

Embracing Tourism and Hospitality through Xitsonga Proverbial Expressions

Arnold Mushwana

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3418-2538>

University of South Africa

wamina27@gmail.com

Abstract

Proverbial expressions have for years been transferred from one generation to the other for different purposes including rebuking actions that are not acceptable in society, encouraging good behaviour and giving guidance. This article addresses how Xitsonga proverbial expressions can promote tourism and hospitality in the sector. The article discusses the role that Xitsonga proverbial expressions can play in the tourism sector in encouraging people to tour, good hospitality to tourists, persistent visits to tourist destinations, and conducts of tourists and hosts, and advising business owners on choosing strategic areas to attract tourists. The corpus method of data collection has been applied by extracting relevant proverbial expressions from a collection of Xitsonga proverbial expressions titled *Vuthari bya Vatsonga-Machangana: The Wisdom of the Tsonga-Shangana People* (Junod 1973). Under the broad umbrella of Afrocentric epistemology in education, this article postulates how proverbial expressions can be used to develop curriculum content that speaks to African norms and values. In the end, the view is that wisdom which is carried in African proverbial expressions can be used in an in-depth analysis. It can offer solutions to different cultural and social problems that the continent faces including, amongst others, decolonisation of African education and economic and environmental obstacles that Africa is confronted with.

Keywords: decolonisation; folklore; hospitality; proverbs; proverbial expressions; tourism

Introduction

Proverbial expressions are short form phrases that are used to strengthen an argument and add value to a speech (Machaba 2011). The same sentiment is shared by Mandowa and Wasosa (2013) who state that proverbial expressions within the Shona culture of Zimbabwe are sometimes used to strengthen arguments during proceedings in a court of law. They are a form of wisdom, ethics and morals (Mokitimi 1997). Also, the importance of proverbs is pointed out by Boyce-Davies (1994) when he describes proverbs as the pride of African culture.

In many ways, proverbs and other styled folklores are perceived as outdated and are no longer given space in the present century. Kuzwayo (1998) shares the same argument that the study of proverbs is old-fashioned and out of touch. Recently, debates are being held where activists argue that there is a need to reconstruct the education curriculum to speak to knowledge not only from the European perspective but through Africa's epistemology. Mvanyashe (2019) argues that limiting the use of proverbs to language teaching has deprived learners of learning about their cultural beliefs and customs. A further argument can be made that limiting African proverbs and other traditional folk narratives has deprived Africans from shaping education and learning in an African way. Decolonisation, it is believed, will instil a sense of pride in Africans and allow Africa to discover solutions to her challenges. Proverbs and other styled folklores are never thought of or even given a chance to see what role they can play in implementing decolonisation in the school curriculum in Africa.

Studies have been done on the relevance of African folklore in the 21st century. However, to this researcher's knowledge, no study has been conducted on how proverbial expressions can be used in the tourism sector. A study conducted by Buthelezi (2018) considered how folk narratives can be used in the teaching and learning of the life skills curriculum at school. Buthelezi found that isiZulu folk narratives can be incorporated in the teaching of decision-making concepts in the life skills curriculum. Different from Buthelezi (2018), Mndawe (2019) discusses the use of taboos for learning about biodiversity sustainability, focusing specifically on fauna and flora. The study proved without a doubt that African folklore, taboos in this case, can serve as an important teaching method and aid in the natural sciences at school.

Even though proverbial expressions may talk about animals, trees and mountains, their main reference is human beings. According to Mushwana (2016), proverbs are part of our daily life communication and allow us to persuade others to behave in a certain way, to mock others, to teach and give advice. Kuzwayo (1998) points out that proverbs are a true reflection of African life; therefore, they are not only part of a language but part of life. Dagnew and Wodajo (2014, 95) assert that:

Generally, proverbs are an integral part of interpersonal communication of everyday life. They strengthen human interactions in day-to-day social-cultural occasions and make speeches interesting and impressive. Beyond their literary value, proverbs have

often been used as a source of didacticism and more generally as a medium for the expression of commonly held views and pearls of wisdom. They enshrine much of the cultural heritage of people, their traditions, history, wisdom and ethics.

Some feministic scholars such as Schipper (1991), Babane and Mapindani (2012) and Machaba (2011) argue that some African proverbs discriminate against women. An example of such discrimination is the Xitsonga proverb that says *wanuna i n'hwembe, wa nava* (a man is a pumpkin plant, he stretches). This proverb permits a man to have extra-marital affairs without being questioned by anyone including his wife.

This article aims to outline how proverbial expressions can be used to develop curriculum content that speaks to African norms and values in the tourism sector by encouraging people to tour, good hospitality to tourists, persistent visits to tourist destinations, and conducts of tourists and hosts, and advising business owners on choosing strategic areas to attract tourists.

Methodology

The study explored a qualitative research design to describe and interpret Xitsonga proverbial expressions. The corpus method of data collection was applied by extracting 13 relevant proverbial expressions from a collection of Xitsonga proverbial expressions titled *Vuthari bya Vatsonga-Machangana: The Wisdom of the Tsonga-Shangana People* (Junod 1973). This is a collection of 1671 proverbs that was first published in 1957 by H.P. Junod. While there are other publications of proverbial expressions in Xitsonga, I opted to use this one because it is the first published book to contain Xitsonga proverbs. I opted to use the 1973 version, which has been improved in terms of orthography and spelling. The extracted proverbs have been grouped into sub-themes. Applying content analysis, each proverb is analysed to highlight its relevance within the tourism and hospitality industry. Proverbial expressions, like other fixed expressions, should not allow addition, deletion or alteration (Akbarian 2012; Furuza 1996). As such, a word-for-word translation has been given for each proverbial expression analysed.

Theoretical Framework

This article is underpinned by Kete Molefi Asante's (1998, 2007) Afrocentricity theory. The theory advocates for an African-centred approach to ideologies that are to solve African problems and challenges. Chukwuokolo (2009) defines Afrocentricity as a phenomenon that pushes Africans to be given their intellectual pride as the originators of civilisation. Asante (2007) postulates the use of Africa's cultural and social experiences to address African issues. While there are different definitions of Afrocentricity, they commonly call for a change in how Africa is seen by the world. Afrocentricity calls for African heritage, culture and beliefs to contribute to "world civilisation and scholarship" and to reflect in the education curricula (Chawane 2016, 78). In applying the Afrocentricity theory in this article, I look at Xitsonga proverbial expressions with new lenses with a view to incorporating them in the tourism and

hospitality sector. They are analysed to clearly show how they can be used to teach tourists about behaviour when touring, to teach individuals in the tourism and hospitality sector how to look after tourists, and to teach good practices to maximise profit.

Discussion and Analysis of the Proverbs

Proverbial Expressions That Talk to Business Owners

The proverbs below have been categorised into three main categories that talk to business owners or managers on the strategic location of their business, marketing their business for a good profit margin, and showing good hospitality to their clients.

Strategic Locations for Business

The importance of placing one's business in a strategic place is shared by Sherman (2018) who states that the location of a business will affect its income and success. This claim is affirmed by Griffin (n.d.) who states that a business situated close to people minimises expense costs while maximising income. According to Puciato et al. (2017, 216), a business that is located in a busy location has more market potential than one situated in a remote area. In Xitsonga, there are proverbial expressions that specifically advise entrepreneurs to place their businesses in strategic areas to attract visitors. One of the Xitsonga proverbs (Junod 1973, 138) states:

Xigatlwana xa le ndleleni, ku gatlula vahundzi

(A *xigatlwana* [thorny tree] along the roadside always scratches those who pass by)

This proverb means that a village or a homestead located by the roadside will automatically attract more visitors, in this case, tourists. *Xigatlwana* is a thorny tree with sharp thorns. Because of its shape, when one of its thorns grazes a person, it locks itself in the flesh. The way these thorns hook passers-by can also be interpreted as a business in a strategic place that locks in visitors. This proverb provides an advisory role to businesspeople to carefully strategise where they place their business—if they locate their business in a strategic place, they are more likely to attract visitors, which will maximise their profit.

Junod (1973, 130) records another proverb that relates to the one discussed above:

Nkuwa wa le ndleleni wu hanyisa vahundzi

(A fig tree on the side of the road makes those who pass by to live)

The meaning behind this proverb is that one is likely to be helped by people situated along the footpath. This proverb makes the same argument that if one places a business where it can be seen by many, people are likely to be assisted there. Therefore, one is likely to make a success of one's business, in this case, a tourist destination. We should further note that the above proverbial expression can also refer to signals that are well-placed to be seen by passers-by.

In business, there is a model that was first developed by Elmo Lewis in 1898 called the AIDA model of advertising. This is an acronym that stands for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. According to the model, a business should be able to attract the attention of potential clients (Li and Yu 2013). Applying the AIDA model, a well-placed business that is situated along the footpath is more likely to grab the attention of passers-by and arouse the interest and desire to visit the place. Eventually the potential client will engage in the action of supporting the business.

Encouraging People to Tour

As Masaka and Makahamadze (2013) argue, some African proverbs play an important role in manipulating people to behave or act in a certain way. They can be used as a tool to encourage and persuade. In Xitsonga, some proverbs exist to encourage tourism. Junod (1973, 128) lists these proverbs:

Ku famba i ku rheta
(To walk is to slip)

and

Ku famba ka vonisa
(To walk is to see)

The proverbs are meant to encourage people to tour. These proverbial expressions describe touring as a hassle-free act. They further associate travelling with slipperiness, evoking the idea that travelling should not be seen as a task but a fun and easy exercise to see the beauty of the world. Another Xitsonga proverbial expression (Junod 1973, 128) says:

Vuthari byi kumiwa endleleni
(Wisdom is found on the way)

This proverb can also be used to encourage people to travel. It depicts travelling as a way that one gets to have new experiences that lead to wisdom. In short, this proverb says if one does not travel, one might never learn. A proverb similar to this one says (Junod 1973, 128):

Loko u nga fambi u ta teka makwenu
(If you don't travel, you will marry your sister/brother)

Like other proverbs provided earlier, this one also encourages people to travel to see different places than their surrounding environment. This proverb does not encourage only local travel but also advises going places a bit further from home. Junod (1973, 30) mentions the proverb that says:

Ku famba i ku chuka miri
(To walk is to exercise the body)

The proverb highlights the physical benefit of travelling. It argues that if one travels, the benefit is two-fold—to see the beauty of nature and as a form of physical exercise.

Good Hospitality to Visitors

Junod (1973, 30) provides the following proverb:

Mpfhumba a nga humi ntsena
(A visitor doesn't go empty-handed)

The Xitsonga proverb above encourages families to warmly welcome their visitors. This proverb argues that whenever a family hosts a visitor, *timbuva* (send-off goods) must be given so that when the visitor gets home, his/her family will see that he/she was welcomed with open arms. Furthermore, the proverb suggests that when a visitor leaves, he/she must be accompanied by some family members. On the way, they must continue with their conversation accompanied by laughter as a sign that the visitor is leaving but they are still fond of his/her company. This proverb can be applied in the hospitality sector. A hospitality business should at least provide some complimentary gifts to its visitors. In some instances, it will also be a business strategy to lure visitors to come back. A free shuttle to shopping centres, for instance, can be provided whenever there is a need. In that way you are saying to the visitor, “you are leaving but we love you, please call again.”

Another proverb that is found in Junod (1973, 32) says:

Muvutisi wa ndlela u fanele ku kombisiwa
(S/he who asks a way should be shown one)

This is another proverb that advises people to warmly welcome visitors and provide assistance whenever they ask for it. The proverb has its roots in *ubuntu*, a Nguni concept that advocates for good humanity—a law of nature amongst Africans. This proverbial expression can be adopted in the hospitality sector, advising them to assist their visitors with whatever they may need from them.

Proverbial Expressions That Talk to Tourists

Because of the aphorism that says a customer is always right, business employees are often faced with different attitudes from visitors. The proverbial expressions below are specifically directed at the tourists and how they should behave to make their visits enjoyable.

Persistent Visits to Tourist Destinations

One proverb that encourages persistent and continued support to the tourism sector is the phrase (Junod 1973, 136):

Vusiku a byi fambiwi kan 'we
(A night is not travelled once)

The above Xitsonga proverbial expression counsels tourists that when they travel to an unknown destination, even when their visit was not enjoyable due to some incidents, they should not be discouraged from engaging in other trips. The proverb is meant to advise prospective travellers that experiences can never be the same every time one takes a trip. Travellers should see unpleasant experiences as once-off incidents and should be ready to risk more.

Conduct of Tourists and Hosts

Junod (1973, 134) provides another helpful proverb:

Ndlela i ya vambirhi
(A road is for two people)

This proverb means that there is no pleasure in taking a trip alone. This proverb advises tourists that when one plans a trip, it is much better if one plans to travel with another person or a group. It is believed that if you take a trip alone, you will not have a person to enjoy and share your memories with. This proverb counsels tourists on how to plan their trips. Another proverb that encourages good behaviour from tourists is the following phrase (Junod 1973, 136):

Muvutisi wa ndlela a nga lahleki
(S/he who asks a way will never get lost)

The meaning behind this phrase is that one who asks for the way will never get lost. This proverbial expression is also an advisory tool to tourists that when they are on their journey, they should not hesitate to ask if ever they encounter some problems or get lost. The last proverbial expression (Junod 1973, 138) says:

N'wendzi a nga orhi mindzilo mimbirhi
(A visitor does not warm himself at two fires at the same time)

This proverb encourages tourists to be focused and stick to a reasonable schedule. Planning a holiday and other activities outside their trip is not encouraged. If tourists can take the advice that the above proverbial expressions offer, they will have an enjoyable and drama-free experience and wonderful memories of their travels. In the end, the biggest winner economically will be the tourism and hospitality sector.

Conclusion

Africa has generally been perceived as an uncivilised continent by the colonisers (Sibanda 2015). This kind of thinking has perpetuated a belief that there is nothing positive that comes from Africa including its rich traditions and customs. Thus, the positive parts of African traditions and customs have been neglected and dismissed as primitive and irrelevant in the ever-developing society of today. Yankuzo (2013, 43) argues that “African traditional cultural values are being replaced by the global cultural values.” This could cause the ignorance of the importance of some African traditions and customs today. This necessitates one to say that for African traditions and customs to gain respect in the world, Africans need to stand their ground; we need to instil confidence in African values. As Tchimboto (2015, 7) puts it, Africa needs to “claim for a change, for a development.” This development can be found in wise African philosophy whose deposits are the proverbs.

This article has challenged the notion that nothing positive can come from African customs, especially its styled folklores. It has demonstrated that if we can look into African ways of life and beliefs, decolonisation of the education system is not and never will be an illusion. Nkuna (2015) has discussed how Xitsonga proverbs can be used in the management of businesses. When he concludes his arguments, Nkuna (2015, 58) proclaims that his work “opens avenues for research on the relationship between culture and management.” In the same vein, it can also be concluded that Xitsonga proverbs, like in any other African languages, can be applied in teaching business strategies that will in the long run address economic challenges facing the continent. This article has manifested that an African-based curriculum on business strategies and tourism management is possible. Proverbial expressions can play an educational tool to strategise high turnover in the tourism and hospitality discipline at schools.

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