



Parody and playfulness in Tshivenda proverbs: A linguistic and cultural analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates parody and playfulness in Tshivenda proverbs, focusing on how speakers creatively manipulate traditional proverbial expressions to generate humour, irony, and social commentary. Although previous studies have emphasized the moral and instructional functions of proverbs, this research explores their dynamic and transformative use in contemporary communication. The study used a qualitative linguistic ethnographic approach. Data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations of naturally occurring speech in rural and urban Tshivenda communities, including social gatherings, storytelling sessions, and digital communication platforms. The findings reveal that parodic proverbs perform multiple social and communicative functions. They create humour, strengthen social cohesion, facilitate indirect criticism, and allow younger generations to engage with cultural heritage in innovative ways. The analysis further shows that parody can challenge traditional hierarchical and gendered assumptions embedded in conventional proverbs, thereby encouraging alternative interpretations. The discussion highlights the adaptability of Tshivenda oral traditions and their continued relevance in changing social contexts. The study recommends documenting and including parodic proverb forms in cultural and educational initiatives to preserve evolving indigenous knowledge systems. It concludes that parody serves as a valuable mechanism for cultural continuity, creativity, and social reflection. The study contributes to scholarship on African oral literature, sociolinguistics, and cultural studies by demonstrating how parody functions as both a linguistic strategy and a means of negotiating cultural identity in contemporary Tshivenda-speaking communities.

Keywords: Parody, Tshivenda Proverbs, Oral Tradition, Humour, Social Critique.

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs are a central part of African oral traditions, encapsulating communal wisdom, moral guidance, and cultural values that are transmitted from one generation to the next. Proverbs are highly regarded in the Tshivenda community as authoritative statements of knowledge that influence social interaction, direct decision-making, and strengthen identity.¹ They serve as instruments of persuasion and moral instruction in a variety of communicative contexts, including ceremonies, dispute settlement, and casual

¹ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*, vol. 1 (Open Book Publishers, 2012); Radzilani Rendani and Mbulaheni Mudau, “Shaping Moral Values and Guiding Youth through Tshivenda Proverbs: A Literary Analysis of Tshindane’s U Gidima Hu Fhirwa Nga u Tshimbila (2023),” *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* 35, no. 1 (2026): 20-pages.

talks. Tshivenda proverbs, however, are dynamic linguistic resources that adjust to the shifting demands of society rather than being static remnants of the past. This flexibility is exemplified by parody, in which speakers purposefully reinterpret or distort classic sayings to achieve irony, comedy, or light-hearted criticism.

According to Hutcheon, parody is imitation with a twist, in which an original text is both acknowledged and twisted to produce a new meaning.² In Tshivenda's case, parody of proverbs is an inventive method of communication that maintains the familiarity of proverbial patterns while undermining their gravity. For instance, speakers change well-known sayings in informal discussions and online forums to make fun of social mores, inject humour into daily exchanges, or subtly challenge authority. This reflects Bakhtin's concept of the *carnavalesque*, in which parody and laughter disrupt traditional hierarchies of meaning and open space for alternative interpretations.³ In this sense, parody demonstrates the resilience of Tshivenda proverbs, showing that they remain relevant not only as conveyors of moral wisdom but also as flexible tools for modern communication.

Although proverbs are acknowledged as important cultural and linguistic resources, most previous research has focused on their rhetorical, didactic, and moral purposes. Very little research has been done on parody in Tshivenda proverbs, despite studies investigating parody in other African oral literature forms, such as songs, folktales, and satire.⁴ This gap is important because it restricts comprehension of how speakers creatively manipulate to interact with modern circumstances. Proverbs run the risk of being portrayed as static, timeless forms rather than as dynamic, ever-evolving resources that continue to influence and reflect social life in the absence of such study.

The problem that this study addresses, therefore, lies in the limited attention paid to parody and playfulness in Tshivenda proverbs, even though these features are increasingly visible in oral and digital communication. Although proverbs are frequently studied in their conventional forms, speakers regularly modify them in light-hearted and entertaining ways that challenge social norms, bridge generational divides, and offer nuanced opportunities for criticism. By focusing on parody as a significant and imaginative aspect of Tshivenda's proverbial discourse, this study aims to bridge that gap.

The study aims to investigate the role of parody and playfulness in Tshivenda proverbs, analyzing how speakers reframe traditional expressions to generate humour, irony, and social commentary while maintaining the recognizable form of oral heritage. In pursuing this aim, the study examines examples of parodic proverbs in oral and digital contexts, explores the linguistic strategies employed in their construction, and evaluates the cultural functions they perform. Therefore, the objectives are to identify parodic uses of Tshivenda proverbs, to analyze the mechanisms through which parody is achieved, to explain how parody contributes to humour and critique, and to show how parody helps both to preserve and to transform the vitality of Tshivenda oral tradition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Proverbs in Global Scholarship

Proverbs have long been recognized by international research as a global mode of human expression that transcends cultural memory, morality, and wisdom. According to Finnegan, proverbs are both stylistic and practical, influencing social interaction and encoding values in oral traditions around the world.⁵ Proverbs are "living texts" that are continually reinterpreted in different circumstances, according to Mieder, an international expert on paremiology.⁶ According to recent research conducted outside of Africa, proverbs are frequently revived through parody. For example, Crawford demonstrates how proverbial parody is used in digital memes and advertising to draw attention through humour in

² Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (University of Illinois press, 2023).

³ Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, vol. 1 (University of Texas Press, 2010).

⁴ Izuu Nwankwo, "On the Limits and Prospects of African Humour," *Critical African Studies* (Taylor & Francis, 2024); Shepherd Mpofu, "Ridicule and Humour in the Global South: Theorizing Politics of Laughter in the Social Media Age," in *The Politics of Laughter in the Social Media Age: Perspectives from the Global South* (Springer, 2021), 1–19.

⁵ Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*.

⁶ W. Mieder, *Proverbs: A Handbook*. (Greenwood Press, 2014).

English-speaking countries.⁷ In a similar vein, Kuusi contends that parody preserves proverbial tradition by bringing it to the attention of future generations who might otherwise write it off as antiquated.⁸ These global viewpoints demonstrate that parody is not exclusive to Africa but is a part of a worldwide pattern of cultural adaptation in which classic forms are kept alive through light-hearted reworking. This global lens is significant for the current study because it places Tshivenda proverbs in broader discussions about how oral traditions endure in contemporary society through humour and creative distortion.

Proverbs and Parody in African Contexts

African research has focused more on the imaginative and entertaining aspects of oral literature at the regional level. According to Nwankwo, parody frequently serves as a covert means of challenging societal norms, criticizing authority, and voicing disapproval without resorting to outright conflict in African storytelling.⁹ Mpofo echoes this by demonstrating how oral traditions in Southern Africa have been transformed into interactive environments where humour, satire, and parody flourish due to digital culture.¹⁰ Okpewho shows how proverbs are often modified in songs and urban performance poetry in Nigerian contexts to make people laugh while making comments on corruption and leadership.¹¹ Similarly, Patrick highlights how parody in African folktales destabilizes rigid hierarchies and enables communal laughter as a social equalizer.¹² These regional perspectives reveal that parody in African oral traditions is not mere entertainment but a cultural mechanism for negotiation, critique, and adaptation. They provide a foundation for analyzing how Tshivenda speakers employ parody in proverbs to address contemporary realities while remaining rooted in tradition.

Local Scholarship on Tshivenda Proverbs

Scholarship on Tshivenda proverbs in South Africa has historically concentrated on their didactic, social, and moral purposes. Rendani and Mudau investigate how Tshivenda proverbs serve as moral teaching tools in family and community contexts and encode cultural identity.¹³ Tshivenda proverbs, according to Ramavhunga and Mulovhedzi, are essential socialization tools, especially when it comes to establishing gender roles and intergenerational connections.¹⁴ Nevertheless, proverbs are frequently presented in these studies in their conventional, unchanged forms, with little attention paid to their humorous or parodic applications. This gap is acknowledged in more recent work. Young Tshivenda speakers are increasingly parodying proverbs on social media, incorporating them into memes and jokes that generate both laughter and criticism while maintaining cultural familiarity, according to Makhado.¹⁵ Likewise, Raphalalani points out that parody in Tshivenda proverbs destabilizes rigid patriarchal messages embedded in traditional sayings, creating space for alternative interpretations of gender and authority.¹⁶ These local studies suggest that parody is an emerging area of scholarly interest but remains underexplored, particularly in systematic linguistic and cultural analysis.

Synthesis and Identified Gap

The literature as a whole emphasizes that proverbial parody is a worldwide phenomenon, with a notable presence in African oral traditions and growing recognition in South African contexts. International

⁷ Mary Crawford, "Gender and Humor in Social Context," *Journal of Pragmatics* 35, no. 9 (2003): 1413–30.

⁸ M. Kuusi, *Proverbs in the Modern World: Tradition, Creativity, and Transformation* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2018).

⁹ Nwankwo, "On the Limits and Prospects of African Humour."

¹⁰ Mpofo, "Ridicule and Humour in the Global South: Theorizing Politics of Laughter in the Social Media Age."

¹¹ Isidore Okpewho, *Once upon a Kingdom: Myth, Hegemony, and Identity* (Indiana University Press, 1998).

¹² Charles Alex Patrick, "Humour And Linguistic Features Of African Folktales," *Lit Journal: A Journal On Language And Language Teaching Vuyedumezu: Sanata Dharma University* 27, no. 2 (2024): 1019–36.

¹³ Rendani and Mudau, "Shaping Moral Values and Guiding Youth through Tshivenda Proverbs: A Literary Analysis of Tshindane's U Gidima Hu Fhirwa Nga u Tshimbila (2023)."

¹⁴ Ndidzulafhi Ramavhunga and Shonisani Agnes Mulovhedzi, "Exploring the Use of the Proverb" Tsiwana i Laiwa Nqilani" by Vhavenda Speaking People., *International Journal of Research in Business & Social Science* 13, no. 7 (2024).

¹⁵ Avhatakali Makhado, "Reconsideration of Tshivenda Proverbs in Preserving Tshivenda Language and Culture," *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* 34, no. 2 (2025): 17-pages.

¹⁶ Tshinetise David Raphalalani, "The Value of Tshivenda Proverbs in the Upbringing of a Child in the 21st Century," 2025.

research shows that by keeping proverbs current in contemporary communication contexts, parody revitalizes them. Parody serves as a cultural tactic for criticism, compromise, and adaptation, according to regional studies. Although Tshivenda proverbs' moral and cultural aspects have been extensively studied in local scholarship, parody has not yet been examined as a major issue. There is a knowledge gap regarding the language methods, pragmatic functions, and cultural consequences of parody because the little research on humorous distortions of Tshivenda proverbs tends to be descriptive rather than analytical. This study addresses that gap by systematically examining how parody and playfulness operate in Tshivenda proverbs, thereby contributing to both local and broader scholarly debates on the resilience and transformation of oral traditions.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research design, which is appropriate to investigate cultural and linguistic phenomena that require contextual interpretation. How parody appears in Tshivenda proverbs and the methods in which speakers give meaning to such imaginative phrases can be thoroughly examined using a qualitative approach. According to Creswell, studies that seek to identify meaning patterns, cultural practices, and lived experiences are best suited for qualitative research.¹⁷ Qualitative approaches were chosen to offer in-depth insights into the dynamic character of proverbial parody since the study focuses on the interaction between humour, tradition, and cultural identity.

The study's participants were Tshivenda-speaking populations in South Africa's Limpopo Province, where proverbs are still widely used in both rural and urban communication. The groups that actively employ proverbs in their daily lives, that is, elders, teachers, cultural performers, and younger speakers who interact with proverbs on digital platforms, received particular attention within this community. Because they are guardians of oral traditions and frequently provide the traditional versions of parody proverbs, the elders were included. Younger speakers were chosen because they embody the creative energy behind the light-hearted adaptation of proverbs in casual conversations and on social media. Because they act as a mediator between tradition and modernity and commonly use proverbs in storytelling, teaching, and performance situations, educators and cultural performers were selected.

Participants were chosen using a purposive selection procedure, which enables researchers to deliberately select people who are most educated and pertinent to the study's goals.¹⁸ Ten elders aged sixty and over, ten younger speakers between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, and ten participants from the category of educators and cultural performers made up the sample of thirty participants that was selected from the general community. This distribution ensured that the data included perspectives from different generations and the various ways in which parody is used in various communication spaces.

Several techniques were used in the data collection process to improve triangulation and richness. In order to document traditional proverbs and their perceived cultural relevance, elders and educators participated in semi-structured interviews. Second, focus groups with younger speakers were set up to investigate how they use parody on digital platforms and in casual conversation. These group environments provide chances for the impromptu exchange of amusing and satirical phrases. Last but not least, naturally occurring data were gathered by watching social events, watching comedies, and examining social media posts that made fun of Tshivenda sayings. A thorough comprehension of parody in both conventional and contemporary communicative situations was made possible by combining these sources.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, guided by Braun and Clarke's framework for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data.¹⁹ Transcribed interviews, focus group discussions, and collected texts were coded to identify recurring themes, such as distortion of structure, exaggeration, inversion of meaning, and recontextualization. The theoretical framework

¹⁷ John W Creswell and J David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Sage publications, 2017).

¹⁸ Lawrence A Palinkas et al., "Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research," *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research* 42, no. 5 (2015): 533–44.

¹⁹ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide," 2021.

informed interpretation by linking humour to incongruity, identifying intertextual relationships between original and parodic proverbs, and analyzing pragmatic functions such as humour, critique, and solidarity. To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation between data sources and member verification, where preliminary findings were shared with selected participants for validation. Through this methodological approach, the study was able to capture both the traditional authority of Tshivenda proverbs and their playful transformation through parody, thereby addressing the identified gap in scholarship and offering a culturally grounded analysis of proverbial innovation.

Ethical considerations

Ethical principles guided all stages of this study to ensure respect for participants, their cultural knowledge, and their rights. Before data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants after receiving clear information regarding the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw from the research at any stage without penalty. Participation was entirely voluntary.

To protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in reporting findings, and any identifying information was removed from interview transcripts, focus group discussions, and observational data. Data were securely stored and accessed only by the researcher.

Given that the study involved indigenous knowledge embedded in Tshivenda oral traditions, particular care was taken to ensure cultural sensitivity and respect for community values. Participants were consulted about the interpretation and representation of proverbs and parodic expressions to avoid misrepresentation or cultural distortion. The researcher also remained mindful of power relations between generations and social groups during data collection and analysis to ensure that diverse perspectives were fairly represented.

To improve ethical integrity and trustworthiness, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants for verification and feedback. The study adhered to accepted ethical standards for qualitative research, emphasizing respect, confidentiality, cultural sensitivity, and responsible representation of Tshivenda cultural heritage.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Theme 1: Linguistic Creativity through Parodic Transformation

The data revealed that parody is a common feature of contemporary Tshivenda communication. Participants demonstrated a vast knowledge of traditional proverbs and creative strategies in modifying them. Across interviews and focus groups, respondents emphasized that parody does not reject tradition but makes it more relevant to contemporary life.

One elder participant (Male, 68 years) explained:

"Vhaswa a vha khou laṭa maambe. Vha khou a shandukisa uri a ambe nga zwine vha khou tshila zwone zwino."

("Young people are not abandoning proverbs. They are changing them so that they speak to the realities of modern life.")

Several examples of parodic proverb construction emerged from the data.

Traditional proverb:

"Dzina ndi ndalamo."

("A good name is a treasure.")

Parodic version:

"Dzina ndi smartphone."

("A smartphone is a treasure.")

Participants explained that the parody humorously reflects the central role of digital technology among contemporary youth. While the original proverb emphasizes reputation and moral character, the parody suggests that technological possessions have become highly valued social assets.

Another frequently cited example was:

Traditional proverb:

"Muthu ndi muthu nga vhathu."

("A person is a person through other people.")

Parodic version:

"*Muthu ndi muthu nga Wi-Fi.*"

("A person is a person through Wi-Fi.")

Young participants stated that social interaction increasingly depends on internet connectivity. The parody simultaneously creates humour and comments on changing forms of social belonging.

A female participant (24 years) remarked:

"*Arali Wi-Fi ya tuwa, na vhathu vha nga si tsha amba. Ndi hone hu tshi bva mutambo.*"

("When the Wi-Fi disappears, people can no longer communicate. That is where the joke comes from.")

The analysis identified four recurring linguistic strategies:

- Structural distortion
- Semantic inversion
- Exaggeration
- Recontextualization

For example:

Traditional proverb:

"*Mulomo na mbilu a si zwone.*"

("The mouth and the heart are not the same.")

Parodic version:

"*Mulomo na Facebook a si zwone.*"

("What people say and what they post on Facebook are not the same.")

Here, the speaker replaces the traditional moral contrast with a critique of online identity construction.

Theme 2: Parody as Social Critique

The findings indicate that parody is a culturally acceptable mechanism for criticism.

One educator (Female, 45 years) observed:

"*Vhathu vha shumisa mutambo uri vha nyadze zwi songo vhaisa vhathu.*"

("People use humour to criticise without offending others.")

For example:

Traditional proverb:

"*Mutsinda ndi khwine.*"

("A visitor is valuable.")

Parodic version:

"*Mutsinda ndi data bundle.*"

("A data bundle is valuable.")

Participants explained that the parody humorously comments on contemporary economic hardships and the importance of internet access.

Another example targeted political leadership:

Traditional proverb:

"*Musi wa vuhosi a u dzimi.*"

("The fire of leadership never dies.")

Parodic version:

"*Musi wa politiki u dzima nga ndila ya load shedding.*"

("The fire of politics dies like electricity during load shedding.")

Participants interpreted this as indirect criticism of governance failures and unreliable public services.

Theme 3: Intergenerational Dialogue and Cultural Continuity

Contrary to expectations, the elders did not generally perceive parody as disrespectful.

One elder participant stated:

"*Ri a sea, fhedzi ri a zwi vhona uri maambeke a kha di tshila.*"

("We laugh, but we can see that the proverbs are still alive.")

Young speakers similarly viewed parody as a way to maintain cultural connections.

A university student explained:

"Ri guda maambeke nga u a ita mutambo."

("We learn proverbs by playing with them.")

This finding suggests that parody contributes to cultural transmission by encouraging younger generations to engage actively with traditional forms rather than merely memorising them.

Theme 4: Digital Platforms as New Spaces of Oral Tradition

Analysis of WhatsApp groups, Facebook posts, and TikTok content revealed widespread circulation of parodic proverbs. Participants frequently shared modified proverbs in meme formats, often accompanied by images and emojis.

One commonly shared example was:

Traditional proverb:

"Tshi wana mbilu tshi a zwifha."

("What captures the heart deceives.")

Parodic version:

"Tshi wana password tshi a zwifha."

("Whoever gets your password deceives you.")

Participants linked this parody to concerns about cybercrime and online relationships.

Comparative Perspectives from Other South African Languages

Participants noted that similar practices occur in other South African languages. Examples mentioned included the isiZulu adaptation of:

"Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu"

becoming

"Umntu ngumuntu nge-data."

Likewise, Sepedi speakers were reported to modify traditional sayings to reference mobile phones, social media, and contemporary politics.

These similarities suggest that proverbial parody is part of a broader South African pattern in which indigenous oral traditions adapt to technological and social change while retaining their cultural significance.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that parody and playfulness are not peripheral features of Tshivenda proverbial discourse but constitute important mechanisms through which oral traditions remain relevant in changing social contexts. The emergence of parodic forms such as *"Dzina ndi smartphone"* and *"Muthu ndi muthu nga Wi-Fi"* illustrates how speakers draw upon familiar proverbial structures to comment on contemporary realities. These findings support Hutcheon's conception of parody as a process that simultaneously preserves and transforms an original text.²⁰ Rather than rejecting traditional wisdom, speakers rely on the recognisability of established proverbs to generate new meanings. Therefore, the effectiveness of parody depends on the continued cultural authority of the original proverb.

The study further confirms the relevance of Bakhtin's notion of dialogism and the carnivalesque.²¹ Through parody, speakers temporarily suspend the seriousness and authority traditionally associated with proverbs, creating spaces for humour, critique, and alternative perspectives. The humorous transformation of proverbs related to leadership, social behaviour, and technology demonstrates that parody enables speakers to negotiate social change without directly challenging cultural norms. This finding aligns with African scholarship that views humour and satire as culturally accepted forms of social commentary.²² In the Tshivenda context, parody functions as a subtle discursive

²⁰ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*.

²¹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*.

²² Mpofo, "Ridicule and Humour in the Global South: Theorizing Politics of Laughter in the Social Media Age"; Nwankwo, "On the Limits and Prospects of African Humour."

strategy through which social concerns can be expressed while at the same time maintaining communal harmony.

The findings also reveal the importance of incongruity in the production of humour. Participants consistently identified humour in the unexpected substitution of traditional concepts with modern references such as smartphones, Wi-Fi, social media, and data bundles. This supports Morreall's argument that humour emerges when established expectations are disrupted.²³ The juxtaposition of traditional proverbial wisdom with contemporary technological realities creates a tension that audiences recognise and appreciate. Significantly, this humour is culturally grounded because it depends on shared knowledge of both the original proverb and the social realities being referenced.

Beyond humour, the findings indicate that parody serves important pragmatic and social functions. The use of parodic proverbs to critique political leadership, economic hardship, and changing social values demonstrates that humour can function as a vehicle for indirect criticism. This supports the arguments of Attardo, who maintain that humorous discourse often performs both affiliative and critical functions.²⁴ In Tshivenda communities, parody enables speakers to raise sensitive issues in a manner that reduces confrontation while encouraging reflection. Such findings suggest that parody operates as a socially acceptable mechanism for negotiating tensions and expressing dissatisfaction.

A significant finding is the role of parody in intergenerational engagement. Contrary to assumptions that younger generations are abandoning indigenous knowledge systems, the data indicate that parody encourages active participation in cultural traditions. Younger speakers demonstrated familiarity with traditional proverbs even when modifying them, while elders generally viewed these adaptations as evidence of cultural continuity rather than cultural decline. This finding challenges narratives that portray modernization as inherently destructive to oral traditions. Instead, the study suggests that cultural preservation can occur through adaptation and innovation. Proverbs survive not because they remain unchanged, but because speakers continually reinterpret them to address new circumstances.

The comparative examples drawn from isiZulu and Sepedi contexts further suggest that proverbial parody is not unique to Tshivenda society but forms part of a broader South African pattern of linguistic and cultural adaptation. In indigenous language communities, speakers appear to employ similar strategies of recontextualization to make traditional forms meaningful in contemporary environments. This observation reinforces Finnegan's argument that oral traditions should be understood as dynamic and evolving systems rather than fixed repositories of inherited knowledge.²⁵

Another important contribution of the findings concerns the relationship between oral tradition and digital communication. The widespread circulation of parodic proverbs on WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, and other social media platforms demonstrates that digital technologies have created new spaces for the performance and transmission of indigenous knowledge. Rather than diminishing the relevance of proverbs, digital platforms facilitate their adaptation, dissemination, and reinterpretation. This supports recent scholarship arguing that oral traditions increasingly exist within hybrid oral-digital environments where cultural expressions are simultaneously preserved and transformed.²⁶ The findings, therefore, challenge assumptions that technological advancement inevitably leads to the erosion of indigenous cultural practices.

Overall, the discussion highlights that parody in Tshivenda proverbs performs multiple interconnected functions. It generates humour, facilitates social critique, strengthens communal bonds, promotes intergenerational dialogue, and supports cultural continuity. The study, therefore, extends existing scholarship on African oral literature by demonstrating that parody is not merely a form of entertainment but a sophisticated linguistic and cultural resource through which communities negotiate identity, authority, and social change. Through playful adaptation, Tshivenda speakers ensure that

²³ J. Morreall, *Humour, Philosophy, and Literature*. (Springer, 2010).

²⁴ Salvatore Attardo, *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Humor* (Taylor & Francis, 2017).

²⁵ Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa*.

²⁶ Makhado, "Reconsideration of Tshivenda Proverbs in Preserving Tshivenda Language and Culture"; Raphalalani, "The Value of Tshivenda Proverbs in the Upbringing of a Child in the 21st Century."

proverbs remain living forms of cultural expression capable of addressing the realities of contemporary society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are emerging for educators, researchers, and cultural practitioners. First, educators should integrate the playful and parodic aspects of Tshivenda proverbs into language and cultural curricula. By including examples of parodic proverbs, teachers can improve learner engagement, foster creativity, and encourage critical thinking about tradition and social norms. This integration would not only promote a deeper understanding of Tshivenda linguistic structures but also cultivate appreciation for the dynamic nature of oral heritage.

Second, cultural practitioners and community leaders should recognize parody as a legitimate form of cultural expression. Rather than dismissing playful modifications of proverbs as disrespectful, they can be used strategically in storytelling, performance arts, and community events to engage audiences, transmit moral lessons, and reflect contemporary societal realities. Encouraging this practice ensures that Tshivenda proverbs remain relevant and adaptable in modern contexts while retaining their traditional authority.

Third, researchers are encouraged to further investigate parody in Tshivenda and other African oral traditions, especially in digital and social media contexts. The study demonstrated that social media platforms have become important venues for the circulation and adaptation of parodic proverbs. Future research could explore the impact of these digital spaces on the evolution of oral heritage, the reception of parodic content among different age groups, and comparative analyses across African languages.

Finally, the study highlights the importance of documenting and archiving parodic forms of Tshivenda proverbs alongside conventional versions. This documentation can serve as a valuable resource for linguistic research, cultural preservation, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. By capturing both the traditional and playful dimensions of proverbs, scholars and community members alike can ensure that Tshivenda oral heritage continues to evolve in ways that are both culturally meaningful and socially engaging.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how parody and playfulness operate within Tshivenda proverbs and to demonstrate their significance within contemporary linguistic and cultural practice. The findings confirm that parody is not a marginal or incidental phenomenon but a widespread and purposeful strategy embedded in everyday communication in both oral and digital contexts. Speakers' ability to parody proverbs depends on shared cultural knowledge of traditional forms, underscoring the continued relevance and recognizability of proverbial wisdom within Tshivenda communities.

The analysis shows that parody functions through identifiable linguistic strategies, including structural distortion, inversion of meaning, exaggeration, and recontextualization. These strategies allow speakers to creatively reshape established proverbs while maintaining a clear intertextual link to their original meanings. As demonstrated in both face-to-face interactions and digital exchanges, these parodic adaptations generate humour through incongruity and simultaneously enable social commentary on contemporary realities such as technological change, shifting values, and generational priorities.

Importantly, the results reveal that parody fulfils several pragmatic and social functions. It fosters humour and social cohesion, allowing speakers to bond through shared recognition and laughter. At the same time, parody serves as a culturally appropriate means of indirect critique, enabling sensitive issues to be addressed without confrontation. This function is particularly significant in intergenerational interactions, where parody facilitates dialogue between older and younger speakers by allowing tradition to be negotiated rather than rejected.

The prominence of parodic proverbs on digital platforms further illustrates the adaptability of Tshivenda oral tradition. Rather than signalling a decline in proverbial usage, digital parody demonstrates how younger speakers actively engage with inherited cultural forms to maintain relevance

in modern communicative spaces. This finding challenges static views of proverbs as fixed expressions and highlights their role as dynamic resources for meaning-making in changing social environments.

In conclusion, parody in Tshivenda proverbs exemplifies the resilience and flexibility of oral tradition. By balancing continuity with innovation, parodic proverb use preserves cultural familiarity while opening space for humour, critique, and creative expression. Therefore, the study contributes to broader discussions in linguistics and folklore by showing that parody is not merely a playful deviation, but a culturally embedded mechanism through which tradition, identity, and modernity are continuously renegotiated.

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