

Critical Discourse Analysis: The paradox of Topoi in Chichewa Proverbs in Malawi

Liston Mpheza

Lecturer in Linguistics and Communication Studies. The Catholic University of Malawi

Abstract:- This article examines the use of Chichewa proverbs as sources of argumentation (topoi) in Malawi from the standpoint of critical discourse analysis. This article illustrates how Chichewa proverbs spark diametrically opposed topoi in various oral and written dialogues. Proverbs are essential because they are utilised in a variety of contexts, including education, entertainment, justice, and behaviour modification, that have an impact on the wellbeing of residents of different communities. Proverbs are used by different speakers to make their views more obvious, offer advice, and caution others about various elements of life, administer justice in legal proceedings, critique the behaviour of others, settle disputes, and enliven speeches. Because Malawians are accustomed to employing Chichewa proverbs as the foundation of a topos in everyday communication, they are more likely to utilise Chichewa proverbs to persuade others of their points of view. Speakers use proverbs to persuade people that what they are arguing is supported by folk wisdom from adults, they employ diverse proverbs in a variety of ways. This paper examines how arguments in Malawi are derived from oral literature, particularly from Chichewa proverbs, one of the types of oral literature. The results show that majority of Chichewa proverbs contain counter proverbs. Because of this, relying on them is inappropriate for someone who wishes to win a debate. The Discourse Historical Approach, a subset of Critical Discourse Analysis, was employed in this paper.

Keywords:- Topoi, Proverb, Discourse Historical Approach.

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the ways in which Malawians base their everyday topoi on Chichewa proverbs. Malawi's national language is Chichewa (a country in Eastern Africa). The majority of sermons, political speeches, songs, short tales, talks, debates, and poems base their points of contention on Chichewa proverbs. Proverbs are defined by Lusweti (2015) as a saying in established forms distinguished by their brevity; they are typically considered as statements of thought by the community. Accordingly, a proverb is a saying that has common sense. Proverbs are primarily utilised by adults in Malawi, much like in many other African nations.

In Malawi, students that successfully and responsibly use Chichewa proverbs in their composition work receive high grades in school. Students receive low grades for their work that does not include any Chichewa proverbs. In spite of the fact that proverbs can be effective argumentative weapons, this essay contends that because they are often contradictory, they shouldn't serve as the primary argument's foundation. A proverb in the African culture conveys a wisdom connotation and is essentially associated with the sage elders. "Our elders say..." is a common way for individuals in Malawi to introduce a claim that has already been supported by evidence. When someone starts an argument with that phrase, we know that he or she wants to argue using proverbs.

II. TOPOI

In rhetorical and literary theory, a common topic or argument that is utilised in a number of contexts is referred to as topoi (plural of topos) (Wodak,2009). It is a method of structuring thoughts and arguments that can be applied to the development of convincing arguments. Topoi can be used to organise a speech, essay, or other piece of writing as well as to spot recurring themes in literary works. Topoi are search algorithms that specify where and how to look for arguments (Zagar, 2009). Different academics use topoi as the framework for developing arguments. The term "topos" has its roots in Aristotle's theory of rhetoric, where it was prominently used in all types of persuasive speeches. Topoi, however, have emerged as one of the main tools of arguing with the development of contemporary argumentative theories. Wodak's model contains fifteen main topoi. The top ten most frequently employed topoi are as follows: 1. Topos of Burdening, 2. Topos of Reality, 3. Topos of Numbers, 4. Topos of Finances, 5. Topos of History, 6. Topos of Authority, 7. Topos of Threat, 8. Topos of Definition, 9. Topos of Justice, and 10. Topos of Urgency (Wodak, 2006, p.74). However, in order to complement the analysis of topoi in Chichewa proverbs, this paper has created further forms of topoi.

➤ Discourse Historical Approach

The Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) proposed by Wodak (2009) serves as the framework for paper. Since DHA is a thorough research design, it has been specifically chosen because it is "helpful in the investigation of discourses about racial, national, and ethnic issues" (Wodak, 2010). The

framework was chosen because the data (Chichewa proverbs) under consideration are classic example of public use. Second, according to Wodak's definition of "discourse" (pp. 89–90), it is "a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices... it is topic linked. It's important to note that Wodak distinguishes between discourse and text, arguing that the former is more thorough and inclusive and the latter is made up of pieces of discourses. Wodak (2009) asserts that DHA is a versatile and fruitful subset of critical discourse studies that consistently chooses a problem-oriented viewpoint. Discourse analysis is the study of language in use and meaning construction.

In DHA, contributions from a variety of academic disciplines, including linguistics, formal grammar, pragmatics, semiotics, conversation analysis, psycho- and sociolinguistics, ethnography of speaking, and others, have influenced people's understanding of language. Despite having very different disciplinary backgrounds, all of these closely related fields have certain things in common, such as an interest in the characteristics of language use in naturally occurring situations by real language users, analysis of a wide range of text grammar and language use phenomena, a focus on dynamic socio-cognitive or interactional moves and strategies, and research into the social, cultural, and cognitive contexts of language use.

DHA is not a clearly defined empirical method but rather a collection of methodologies that engage in conversation with various disciplines and theories. By concentrating on the use of topoi in the discourse structure of Chichewa proverbs, the researcher aimed to use the Discourse Historical Approach.

Although the discourse model and the emphasis on historical analysis play a larger significance than generic social theory, DHA is associated with critical theory. DHA adheres to the triangulation principle in a more organised manner than other CDA strategies. The observational, descriptive, and explanatory steps of CDA are expanded upon by the idea of "rhetoric," or argumentation as a major area. Sometimes a more significant goal is the actual application of the analytical insights, or practical critique (Lazar, 2007).

Proverbs used in this paper are just a sample of most of the Chichewa proverbs that advance an argument. However, there are many proverbs that contradict one another, which run into paradox. Proverbs should be kept in their own category because they can be an important research tool. It must be noted that while the use of proverbs in everyday conversation cannot be stopped, points for constructing arguments must also be placed in their right contexts. It is a known fact that Malawians frequently enliven their statements with proverbs. However, they must provide some standards of correctness as they move from proposition to proposition.

➤ *Topoi of Age*

It is possible to use proverbs to talk about the idea of age by using topoi of age as a discursive method. In this approach, the numerous facets of aging—such as knowledge, experience, and the passage of time—are discussed through proverbs. It also entails utilising proverbs to talk about the opportunities and difficulties that come with becoming older, such as the necessity of adapting to shifting circumstances and the significance of keeping an optimistic mindset (Piazza, 2020).

Proverbs are regularly cited as proof while making claims in Malawi. Proverbs can also be used to convey how new or recent something is. For instance, anytime an elderly guy says or does anything stupid, the Chichewa proverb "*Mwamuna ndi mwana sakula*" (a man is a child does not grow) is used. The expression "*a man is a child does not grow*" is used to characterise the behaviour of old men. For instance, women or girls taking a bath in the river may laugh at a man who is staring at them from the grass while he is hidden there and yell, "*Mwamuna ndi mwana sakula.*" (A guy is like a child that never matures.) On the other hand, the crowd cheers the young man and yells "*Mphongo ya chiwala siichepa*" (the male grasshopper is not limited) when he performs something bravely and expertly, such as killing a snake. The implication of that Chichewa proverb is that males are stronger and more powerful than females, hence young males can accomplish unusual things that old men can do (the male grasshopper is not limited to this). There are Chichewa proverbs in Malawi that denigrate young boys for not being able to perform tasks as well as older men just because they are young, and there are also Chichewa proverbs that denigrate old men for acting like children.

"*Mawu aakulu akoma akagonera*" (elders' voice are sweeter after some days) is a Chichewa proverb when adults are providing guidance and counselling, they usually utilise this proverb. This adage is intended to caution someone against doing anything wrong that will have unfavourable effects. To counter this, the accused will occasionally reply, "*Tsabola wakale sawawa*" (ancient pepper is not hot), which means that outdated ideas are no longer relevant in today's world. So there's no need to follow the elders' guidance. These make Chichewa proverbs paradoxical.

➤ *Topoi of Consistency versus Inconsistency*

Topoi of consistency is a discursive technique that makes use of topoi proverbs to advance a claim or viewpoint. This tactic entails the use of proverbs that support the thesis and serve as further evidence for the point being conveyed. Proverbs are regarded as wise and authoritative, so this tactic is frequently employed to strengthen the credibility of an argument (Gunn, 2020).

For both stable people and unstable people, there are some Chichewa proverbs. These also apply to persons who are quickly captivated by novel experiences. People who, after seeing it or being influenced by it, can quit doing what they had

meant to do and start something new. The Chichewa proverb "*Ukayendera mzengo usamati asakhwi afumbula*, (when you are in the bush seeking trees don't admire animals' tracks) refers to the idea that one should refrain from acting in an unplanned manner. However, if the other party in a debate is intrigued by a novel idea or activity, he or she can respond, "*Ukayenda mtchire wayendera zonse*." (Do whatever you can while in the bush), or "*Okawona nyanja adakawona ndi mwuwu yomwe*" (those who are interested in observing the lake may also be lucky to view the hippopotamus in the lake). This means that if you are on an adventure, you don't have to be interested in one thing; do anything you can at the time.

➤ *Topoi of Number or frequency*

The notion that repetition or the number is essential to success is a *topoi* on number or frequency in proverbs. Proverbs like "*Unity is power*," "*United we stand, divided we fall*," "*Practice makes perfect*," and "*The more you do it, the better you get*" are frequently used to convey this. This *topoi* highlights the value of repetition, practise, and working in the majority in order to succeed (Kövecses, 2010). Sometimes, Malawians will say, "*Njuchi zikachulukitsa siziika uchi*," (when bees are many, they do now make honey) this is said, when they are performing a task and wish to divide the compensation among selected few people. This suggests that when numerous individuals are working together, some people may not work very hard, which may lead to others becoming lazy. However, some people may say, "*Manja akachuluka amadzutsa mpanda owola*," (the downed fence might be raised by many hands).in an effort to persuade the supervisor to include them in the group of workers. This proverb indicates that work is completed quickly and effectively when it is done by a large number of people.

When someone's life is spared by something danger, he or she frequently vows never to repeat the action by saying "*Mphechepeche mwa njovu sapitamwo kawiri*," (you don't purposefully go through an elephant's legs twice). This implies that you don't need to keep doing the same thing that can bring you bad luck. However, people can employ the adage "*Mphini zobwereza ndi zomwe zimatumba*" (repeated tattoos shines) for something nice that has to be done repeatedly. This implies that some behaviours, particularly those that are positive, need to be repeated in order for people to remember them.

➤ *Topoi of Patience versus Impatience*

As a discursive technique, *topoi* of patience can be summed up as follows: This proverb highlights the value of patience and the notion that good things come to those who wait. 1. Patience is a virtue. 2. Slow and steady wins the race: This adage inspires tenacity and serves as a reminder that moving slowly and steadily is frequently more successful than moving quickly. 3. Time heals all wounds: This proverb serves as a reminder that we can recover from difficult times with time (Clines, 2015).

We cannot draw the inference that those who act slowly get an advantage over those who act quickly. These depends on the circumstances. The proverbs : "*Kuona maso ankho n'kudekha*," (patience makes one to see snail's eyes) or "*lero lomwe linadetsa nthengu*," (do it today blackened the grongo) or "*zabwino zili mtsogolo*" (good things are ahead) are expressions used by those who believe in patience in doing things. They believe that exercising patience has more perks or benefits. On the other hand, those who lack impatience in taking actions can say proverbs like "*Dyeratu kunja kuli malingo*" (spend it all for fear of malaria disease) or "*Ndionetsetse chilli apachi adathetsa nkhosa*." (Let me see it clearly made all sheep be eaten by bear") These proverbs imply that we should make the most of what we already have or take advantage of the opportunities that are present on that particular day because we don't know about tomorrow. It depends on one's perception of the world.

➤ *Topoi of responsibility versus irresponsibility*

An approach to underline the value of accepting responsibility for one's conduct through proverbs is to use the *topoi* of responsibility discursive tactic. This tactic entails illustrating both the benefits of accepting responsibility and the drawbacks of not doing so through proverbs. Proverbs like "A man is only as good as his word," "A stitch in time saves nine," and "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound" are examples of sayings that could be applied to this tactic (Deltete, 2020).

The majority of Malawian families are extended. They adhere to sayings like "*mwana wa nzako ndi wako yemwe ukachenjera manja umadya naye*." (A child of your friend is your child; if you take care of him or her, you will profit"). This proverb emphasises that if you are responsible to others, they will be responsible to you. However, the saying "*Mwana wa mwini ndi gaga sawundika*" (somebody's child is husks, he she cannot be moulded) gives the opposite meaning. In other words, you don't need to look after your friends' kids because once they are old enough, they'll go and take care of their real parents or other relatives.

➤ *Topoi of Habit*

Topoi of habit is a discursive technique for using *topoi* proverbs, where proverbs are used to support or make a point. It entails the use of proverbs to highlight a point or support an argument. This tactic is frequently employed to strengthen an argument or explain a point more clearly. It can also be employed to offer a refutation of a competing claim (Foley, 2020).

While certain behaviours are bad, others are positive. The Chichewa proverbs: "*Pakadafunda padajiwitsa galu*," (This place is warm made the dog be eaten) and "*Ndionetsetse adathetsa khola*" (let me see it clearly realized when the cage/kraal was empty") are a few that warn against unhealthy practices. These sayings are meant to give advice to persons who might be in trouble because they are holding on to

something. Its ironic proverb is "*Mwala oyenda yenda suyanga ndere*" (a rolling stone gathers no moss). This means, those who frequently alter their routines, work or hobbies don't have much experience since they lack a strong foundation in what they are doing.

➤ *Topoi of vigilance*

To emphasise the value of being watchful and aware of potential hazards, topoi of vigilance is a discourse approach used in topoi proverbs. This tactic is frequently employed to teach people to be aware of their surroundings and ready for any hazards. The proverbs "Look before you jump," "A stitch in time saves nine," and "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" are some examples of proverbs that can be used in this method (Timofeeva, 2006).

The following proverbs inspire individuals to act right away: *Kugona pakati n'kuyambirira* (may hay when the sun shines) or *Kaitana kavula, ukachedwa upeza katavala* (strike when the iron is hot). This implies that one need to be alert in doing things. However, the saying "Ilero lomwe lidadetsa nthengu" (do it today blackened the drongo) warns that rushing through tasks could result in subpar performance. It should be noted that some proverbs can be categorized into two or more types of topoi. For example, the same proverb can be under topoi of impatience and topoi of vigilance.

➤ *Topoi of Dependence versus Independence*

Topoi of dependency is a discursive technique used in topoi proverbs to highlight the significance of looking to others for help and direction. This tactic highlights how crucial it is to draw on the experience of others and how vital it is to be humble and receptive to learning from people around us. It also highlights how crucial it is to be aware of our own limitations and acknowledge that we cannot accomplish everything on our own (Kövecses, 2010).

The sense of dependency is encouraged by proverbs like "*Uchemberen'kudyerana*" (martenity goes by sharing food) and "*Mnzako akapsa ndevu m'zimire mawa adzazima zako*" (when your friend's beards are burning help him to extinguish it tomorrow will extinguish yours). On the other part, the saying "*mwana wa chewa alimbikira mpani wake*," (A child from Chewa clan takes care of his cleft stick). This proverb encourages the attitude of independence. Due to the paradox in Chichewa proverbs, people who depend on proverbs for guidance may be at a loss.

III. CONCLUSION

It is evident from the adages provided in this paper that the majority of Chichewa proverbs contain counter proverbs. Because of this, relying on them is inappropriate for someone who wishes to win a debate. In meetings, debates, music, offering advice, and other speeches, proverbs can help one to speak more clearly. However, he or she shouldn't use proverbs

as his or her main argument while trying to convince people of his or her point of view. This is so that the opponents may counter what has been said with his or her own proverbs.

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