

# The proverbs in Bantu Social Justice as a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): Case Study of the Kisongye Palavers

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**Abstract:** The present qualitative paper is meant to discuss the logical role of proverbs in Bantu social justice, specifically in the Kisongye palavers. It demonstrates the power of language through proverbs within the palavers to regulate issues in social justice. It seeks to address a large number of African societies in this contemporary century. As a linguistic survey, this study answers the question: “How do proverbs intervene and logically serve as a vehicle of language of wisdom in social justice through the palavers in Kisongye?” The text documented different approaches such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), hermeneutics, and logic. Hermeneutics, being the theory and methodology of interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom literature, and philosophical texts, helped to demonstrate the techniques of interpreting and explaining meanings of the language embodied through proverbs in Kisongye. CDA has the force of critiquing and analysing a discourse in any given language. Logic observes the process of premises in a discourse to lead to a good conclusion. Therefore, the paper shows how proverbs in Kisongye as expressions of people’s wisdom and their logical thought find place in education and popular discourse as well as in palavers. To put it clearly, for social transformation and educational change, African society ought to help young people use proverbs in everyday vernacular language. This suggestion could be used in schools and in political discourses. The contribution of this paper is to vulgarize proverbs as rhetoric-logic techniques in Bantu palavers to iron out conflicts in African countries. Hence, the implications of this paper are on social discrimination, health inequality, the effect of climate change on specific groups, and statelessness.

**Keywords:** *proverbs, social justice, CDA, hermeneutics, Kisongye palavers.*

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## 1. Introduction

A careful critical reading of proverbs in their diverse versions of social justice has awakened my mind to the wisdom of people. However, it is a great task to understand and help people understand the richness hidden within proverbs. This paper will attempt to demonstrate the role of proverbs from oral to their written form. Proverbs find their implications in ecology, justice, and in other fields of social life. This study will focus its particular attention to the Kisongye proverbs through palavers to show that problems may be solved wisely and without any conflicting situation.

To come to the achievement of this matter, the paper suggests the following main question: "How do proverbs convey wisdom and establish peaceful social justice?" Being a literary and qualitative work with regard to society, it will observe the action of proverbs in palavers to settle conflicts in the community. Indeed, the paper will make use of techniques, methods, and approaches, among them data collections, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and hermeneutics. These methodological frameworks will facilitate the interpretation of proverbs and explain their use in everyday language through social justice. Therefore, the paper is divided into the following sections: Methodology and Key Concepts, Results, Discussions and Conclusion, and References.

## 2. Methodology and Key Concepts

Based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Hermeneutics, the present paper interacts with different approaches. On the one hand, CDA can be seen as aiming to critically investigate issues of related texts. It aims to help the analyst understand the social problems that are mediated by mainstream ideology and power relationships, all perpetuated by the use of written texts in our daily and professional lives. On the other hand, hermeneutics helps to set out the logical truth embodied in the proverb. It should be demonstrated that there is a kind of syllogism lying in the proverb which has to end with a concluding idea as a moral lesson.

### 2.1. Proverbs quid?

A proverb is a short, well-known sentence or phrase that states a general truth about life or gives advice (Hornby, 1996, p.933). It follows from this definition that a proverb is often a short and meaningful phrase, and it declares a general truth about social life. Every social community in the world possesses its proverbs to express wisdom; therefore, African countries cover a great number of proverbs. In Kisongye, there are also oral and written proverbs collected by missionaries from the Basongye land (Lumeka, 1967).

### 2.2. Social justice

By social justice, we mean a perspective that holds that everyone deserves equal economic, political, and social rights and opportunities. It is the virtue that guides us in creating those organized human interactions called institutions. It is to be noted that the five principles of social justice that regulate problems in society, notably the access, the diversity, the equity, the participation, and the rights of persons. Social justice is founded on the equal rights for all people and the possibility for all human beings without any discrimination to benefit from economic and social progress all over the world. Many proverbs in Kisongye refer to social justice. Here is an example of a proverb denoting

social justice: "Kitubukie n-kipeele" (Muepu, 1988, p.238, no1396), which means "What is burst (in the sense of an abscess, i.e., to resolve the situation)". It also means that better get a lawsuit mutually. This is the preference for a happy ending to a dispute. During the palaver among the Basongye, this proverb is preferably used to appease the tension.

### 2.3. CDA

The label Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used by a significant number of scholars with a diverse set of concerns in a number of disciplines. Critical Discourse Analysis is a methodology that enables a vigorous assessment of what is meant when language is used to describe and explain. There is a proliferation of terms within critical discourse analysis, which is reflective of the various influences in the development of the methodology. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) cited by Amoussou and Ayodelle (2018) draw on the aforementioned criteria and set up eight basic principles or tenets of CDA as follows: (i) CDA addresses social problems; (ii) power relations are discursive; (iii) discourse constitutes society and culture; (iv) discourse does ideological work; (v) discourse is historical; (vi) the link between text and society is mediated; (vii) discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory; (viii) discourse is a form of social action (Van Dijk, 1995, p.353; Jahedi, Abdullah & Mukundan, 2014, p.29).

Some key concepts of critical discourse analysis include the social practice of language, social contradictions and conflicts, and the role of discourse in the macro-social, cultural, and historical process. It focuses on the work of three prominent scholars and Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach. This study concludes that a combination of these three approaches can be useful for the critical analysis of texts.

### 2.4. Hermeneutics

As one of the approaches employed in this paper, hermeneutics is the branch of knowledge that deals with explanation and interpretation, particularly of the Bible or other literary texts. The American Heritage Dictionary defines hermeneutics as the theory and methodology of interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom, literature, and philosophical texts. It may include the art of understanding and communication. However, modern hermeneutics includes both verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as semiotics, presuppositions, and preunderstandings (*The American Heritage Dictionary Online*).

### 2.5. Kisongye palavers

In the Basongye culture, a "palaver" refers to a traditional form of deliberation and consensus-building, often used in dispute resolution and community decision-making. During the discussion, however, all the sentences passed off peacefully in Kisongye. The "palaver" involves a gathering where people discuss issues, share perspectives, and aim to reach a mutually agreeable solution. The term "palaver", derived from the Portuguese "palavra", which means the importance of oral communication and negotiation in their society (<https://en.wikipedia.org>).

## 3. Results

During the investigation process for this paper, it has been found that proverbs play a significant role in promoting social

justice within a community. In Africa, it has been asserted that a people without proverbs is a people without wisdom; therefore, it is a dead people (Dzobo, 1973). To come to the outcomes of this paper, the following relevant points are to be developed:

### 3.1. The rescue of proverbs in palavers

One can wonder why the Basongye make recourse to proverbs in palavers. This is done for several reasons, as mentioned earlier in point 1.2, including the one related to social justice. First, to appease social tension, proverbs, being the expression of wisdom (Njo-Mouelle, 1975), are to regulate disputes and create harmony in the community. Second, in Kisongye palavers as well as in any African ones, proverbs serve as powerful tools for communication, conflict resolution, and the transmission of cultural values (Samain, 1923, & Ladrille, 1989). The same authors continue asserting that proverbs are to illustrate points, reinforce arguments, and offer advice, often in a subtle yet impactful way.

Proverbs in palavers bridge generations, carrying the wisdom and experiences of the past into present-day situations. There are more detailed roles of proverbs, such as in cultural transmission, moral instruction, conflict resolution, social commentary, and enhancing communication.

It should be stated, however, that “proverbs are a cornerstone of African oral tradition, passing down cultural norms, social values, and ethical principles from one generation to the next” (Seguro, 2025). They offer guidance on how to live a good and prosperous life, often by highlighting virtues and discouraging vices. Proverbs can be used to de-escalate tense situations, offer alternative perspectives, and promote reconciliation by highlighting shared values and experiences. They can be used to critique social injustices or power structures, often metaphorically and indirectly. Proverbs add depth and nuance to conversations, making them more engaging and memorable. They can also be used to soften the impact of direct criticism or to offer encouragement. By referencing shared wisdom and cultural knowledge, proverbs can foster a sense of community and belonging. Proverbs can be used to express a range of emotions, from sympathy and apology to warning and congratulations.

### 3.2. The rhetorical-logical technique in Bantu palavers

By rhetorical-logical technique, it is meant using persuasive language (rhetoric) in conjunction with logical reasoning to influence an audience. It combines appeals to emotion, credibility, and logic (logos, ethos, pathos) to make an argument more compelling and persuasive (The American Heritage Dictionary Online). This approach utilizes rhetorical devices alongside logical structures and evidence to achieve a desired effect on the listener or reader. In Kisongye palavers—formal discussions or negotiations where community members gather to deliberate on important matters—among the Bantu, this eloquent and strategic technique is commonly preferred when presenting arguments.

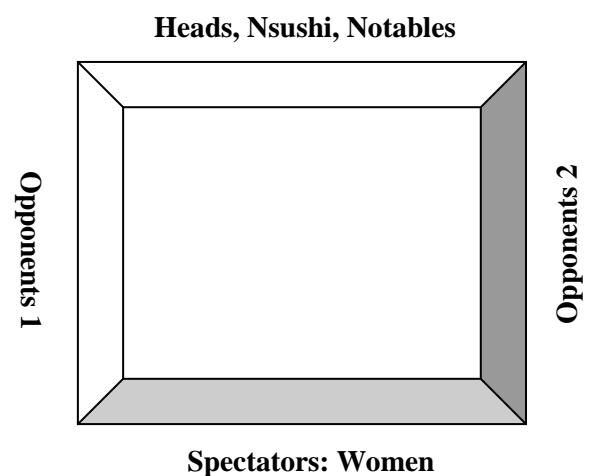
For example, during a discussion where two people oppose each other, one might use a proverb to make a point, and the other opponent may counter with another proverb that follows the same theme.

### 3.3. Purpose, Process, Role of the “Nsushi” (Judge), and Outcomes

It is worth noting that palavers are convened to address conflicts, make important decisions, or restore harmony within the community. Landrille (1989, p.32) asserts that the palaver is often courteous. During the performance, if the tension rises, an informed speaker will find a joke to bring about relaxation. It is here that proverbs intervene as a word of defense. On every side, there is a worry about taking care of the opponent.

After criticizing the opponent, a word of praise is said. Everyone takes it in turn, and abrupt approbations often come from the opposing party and vice versa. Landrille (1989) schematizes the palaver in a square representation as follows: the two opponent parties occupy two opposed sides of the square. The third side on top is occupied by judges, eventually the head or chiefs, and the notables. The fourth side is that of spectators, mostly composed of women who can clap and encourage with thunderous applause (p.23).

It is shown as in the figure below:



Furthermore, the palaver is a participatory process where everyone, regardless of age or social status, has the opportunity to speak and express their views.

A designated individual, often called the “Nsushi” (Muepu, 1988, p.219), may guide the discussion, summarize points and use proverbs, jokes, and songs to facilitate understanding. Therefore, the goal of a palaver is to reassemble the community, mend relationships, and achieve a collective decision that respects everyone’s input (Landrille, 1989, p.32). While “palaver” is a term used in many African cultures, its specific form and function can vary. In the Basongye context, it is a vital part of their social and political life.

## 4. Discussions and conclusion

### 4.1. The application of proverbs in social justice today

Today, proverbs can support social justice, especially in group discussions. When people show respect for others and human rights, a community’s wisdom stands out. The Ubuntu philosophy, rooted in Bantu cultures, also offers key ideas for social justice. It focuses on human connection, encourages empathy, and values the community’s well-being. These ideas help promote fairness, inclusion, and respect for human dignity in many areas of social justice.

Studying how people use proverbs is important because it helps researchers see how language shapes social life. By looking at proverbs and other common sayings, researchers learn how language affects our views and interactions. For example, analyzing proverbs can reveal how they reflect and support gender roles and stereotypes in different cultures. This understanding can also help create more memorable and persuasive advertising campaigns.

#### 4.2. Discourse analysis of proverbs and other popular wisdom

To put it otherwise, discourse analysis of proverbs and popular wisdom examines how these concise sayings function within communication, especially within palavers in Kisongye, shaping social interactions, transmitting cultural values, and influencing thought. Paraphrasing Lunjwire (2002), it can be asserted that “proverbs, as short, memorable expressions, carry significant weight in various contexts, from everyday conversation to political rhetoric” (Barasa et al., 2023). Their analysis reveals insights into a culture's worldview, social norms, and even gender dynamics, as proverbs often reflect and reinforce existing power structures.

Proverbs are often used to offer guidance, share life lessons, and impart moral or practical advice. They act as concise summaries of experience and cultural knowledge. Proverbs reflect a society's core beliefs, worldview, and ethical principles. Analyzing proverbs can reveal what a culture considers important, desirable, or undesirable. In some cultures, proverbs are used as politeness strategies to soften criticism, express disagreement indirectly, or maintain social harmony.

For instance, in a conversation between two colleagues, one might begin by saying, “You know, as the old saying goes, ‘The leopard does not change its spots.’” The other might reply, “True, but remember, ‘The river is never so deep as to drown a man willing to swim.’” Such interactions demonstrate how proverbs, with their rhythmic structure, serve to align perspectives gently, mediate discussions, and uphold harmony even when parties disagree.

Performed in palavers, proverbs can be used to add humor, wit, and engaging elements to a conversation. Proverbs can be used to bolster one's claims, add weight to an argument, or persuade an audience. Proverbs can reinforce social norms and expectations, discouraging behavior that deviates from the accepted standards. Proverbs can be a marker of group membership, reinforcing shared cultural identity and belonging. Discourse analysis emphasizes the importance of context in understanding the meaning of proverbs. The situation in which a proverb is used, the relationship between speakers, and the broader cultural background all influence its interpretation. Proverbs often have a literal meaning and a figurative or implied meaning. Discourse analysis examines how audiences interpret the figurative meaning based on their understanding of the context and cultural background. To put it plainly, proverbs can perpetuate or challenge existing social ideologies and stereotypes. Proverbs often rely on metaphors, similes, and other figures of speech. Discourse analysis examines how these linguistic devices contribute to the proverb's meaning

and impact. Proverbs can be adapted, modified, or combined with other expressions to create new meanings and demonstrate linguistic creativity.

Comparing proverbs across different languages and cultures can reveal both universal patterns and cultural specificities in the use and interpretation of these expressions. Examining how politicians use proverbs to connect with their audience, convey their message, and establish their credibility. Exploring how proverbs are integrated into narratives to convey cultural values and moral lessons.

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