓ Structural peculiarities and irregularities.
- ✓ Constraints or restrictions on their lexicogrammatical behaviour.
- ✓ Conventional expressions that belong to a grammar of given language.
- ✓ Fulfil specific discourse-communicative functions (Everaet, et al 2014).

Idioms play a vital role in any communication which is highlighted by Steinberg (2011) when she broadly defines communication as follows:

A verbal and non-verbal communication, formal and informal communication intentional and unintentional communication.

Idioms play most important role in Siswati language. These expressions are vigorous, graphic and natural. They add beauty and effect in everyday language. If idioms are used with skill, they enhance artistic value. Doke and Vilakazi (1990:202) holds the following view concerning the idiom:

The term idiom commonly signifies a structural form or form of expression peculiar to a language, and one which reflects genius of the language and psychological workings of the speaker of such language.

An idiom is an impressive expression which is peculiar to a language if construed literally may be meaningless or at least not have the meaning that the words convey. Nkabinde (1968:69) defines an idiom as form of expression that is peculiar to a language. He says that the idiom has a structural phrasal pattern words which are used together. The meaning of such pattern of words is completely different from the lexical meaning. The pattern of words used in idiom generally consists of an introductory word which is infinitive application of the root morpheme.

Seidl and Memoradie (1978:4) give the following view on a specific folk saying:

Idiom is a member of words which, taken together, mean something different from the individual words of idiom when they stand alone.

From the aforementioned definition, we deduce that the syntactic structures of an idiom is a lateralization of the underlying meaning. It seems true that idioms are decorated by the rhetorical devices. In Swati language discourse, the idiom is strongly reflected in tropes. Figures of speech are also defined as deviations from the ordinary use of words with a view to increasing or emphasizing effect. The idioms are the vivid expressions that are using figurative language to express a unitary meaning. They are component parts of speech that are syntactically and semantically analysed.

Ntsanwisi (1968:2) defines idioms as a structural form, phrasal pattern of words which is peculiar to the genus of a grammatical structure, accepted by usage and the meaning of which can be logically ascertained from its components parts. Particular pairs of nouns and verbs, rhetorical expressions and copulative constructions are used to express the specific ideas.

Idioms appear as isolated lexical units. They are linguistic expressions that involve metaphors, metonyms, pairs of words, simile, sayings, phrasal verbs, grammatical constructions, and they are assumed to be a matter of language alone. (Rasinsky, et al 2007).

Idioms are phrasal or clausal constructions that are basic to a language. They are lively, well delineated and effective expressions. They are characterised by structural and unstructured constructions. They are phrasal pattern of words which allow rearrangement of their component elements or syntactic alteration. Idioms are phrases that are modified addition of formatives and words. There are idioms that are associated with the proverbs, especially those proverbs that are firmly embedded in colloquial speech. The function of Swati idioms is evident by being instrumental in communicative acts during any language discourse.

IV. Conclusion

It is, however, noted that an idiom is made-up of one, two, three or four words. Idioms are devoid of regular, fixed and static form to which they adhered to at all times. They are indigenous or folk saying expressions that are usually based on predicates which are built on verb stems. They are basically concerned with actions rather than symbolic or metaphorical representations. It is also noticed that in their form, they are based on their infinitive form of verb stem. Their differences from the proverbs are that they are partially syntactically constructed to assume various structural forms. Thus, the study of idioms is worthwhile as great awareness and understanding of idiomatic language that enhance readers understanding of the texts.

V. Recommendations

The study of idiomatic expressions is essential in any language because it enables the speaker to express his thoughts, gives life and colour to his or her speech and writing. Idioms are the real soul of a language and gives it illustrious, notable and distinguished character. More could be done in our schools to promote the systematic study of idioms than leaving to the students themselves to acquire incidentally a knowledge of them from what they read or chance to hear in conversation. It is primarily to provide the means for such a course of study that this article has been compiled, and the manner in which the material has been assembled and presented specially adapts it to such a purpose. The informative or presentation lessons on idioms are needed to enhance revision, appreciation, illustration, demonstration and explanation.

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