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To cite this article: Mfundo Mandla Masuku & Tholakele Henrietta Chiliza (2021) Cross-parallels in isiZulu proverbial messages, South African Journal of African Languages, 41:1, 69-75, DOI: [10.1080/02572117.2021.1902140](https://doi.org/10.1080/02572117.2021.1902140)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02572117.2021.1902140>



Published online: 27 Apr 2021.



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Cross-parallels in isiZulu proverbial messages

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This article analyses Zulu proverbs and examines contradicting and contrasting expressions embedded in the selected proverbs. A contrast occurs when the first part of a proverb is followed by its antithesis in the second part. This is referred to as parallelism or cross-parallelism, where the meanings of two verbs in a proverb contradict each other and where nouns in the same proverb are antithetical. This is also called ‘paired contrast’, to describe contrasting ideas between and within proverbs. In this article, a qualitative approach is used to critically analyse proverbs with contrasting and contradictory elements, and is informed by pragma-sociolinguistic theory and sociocognitive theory. Pragma-sociolinguistic theory stresses that a speaker and a listener should be from the same cultural background for the listener to understand proverbs. The sociocognitive theory has to do with the mind, language and society with all its beliefs, which greatly influence the manner in which proverbs are understood. Proverbial utterances indicate a speaker’s serious intention to convey a certain message to the audience; thus, they intensify the message. This article is motivated by the need to explore contrasts and contradictions in proverbial messages which are found in many cultures. The findings indicate that proverbs do not portray universal truths but relatively limited pieces of folk wisdom which apply in specific situations. The article concludes that proverbs in a common discourse are not contradictory when you consider the context of usage.

Introduction

This article critically analyses Zulu proverbs that are cross-parallels, i.e. which have contrasting and contradictory meanings and ideas. This cross-parallelism is found where ideas are contrasted by a type of speech where a verb is contrasted with another verb and an adverb with another adverb. The contrast could be in ideas and not in words because in the proverb there are contradictory meanings and ideas. The article is structured as a discussion of the literature that is informed by pragma-sociolinguistic and sociocognitive theories. Proverbs are part of any language, and it is not known who created most of them. In general usage, proverbs are regarded as tools for expressing messages embedded in a language, mainly truth and advice. They can be defined as wise words or utterances, resulting from observations and experiences of people and are passed on from one generation to another by word of mouth. They carry both literal and figurative meanings. Bock and Brewer (1980) argue that meaning in proverbs is created by an interaction in an individual’s mind which enables the individual to arrive at an appropriate interpretation through his or her ability to go from a literal level to a figurative one. Figurative meaning is not explicit; that is, the actual meaning of a proverb is hidden and thus calls for interpretation on the part of the interlocutor. By contrast, a literal statement involves saying and understanding the words as they stand; that is, it is a statement in simple, straightforward terms. Although the experiences and the messages expressed in proverbs may be viewed as having no cultural implications, they cannot be understood outside the cultural context in which they

are spoken. These proverbs could be classified as opposite in meaning.

Bock and Brewer (1980) disagree with Temple and Honeck (1999), who postulate that there is no difference between the figurative and literal meanings of proverbs. In a proverb such as *amathanga ahlanzela abangenangobo* (‘pumpkins yield for those who have no place to store them’), an *ingobo* is a hut where pumpkins are stored when ripe. Literally, this saying means that a person without an *ingobo* can find him or herself with many pumpkins and nowhere to store them. Figuratively, the same proverb could mean ‘things seem to go well for people who do not expect to succeed’, which is a much deeper and more generally relatable meaning.

In the context of indigenous communities, traditional leadership is the patron of culture, including proverbs. No single individual holds a claim to them; hence, proverbs are regarded as products of a community. In Zulu culture, scholars such as Nyembezi (1990) and Vilakazi (1989) were instrumental in collating and publishing some of these cultural treasures, but others remain unrecorded. Proverbs belong to an ancient form of oral tradition. Before 1950, they did not exist in isiZulu in written form, but they have been passed down through the centuries by word of mouth. They comprise wise sayings by people who speak a particular language, in this case, the Zulu people (Nyembezi 1990). Charteris–Black (1995), Daramola (2003) and Avoseh (2013) assert that proverbs have been, and will always be, timeless and are thus part of a people’s heritage. If used on a daily basis, proverbs will continue to be an addition to the main manner of communication in African communities. Mieder (2009) states that proverbs will never go out of use. Each proverb is used in a specific situation. Linguistically, they are

a rich source of figurative language and metaphor, which are expressions that are used to refer to things figuratively, to suggest an analogy. Proverbs are classified by Nyembezi (1990) according to situations to which they refer, together with their possibly diverse meanings. Because situations differ, some proverbs seem to be contradictory (Biyela 2003). Mieder (2009) states that proverbs are a useful gate post of experiences and observations by people and are still created wherever human beings live. For instance, the original proverb *khula uze ukhokhobe*, which means 'grow older until you use a stick for walking', has been modified to *khula uze udle izinyoni zabantwana bakho*, 'grow old until your offspring can catch birds for you to enjoy eating'. This proverb means that a person should grow older until he or she reaches an age where he or she enjoys the support of his or her offspring.

Heras Ramírez (2015) argues that proverbs have a strong poetic element, being symbolic and metaphoric in nature. Proverbs can be regarded as a means of concealing the real meaning from non-mother tongue speakers of a language, demonstrating how rich and complex the language of proverbs can be. It is, therefore, important that contradictory proverbs are added to the existing books and taught at school level to ensure that a new generation does not lose the valuable sociocultural knowledge in contradictory proverbs. Banda (2008) refers to proverbs as 'capsules' full of wisdom, some of which have an advisory and restraining effect. Proverbs serve to correct human behaviour through warnings and advice. Finnegan et al. (1970) argue that proverbs are cultural and context dependent; therefore, proverbs cannot be properly understood outside of the cultural context in which they are used. Finnegan (2012) asserts that a proverb is a model of compressed or forceful language. They are rivers full of living waters created by wise people long ago, but they still carry truths even as they continue to be used by the present generation. As Kunene (1994: 1) writes, *ubuhlakani bezaga bukhona futhi busaqhubeka* ('the wisdom of proverbs is there, and it still continues'). Ishengoma (2000) agrees with Kunene (1994) that besides being utilised for entertainment and recreational purposes, proverbs build communities. Ashipu and Amende (2013) add that proverbs bring freshness to conversations and public speeches as an oral feature that is easily remembered and transmitted.

Proverbs fit situations for which they are intended. For instance, the expression *inkom'ingazal'umuntu* ('a cow can give birth to a human being') means something will never happen. The proverb *hamba juba bayokuchutha phambili* means 'go pigeon, they will pluck your feathers'. No one can imagine a bird without feathers. Not only would it look absurd and abnormal, but it would also struggle to survive. This is said to a stubborn person to warn him or her that if he/she does not listen, he/she will be stripped of their livelihood and they will look like a bird without feathers. The literature that informs the theoretical framework of this study is described in the following section.

Theoretical framework

Whetten (1989) describes theory as a set of ideas put together to describe, predict and provide an explanation

for a phenomenon. To date, applying theories to the study of proverbs has been problematic because, according to Heras Ramírez (2015: 7), 'none of the mechanisms suggested for the comprehension of figurative language by current theories is fully satisfactory'. The pragma-sociolinguistic theory (Emezue 2013) is applied in the study of proverbs, whose main studied aspects are the participants and the state of mind and mutual beliefs of the speaker and hearer in an exchange (Ayeni 2011). This is due to communication relying on the mutual contextual beliefs and sociocultural background of interlocutors, which, as Emezue (2013) indicates, play a key role in interpretation. This theory focuses on the context and common contextual beliefs in the analysis of proverbs.

A theory by Grice (1991) is most commonly applied to the study of proverbs. The theory states that the speaker should make him/herself understood by the listener. Most researchers, including Temple and Honeck (1999) agree with and support the use of pragma-sociolinguistic theory in explaining the meaning of proverbial messages. Therefore, the interlocutor would have to explain literal meaning before the figurative meaning of a proverb. The sociocognitive theory (Gee 2012) is in accord with researchers who argue that understanding the meaning of proverbial messages depends on a listener's cognitive ability. Gee (2012: 116) states that 'reading is a sociocognitive phenomenon'. Fundamentally, the mind, which constitutes the cognitive faculty, and language and society with all its beliefs influences the manner in which proverbs are understood. This is evident in situations where proverbs are used to resolve problems in society; for example, *okwehlul'amadoda kuyabikwa* means 'what is a challenge to a man is declared to other men'. When men are gathered in court, many matters come up for discussion. A matter that they cannot solve must be a really difficult one.

Psycholinguistic approaches can also be used in the understanding of proverbs. The literal-first model argues that for an individual to understand any proverbial message, he/she has to first deal with the literal – rather than the non-literal – meaning (Katz and Ferreti 2003). The multistage model also agrees with the literal-first model that processing the figurative meaning takes longer than processing the literal meaning of a proverb (Temple and Honeck 1999). However, Kemper (1981) disagrees with this. He further argues that it is quicker to process the figurative meaning than to process the literal one. This is because the context and the mutually shared information generate strong expectations in the hearer; thus, they help him or her to process and understand the proverb directly.

Certainly, if a speaker were to say *ayihlabi ngakumisa* ('a beast does not gore according to the shape of its horns') among people with whom they share the same language, the hearer would immediately understand what that means, as opposed to someone speaking a different language. This proverb means that the shape of the horns does not affect the fighting ability of the beast. A beast with badly shaped horns could potentially defeat a beast with perfectly shaped ones. The latter is also true for people; based on appearances, people may expect much or very little from a particular individual and in actual fact they may be proven wrong due to the deceptiveness of appearances. Temple

and Honeck (1999) state that familiarity is one of the main contributors as far as the correct interpretation of proverbs is concerned. This simply means that familiar proverbs are understood in a non-literal fashion more quickly than unfamiliar proverbs. With regard to unfamiliar proverbs, context plays an important role in aiding comprehension and clearing ambiguity (Heras Ramírez 2015).

Gibbs et al. (1994) state that from a psycholinguistic point of view, there is a link between a proverb and its figurative meaning. They proved a listener's ability to recognise novel proverbs or proverbs from different languages or even cultures in spite of their unfamiliarity. They explain that in terms of a psycholinguistic analysis, 'proverb understanding appears to involve conceptual mapping of one specific-level schema from a source domain onto a generic-level schema from a target remain' (Gibbs et al. 1994: 314). People who use proverbs may have the same feeling about the relationship between the literal and figurative meanings of a proverb, and their understanding and memory of proverbs might be influenced by these mental images. For researchers, it is evident that a person who is familiar with the language in which the proverb is spoken will have a comprehensive understanding of its literal and figurative meaning.

Methodology

The study which formed the basis for this article followed a qualitative approach, with a specific interest in analysing and understanding proverbs with contrasting and contradictory elements. Qualitative research involves the study of people's experiences in natural settings, employing a variety of techniques, such as report findings and papers, using mainly verbal descriptions and narratives rather than statistics (Chilisa and Preece 2005). In terms of description and classification, the article follows a critical book analysis. A book by Nyembezi (1990) titled *Zulu Proverbs* served as a reference source. Nyembezi is regarded among scholars as an expert in both linguistic and cultural aspects of the Zulu nation. The proverbs selected for this activity were published in the book and had a contrasting or contradictory element.

Discussion

The contradictory nature of proverbial messages

Some isiZulu proverbs which are cross-parallel in nature, meaning that contradictions exist between different proverbs, were translated by Nyembezi (1990). Proverbs normally refer to certain situations and because situations differ, some proverbs may seem to be contradictory. These contradictory proverbs have come about because of the endless variety in human behaviour, as well as the complex situations in which people find themselves. One wise saying cannot fit all circumstances, and a number of contradictory proverbs, all equally valid, may be used for the same issue. The proverbs discussed in this section demonstrate contradictions between two different proverbs.

- (1a) *Akukho thusi lathetha lilodwa*. 'No copper will make noise (speak) by itself.'
 (1b) *Ubuc'obuhle buhamba ngabubili*. 'Good waxbills go in pairs.'

In proverb (1a), the idea is that for people, there must be two of them to make a 'noise' or a quarrel. Proverb (1a) is in contrast with proverb (1b), which states that two people are always better than one because they will be of assistance to each other in times of need.

- (2a) *Iningi liyabona ububende*. 'Many people spoil the blood broth.'
 (2b) *Injobo ithungelwa ebandla*. 'A good loin skin is one sewn in front of men.'

In (2a), the message is that it is not safe to involve too many people in a project. In the Zulu tradition, cooking of the *ububende* (animal blood with other parts, mainly entrails) was assigned to one good cook, so that the broth was not ruined. However, proverb (2b) presents a different message, as it emphasises that the involvement of many people in anything makes the work manageable.

- (3a) *Inja iyawaqeda amanzi ngolimi*. 'The dog can finish water with its tongue.'
 (3b) *Isuka muva likholwa yizagila*. 'The late starter gets knobkerries.'

The comparison of (3a) and (3b) indicate a contradiction between the two proverbs. The message in proverb (3a) is that even the slowest person will complete the task, whereas (3b) says delay or procrastination in an endeavour has bad consequences. Proverb (3b) refers to birds that would be struck by knobkerries of the hunters if they remained behind the flock. Essentially, if one does not start on time, he or she may find him/herself in great trouble.

- (4a) *Wogawula ubheka*. 'Beware as you fell a tree.'
 (4b) *Ungcede ukholwa yizagila*. 'The warbler receives many throwing sticks.'

In proverb (4a), we are urged to be careful while doing something to guard against impending dangers, but in (4b), we are told that we should not waste time when doing anything lest we lose an opportunity and fail. These proverbs contradict each other, as (4a) encourages people to move carefully in life, whereas (4b) discourages caution, rather encouraging people to seize opportunities timeously. Depending on the circumstances, both of these sayings may be true.

- (5a) *Akazalanga wabola amathumbu*. 'She did not give birth: her bowels became rotten.'
 (5b) *Ukuzal'ukuzilungelela*. 'To bear children is to lengthen oneself.'

Proverb (5a) is typically said about parents of children who are misbehaving and bring shame to their parents, whereas in proverb (5b), the message is different that parents with good children will always be helped with household duties. Such duties need no longer be done by the parents, as their offspring will take over the burden of performing such duties; so, by bearing children, the parents have lengthened or extended themselves, meaning that they are now able to do multiple things at the same time, for children are regarded

as the extension of their parents. These proverbs contradict each other in that proverb (5a) suggests that being a parent is a painful experience if the offspring is particularly difficult and uncouth, whereas proverb (5b) indicates that it brings rewards. Here, both views may also be valid, depending on the context and situation, as parenthood is a very complex phenomenon entailing many possible outcomes.

- (6a) *Ingqala ngobuhl'igcina ngobubi*. 'He who starts well ends badly'.
 (6b) *Isina muva liyabukwa*. 'He who dances last draws attention'.

The saying in (6a) is used when a person has a good start in life but later on becomes negative and ends poorly, as opposed to (6b), which means that a person who started much later becomes successful and acclaimed in life.

- (7a) *Ukuthul'akoni*. 'Silence is golden'.
 (7b) *Ingan'engakhali ifel'embelekweni*. 'A child who does not cry dies on the mother's back.'

In proverb (7a), silence is considered golden and, therefore, prized and encouraged. Proverb (7b), however, encourages complaining because, if you do not complain, people may never know what is bothering you, and you will be ignored.

- (8a) *Amathe nolimi*. 'It is saliva and the tongue.'
 (8b) *Yinkukhu nempaka*. 'It is a fowl and a wild cat.'

The proverb (8a) describes a very intimate and close friendship/relationship of two people, who are inseparable like a tongue and saliva. Proverb (8b), however, conveys a type of enmity so intense that one party would kill the other when they meet each other. The contradictory meanings of these proverbs indicate the myriad permutations of human experiences which demonstrate opposing truths.

Internal contrasts within proverbs

The proverbs discussed in this section demonstrate contrasts within the same proverb. Words in the last part of the proverb present antonyms (words opposite in meaning) to those in the first part. These contrasts add power and impact to the saying, and this is what Nyembezi (1990: 21) terms 'cross-parallelism'. Furthermore, Ighile (2013) argues that in cross-parallelism, similar ideas are repeated in a parallel structure to emphasise a concept or reality, and in semantic parallelism, there is a change in the context and words.

Contrastive parallelism in the learning process puts emphasis on different proverbs, each of which may be expressed into two or more semantically parallel parts, such as contrastive pairs 'up' and 'down', embedded in cultural knowledge. In these proverbs, it may be the noun that is in contrast with another noun, for example, *umenzi* ('the offender') and *umenziwa* ('the offended'), or it may be the verbs, for example *uyakhohlwa* ('he/she forgets') and *akakhohlwa* ('does not forget'), which are antithetical. The prefix *aka-* in the verb *khohlwa* makes the verbs mean the opposite of *ukkhohlwa*, as indicated in the following proverb: *umenziw'akakhohlwa, kukhohlw'umenzi* ('the offended never

forgets, the offender does'). This means that the one who has been wronged never forgets, but the wrongdoer easily forgets. When a person has been hurt, the injury is never forgotten, even if the pain is no longer there. By contrast, the offender quickly forgets because he/she does not realise how serious his/her offence was, and he/she does not suffer any pain. In this proverb, words with opposite meanings, 'offender' and 'offended', are balanced against each other, exemplifying antithesis through the use of antonyms (words with contrasting meanings).

The proverb *kumnyama phambili; kusile emuva* means 'it is night ahead; it is day behind'. The night, or darkness, is balanced with its antonym, the day, or light. This is said in situations where there is danger ahead and it is better to retreat. A variant of this proverb is *kuhlwile phambili; kusile emuva* ('it is dusk ahead; it is dawn behind'). Using the opposites of 'dawn' and 'dusk' is much more striking in effect than the abstract nouns 'safety' and 'danger'. The wording of the proverb is concise and emphatic.

The proverb *ukhohlw'ezakhe, uqaphel'ezabanye* means 'he forgets his own affairs, yet he focuses on others' affairs'. This proverb refers to a person who is good at speaking about other people's affairs, forgetting that he/she has his/her own affairs to attend to. The variants of this proverb include *umazi wezabanye ezakhe zimhlalele* ('he who knows other people's affairs typically forgets his own') and *uqaphel'ezami, ezakho zikuhlalele* ('you watch my affairs, yours await you').

The contrast between 'abundance' and 'famine' in the next proverb is striking. *Inal'ayihambi, kuhamb'indlala* means 'abundance does not spread, famine does'. Even if there is plenty of food, one may find that some people in rural areas are starving. By contrast, when there is food insecurity, one may find that the whole society is hard hit. The hidden or figurative meaning is that bad things spread more quickly than good ones.

The proverb *emathumb'amnyama kayifi, kuf'emathumb'amhlophe* means 'the one with black bowels does not die, but the one with white bowels does'. This is said about a pig that eats anything, resulting in its bowels becoming black. This means that a person who is fussy and hard to please will never achieve anything, but the one who is not will thrive, like the pig. This saying means the same as *akwaziw'okwanonis'ingulube* meaning 'it is not known what made the pig fat'. People who can attest to this behaviour of the pig are those who have visited a place where pigs are kept and observed what they eat.

The proverb *ukubona kany'ukubona kabili* ('to see once is to see twice') contains an apparent contradiction, which means the same as the English saying, 'once bitten, twice shy'. A person does not wish to experience the same adversity twice. The antithesis is found in 'once' and 'twice', and the proverb is a warning that one should not be caught unawares but should be aware lest something that happened before happens again. The variant of this proverb is *lixhoshwa kanye lesabe*, meaning 'the eye becomes sensitive even after a foreign object has been removed from it'.

In the proverb *lithath'osemsamo limphons'emnyango* ('lightning takes the one at the back of the house and throws him/her at the door'), the antithesis is between *umsamo* ('back of the house') and *emnyango* ('outside' or 'outdoors').

Here, the future is compared with the unpredictability of lightning. No one knows where lightning is going to strike. Many people may be seated in different places in a hut, but instead of the lightning striking the one closest to the door, as expected, it can strike one who is right at the back of the hut. In rural settings in South Africa, people reside in huts. With regard to a seating arrangement, some sit at the back of the hut, and others right at the door; so, when lightning strikes, it may happen that the one at the back is the unlucky one who gets harmed.

Ukwenza kuya emuva, kuye phambili means 'whatever you do may be retrogressive or progressive'. The figurative meaning is that whatever life brings is not known. Life can bring good or bad things. A variation is *inala iya emuva, iye phambili* ('plenty goes backwards and forwards'). This also means fortune comes and goes: one may be lucky today but unlucky tomorrow. The contrast/antithesis is in 'backwards' and 'forwards'.

Kuyoqhuma nhlavana, ezinye ziyofekela means 'some seeds will grow, others will die'. The contrast/antithesis is in 'grow' and 'die'. In life, one may expect anything to happen. Sometimes dreams come to fruition, but others do not, just like seeds that are planted (some will thrive, and others will die). The variant is *kuyakuqhuma nhlamvu, ezinye ziyofekela* ('some seeds will survive, others will die').

When people are enjoying snuff, only the left hand is used to share the snuff: The right hand is used to insert the snuff into the nostrils, while the left hand is used to place the snuff into the mouth, which some people also do. The proverb *ugway'usuk'entenden'uhlal'entendeni* ('snuff goes from one palm to the other') demonstrates this literal meaning. The figurative meaning is that fortune may move from one person to another, just as snuff moves from the palm of one hand to the palm of the other.

The proverb *ingqala ngobuhl'igcina ngobubi* means 'he who starts well, ends badly'. We can never be sure what is going to happen in life. A person may start off very well only to change completely for the worse later in life and fail completely. The antitheses/contrasts in this proverb are in the words 'starts/ends' and 'well/badly'. *Yiz'uvalo, inqobo yisibindi* means 'fear is nothing, victory is courage'. Such words of encouragement are often said when there is a task to be performed. A person is advised to put fear aside and grab opportunities. The contrast lies in 'fear' and 'courage'.

Ukuwa kwendlu ukuvuka kwenye means 'the fall of one house is the rise of another'. When a girl joins another family through marriage, it is deemed a loss for her family of origin but a gain for the family of her husband. Her usefulness is now going to be enjoyed by her in-laws. The contrast lies in the words 'fall' and 'rise'.

Sathunyw'ugwayi, sabuya neboza means 'he/she was sent for tobacco and ran for a medicinal herb'. The proverb refers to a foolish person who is told to do one thing but does another. The contrast is found in 'tobacco' and *iboza*. Tobacco is used for smoking, but *iboza* is a herb used to cure a serious cough.

The proverb *uzenzil'akakhalelwa, kukhalelw'uzumekile* ('he who deliberately brings trouble upon himself is not given sympathy') relays the truth that people do not feel sorry for a person who has brought the mishap on him/herself. There is a contrast in the words *uzenzile/uzumekile*

and *akakhalelwa/kukhalelwa*. *Uzenzile* is the one who has brought mishap deliberately on him/herself, therefore people do not sympathise with him/her. *Uzumekile* is the one who experienced mishap without any contributing deliberate actions from his/her part, therefore people sympathise with him/her.

Bazibona amaphiko ukundiza kanti azindizi zonke ('people see birds with wings, yet not all of them can fly') is said to a person who pretends to be wise but is in fact foolish. He/she is compared to a bird that cannot fly like other birds. There are contrasts in the proverb *kusind'ezakwaLuvadlwana, kuf'ezakwaSibinjana* ('The cattle of Timid get safely through, those of Courageous die'). In times of war, fearful people survive because they run away, but the courageous ones are destroyed as they would wait until the attackers come. The contrast is found in *kusinda* and *kufa*, which are 'survive' and 'die', and in *Luvadlwana* and *Sibinjana*, which mean 'timid' and 'courageous'.

The proverb *amanq'akakakuboni, intuthan'isikubonile* means 'the vultures have not seen you, the ant has seen you'. What attracts the ant does not attract the vulture. The ant being a small creature that lives on the ground sees what the vulture cannot see because the vulture flies very high. The contrast is in 'not seen' and 'seen' and in 'ant' and 'vulture'.

Isoka aliganwa, kuganwa intolela-mlonyeni means 'a young man popular with girls does not marry, old men do'. When a young man has many girlfriends, it becomes difficult for him to get married. Only when he gets older does he choose a life partner. The contrast is in 'young' and 'old'.

Uyishaya emuva, ayishaye phambili means 'he/she strikes it behind and strikes it in front'. This refers to an untrustworthy person who gives different versions of the same story to different people. The contrast lies in 'behind' and 'front'. The variant of this proverb is *bayishaya nxazonke* ('they hit the affair on all sides').

Sihlangene phezulu, phansi singamahele means 'we are united at the top but separated at the bottom'. This is said when a friendship is superficial and has no solid basis. These kinds of people pretend to be friends when in fact they are deceiving each other. The contrast is in 'top/bottom' and 'united/separated'.

The contrast in this proverb is found in 'hot' and 'cold': *umlomo udla okushisayo, udle okubandayo* ('the mouth eats the hot and the cold'). This refers to life in general, that one should expect the good and the bad to happen, just as the mouth eats both hot and cold food.

Iyagodla nxa igqulwa, yehlisa nxa inxenxwa means 'the cow withholds its milk when prodded but yields much when coaxed'. Those who milk cows are familiar with this type of animal behaviour. They know that when they want more milk, they must be gentle when handling the cow. This proverb means that for one to get anything from another person, violence should be avoided. The contrast/antithesis is in 'prodded' and 'coaxed'. As mentioned by Nyembezi (1990), proverbs are used to study people and how people observe the habits of birds, animals and nature in general. This proverb, therefore, results from people's observation with regard to the behaviour of cows, the milking process and how cows react to different interactions.

In rural settings of South Africa, people still grind millet to make their own beer. *Uphoko* is a very small type of seed

used in the making of beer. It is kept in a basket because if placed on a mat, it scatters easily, making it very difficult to collect. *Ngumasiza lusembengeni, luthi lungaba sesithebeni luchitheke* means ('seed is better in a basket; on a mat, it scatters'). This proverb has to do with the proper handling of food.

Kungcon'ukuyinqand'okhalweni kunokuyikhiph'ekhaya means 'it is better to check the enemy's army in the bush than to drive it out of the home'. It is always better to prevent an enemy's army from entering a homestead; it is better instead to meet it in the open, saving women and children from being hurt.

The proverb *Ayihlatshwa mvusi, ihlatshwa abaphambili* ('a buck is not stabbed by the one who rouses it; it is stabbed by those ahead') refers to hunting. One group of hunters may come across a buck that they fail to kill as it escapes but then runs into another group of hunters who manage to kill it. This means that the one who initiates something may not necessarily be the one who reaps the rewards of the action. The initiator is almost forgotten after his/her idea is taken by someone else who implements it and enjoys the resulting benefits.

Many of the foregoing proverbs would not be properly understood by a person outside the speakers' cultural context. Their comprehension would depend on familiarity with a particular rural way of life. They demonstrate a close observation of nature through activities such as hunting wildlife and stock farming. As Temple and Honeck (1999) assert, familiarity is the most important factor in the interpretation of proverbs. One has to belong to a particular society and share common knowledge, as this generates strong expectations in the hearer that help him/her process the proverb directly and understand its underlying meaning.

In Zulu culture, using a proverb and explaining its literal meaning would not be a problem. This has to do with the fact that Zulus are familiar with Zulu life and proverbs. Speakers from a different language and culture, by contrast, would have difficulty in making out the deeper meaning of such proverbs. For example, the proverb *umbeki wenkosi akabusi nayo* ('he who installs a king never rules with him') means that the one who starts a project does not necessarily reap the benefits. The view that a shared culture is necessary for the full comprehension of proverbs is supported by Sperber and Wilson (1995). Furthermore, these researchers indicate that even when the speaker uses tools such as irony, the familiar hearer can recognise the intention and understand. As far as the context is concerned, Sperber and Wilson (1995) state that context does not refer to the immediate conversation but rather to the hearer's previous cultural knowledge and background. In other words, proverbs are culture and context dependent, therefore they may not be an effective means of communication if used outside a cultural context.

Conclusion

This article focuses on the use of contrast and contradiction in proverbs. One has to consider whether these contrasts are useful to our culture and language. In the case of proverbs that use contrasts internally, it is clear that such contrasts enhance the impact of the proverbs. Antithesis can provide dramatic and striking effects, which make the

saying memorable and quotable. With regard to proverbs whose messages contradict the messages of others, it is our view that such variations are necessary, as people and situations vary widely, and opposing messages will apply equally validly to a wide range of people in different situations and circumstances. In fact, proverbs highlight the dialogical nature of African societies and knowledge production as well as the complexity of human experiences. This is why Nyembezi (1990) classifies proverbs according to the situations in which they occur and whom they target. Kayange (2014) states that the purpose of making proverbial utterances indicates a serious intention to convey a certain message on the part of the user for the audience, thus making the utterance more powerful. Using a proverb instead of simple and straightforward literal language suggests that the speaker has given some thought to what he/she is saying and that he/she really means it. Further research is needed to explore cross-parallel proverbs because they bring together contrasting and contradictory messages which can also be found across different cultures and languages.

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