

Conversational Songs of Meru Men: The Hidden Proverbial Wisdom in the Performers'

Pragmatic Rivalry

Albert Mugambi Rutere¹ and Eliud Kirigia²

¹The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), Kenya

²Laikipia University, Kenya

Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to examine the social significance of conversational songs as sung by Meru men in the Meru community of Kenya, while making a critical linguistic and literary analysis of them. Meru men have a variety of song performances which address the community's daily activities and are very popular for their educative and entertainment value embodying the community's accumulated experience passed from one generation to the next. To name a few, there is reenta performed by elderly men, auuthi performed by young, energetic, newly circumcised men and kirarire and Kiama performed across age groups. Though performed in different styles and instrumentation by different age groups, the songs are similar in form and content and take a protracted conversational structure, involving the soloist, the respondent and the choral audience. Proverbial wisdom characterizing the songs is replete with aphoristic expressions, which are highly rated as a source of knowledge. The songs comprise the soloist's witty lines punctuated with repetitive affirmative syllables aaha -iiihi characterized by a rousing rhythm and a lilting tune. The songs are rich in analogy and metaphor, revealing the community's verbal economy, in which word power is mystic. The data for this paper was collected by the first author for a period of ten years as a participant as well as a performer in his own right. The songs are used to demonstrate the proverbial knowledge underpinning the pragmatic (mock) rivalry between the soloist and his interlocutor in passing Meru community's

knowledge from one generation to another. This paper demonstrates the vibrancy of Meru men's creative impulse as custodians of the community's wisdom. A.L. Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory and H.P Grice's (1975) Theory of Conversational Implicature are used to analyze the songs.

Key words: conversational songs, proverbial wisdom

Introduction

The paper discusses proverbial wisdom in conversational songs by Meru men using Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory and Grice's (1975) Theory of Conversational Implicature. Songs and dances are very popular in Meru community and represent the Meru world view. Arguably in many African societies, songs and dances represent the most pervasive genre of literature across both time and space, and have many facets and roles such as enhancing the process of identity; be it cultural, ethnic, national, religious and/or gender. The songs and dances explore social cosmology, worldviews, class and gender relations, interpretations of value systems and other political, social and cultural practices, even as they entertain and provide momentary escape for audience members (Mbiyu, 2011). Kirarire, for example, is a protracted ritualistic song sang by men on the eve of circumcision and contains instructions to the initiates (Nyaga, 1997).

The Meru belong to the Kenya Bantu linguistic group living in the eastern slopes of Mt. Kenya. The Meru society is highly patriarchal and its social, political and economic affairs are directed by a council of men elders known as Njuri ncheke. Meru men are the custodians of Meru culture.

26

LU JSSEH (2013) VOL. 1: NO.1

The cultural contests and modes of their mediation through proverbs are expressed in contexts such as songs. Below is a map showing the major subgroups of the Ameru.

Meru comprises nine major territorial subdivisions based upon dialectal differences, variations in culture traits and tradition. These subdivisions are formally recognized as sub-tribes. Proximate to the Kenya Central Highlands and circling the slopes of Mount Kenya to the northeast, between 1200 to 1500 meters above sea level, live the Imenti, Miutine, Igoji, Muthambi and Chuka.

These territories are made up of chains of east-west extended clan clusters separated by eastward flowing rivers and streams of various sizes. The Igembe occupy a similar altitude to the north in the Nyambene ridge. The Tigania and Tharaka occupy the lower north-eastern and northern plains in the adjoining lowlands (Spear, 1981). Although the Chuka and the Tharaka sometimes consider themselves non-Merus due to different myths on the origin of their language, their cultural practices are similar to the other groups. Meru's neighbours to the south and around Mt Kenya are the Embu, Mbeere and the Kikuyu, and to the east are the Kamba. To the north are the Borana and Samburu.

In traditional Meru community, knowledge embodied in proverbs was derived, preserved and cascaded in part from various institutions of leadership as indicated below:

Agwe (sacred kings)

↓

Iroria (Prophets)

↓

Agambi (Judges/Advocates)

↓

Aga (Medicine men)

(Adapted from M'Imanyara, 1992)

According to M'Imanyara (1992), the sacred king was identified as the head of the theosophy

since Meru was a theocratic state. The judiciary was managed by legal experts (Agambi) while
27

LU JSSEH (2013) VOL. 1: NO.1

religion was managed by Agwe (sacred kings), Iroria (prophets) and Aga (medicine men).

Politics was controlled by Njuri Ncheke (council of elders) who made policy, which was executed by Kiama (military council).

Method of Study

This study involved conversational songs as sung by Meru men. In this case, there was a set of three types of songs namely; Kirarire i, Kirarire ii and Kiama, which were collected through a personal diary for over a period of 10 years (note kiama is an ambiguous term referring to military council, a song and a secret organization). This data was collected from both young and elderly performers. The main objective of the paper was to examine the form, content and social significance of the conversational songs. The specific objectives were two, namely: To examine the form and content of conversational songs by Meru men; and to find out the social significance of these songs.

The full text of the Meru men conversational songs analyzed in this study is as below:

Kirariire Song 1

A. Jii jii, tuuriiria naa turaare cubuuria nii yaa Mareete. line 1

We shall sing and sleep over (as we feast) because the pot belongs to M'marete (bringer of plenty).

C.Aaaa.line 2

A. Jii jii teeka nkwiijiite kweenu nii mururuumo jwa mbeere ndaiigua. line 3

I was not coming to your home. I have only heard the sound of jingles.

C.Aaaa. line 4

A. Jii jii kithaaria kioona kiingi niitaa muruukio ciimbaa. line 4(b)

When a performer sees an equal is like a lion sensing another one.

C. Aaaa. line 5

B. Jii jii turiciindaana unthuure naa mwaari waa nyaakwe ngaambie. line 6

We shall compete, you get annoyed, and ultimately I will court your sister.

C.Aaaa. line 7

D.Toonya.line 8

Attack.

A.Jii jii kithaaka ntiikuuriithia ntigiiria baiite ariithia.line 9

I cannot prevent my friend to graze where I have no interest.

C.Aaaa. line 10

B. Jii jii juukia mwaari waa ciao ugaambie noo mwaari waa nyaakwe urii uuntu..... line 11

You are free to court my sister. However, your sister is an issue.

C.Aaaaa. line 12

A.Jii jii mbitaagwa kauuna meetho nii nkéenye ciao ntuura eetu. ... line 13

I am known as a winker by girls of my village.

C.Aaaa. line 14

B.Jii jii kaa njeenu irii kithiooro nkomboore baicikiiri. line 15

Does your way to your home have bends for me to hire a bicycle?

C. Aaaa. line 16

A. Jii jii mwaari waa ciao nii muthoongi agambaagwa jumamoci. line 17

My sister is beautiful, and she is only available for courting on Saturdays.

C.Aaaa. line 18

28

LU JSSEH (2013) VOL. 1: NO.1

B. Mwaari waa ciaa nii kabuteeni naani cekiini minjaa. line 18 (b)

My sister is a Captain and I am a Sergeant-Major.

C.Aaaa. line 19

D.Toonya. line 20

Attack.

B. Jii jii naa riiria tukuugambia tutiigambaagia utii curuuari. line 21

Although we are courting we cannot accept those without innerwear

C.Aaaa. line 22

A. Jii jii baamo njeetu nii ta mucii jwaa njuura jutikiagaaira maarwa ruuri. line 23

My friend our home is like a beehive and cannot prepare millet beer for loafers.

C.Aaaa. line 24

B. Jii jii baamo nii mwaathi waa mauugu agwimaaga miiiti iguuru. line 25

My father is a hunter and he hunts beehives on top of trees.

C.Aaaa. line 26

A. Jii jii twetiire twauuma maguuru tugikiira kwaaria uroongo. line 27

We have gone to far and wide, fearing to lie.

C.Aaaa line 28

B. Jii jii ndikuthiuurukia turiima baaruga ituure kwijja. line 29

I will take you round the mountains and consequently receive letters.

C.Aaaa. line 30

D.Tonya. line 31

Attack.

A. Jii jii ntireei naa ntikwii ciejea ctaa iguuru ngwaate. line 32

I am not tall or short; therefore I will catch whatever comes above.

C.Aaaa. line 33

B. Jii jii baamo mbitagwaa reenya ndijaaga miiti ithuumbi. line 34

My friend I am called a giraffe because I eat the tops of trees.

C.Aaaa. line 35

A. Jii jii turiima nii twiiri Gwaamba mbathiira kauu kaangi. line 36

There are only two mountains in Gwaamba. Where is the other?

C.Aaaa. line 37

B. Jii jii kaamwe nii Kiraitu Meeru naa KANU yatuunywaa iratu. line 38

The mountain is Kiraitu in Meeru, and KANU lost its shoes.

C.Aaaa. line 39

A. Jii jii mbeere yaakwa nikuriama niurugiirwee maarwa ikuunde. line 40

My jingles are pausing, brew millet beer for them to drink.

C.Aaaa. line 41

B. Jii jii ruumaagia ng'oondu cumbii gwatuuka ikuruumiire. line 42

Give the sheep salt, when night comes it will follow you.

C.Aaaa. line 43

A. Jii jii munyaaki juuri ngiriine ntithaagirwa ucuuru naa nguoo. line 44

With plenty of millet in Ngiriine, you cannot hide gruel for me in your clothes.

C.Aaaa. line 45

B. Jii jii tukuubundiithia ikuurema noo Kithiruune ikweenda. line 46

We have taught them well, but they still desire Kithiruune (a despised place).

C.Aaaa. line 47

A. Jii jii ndumaagia utinguntiimba kaa muuntu aguukua akauura. line 48

Give me when you are alive, because a person gets lost when he dies.

C.Aaaa. line 49

B. Nii Kithiruune kiauuga njoogu nii muriimo oriire. line 50

It is Kithiruune which claimed the elephant died of sickness.

C.Aaaa. line 51

A. Jii jii nkwijiite ndii umuthoongi ndethiira unkuruukite. line 52

I came thinking I am the best, but I have found another beyond me.

C.Aaaa. line 53

B. Jii jii kithaaria gitii mwiiri noo mitii yaa mbaaru ikweeba. line 54

A performer has no body, only the ribs are gently moving.

C.Aaaa. line 55

A. Jii jii kaguutu kamwee gaiika kariira tuungi bwauura. line 56

One girl gets married, and she tells her age-mates that they are doomed.

C.Aaaa. line 57

D.Tooo. line 58

Enough.

B Ajia murogi ukuundoga urokiinywa nii ndamba. Nangakua utiinduma nii muuthwa

wathinjiira. line 59

Woe unto you, you sorcerer bewitching me, if I die you will not eat me. Instead you will have me

slaughtered for the ants.

Kirariire Song 2

A. Guguukia gukuthiira naa makuii. line 60

The dawn is very visible and its indicators are glaring.

B. Eee. line 61

A. Kariinguri nkiiri yaa taata ndiuuga nguutatiiree kiaao gitiindeka. line 62

Small boy of my mother, I want to ignore you but I feel for you

C.Eee. line 63

A. Ndauuga nkwereekere kiruumba na mbooru. line 64

I think of facing you, but your odour is too much.

C.Eee line 65

B. Agwee Namiiruri mwaaria nkaanya utii kimaamo kieega. line 66

C. You Namiiruri (name of a singing bird) the sweet talker, you have no good sleeping place.

D. Toonya. line 67

Attack

A. Kariinguuri nkiiri yaa taata urii muriingi waa kirariire kaaana urii

kathanduuri nkiina miuunda yaa kiriindi ncooga ikiithaanduura? line 68

Small boy, the pride of my mother, is you a performer of kirariire or you are a monkey shelling green grams in peoples' farms?

C.Eee. line 69

A. Kaana nii mbaaki mbiithi itiiirathiira ng'aana. line 70

Or you are raw tobacco whose bitterness is live?

C.Eee. line 71

B. Ndikwiinganga naa tuguuru twaaku urii naa tuu utoonye ndiia uurie

kauura mwaathi wa ruuji gikaaro niikuu. line 72

30

LU JSSEH (2013) VOL. 1: NO.1

I will chase you with your legs until you enter deep waters and ask the frog, the king of water where you can rest.

C.Eee. line 73

B. Akuuire mukuui naa nkaai niwanduumiire riiria bwathambaagia mwari waa

nyaakwe. line 74

He will tell you, the dying man with testicles, I will not help because you stepped on me when you were bathing your sister.

C.Eee. line 75

B. Ncooke nkwiingaiinge natuu utoonye itiiri uriie nthingiiri mwaathi waa kieeni

gikaaaro niikuu. line 76

I will still pursue you until you enter the field and ask the ant, the king of open grounds where you can rest.

C.Eee. line 77

B. Akwiiree niwambaatiire ncaabu riiria wataanagwa. line 78

He will tell you that you refused to give him a bit of your foreskin when you were getting circumcised.

C.Eee. line 79

B. Ncooke nkwiingaiinge natuu utoonye gaaru withiire abaagu naa nyakwee

bakiraaitha thoo. line 80

Even further, I will pursue you until you enter the hut and find your father and mother doing the manual lumbering (making love).

C.Eee. line 81

B. Ituu muuthi muuga uu muuga. line 82

Please (you) the performer, I greet you and I greet you (again).

C. Muuthi muuga uu muuga. line 83

(You) the performer, I greet you and I greet you (again).

A. Kirimaara kiraari bwaa ruguuru nikuu kiauuma gaiiti. line 84

(You said) Mount Kenya was in the West why do you now say it is in the East?

C.Eee. line 85

A. Ndiirwa nii muuri waa baatiiri wakiriingiree mbiicha kirenaama gaiiti. line 86

I hear when the bastard Catholic father photographed it, it relocated to the east.

C.Eee. Line 87

B. Ndauumiire auu ndeeta kwaba muntuweetu ndoorua nthaaka

niitumagwa kaana itutumagwa. line 89

I travelled to the home of my uncle and I was asked if circumcised men can go for errands.

C. Eee. line 90

B. Ndauuga niitumagwa. line 91

I agreed they can go for them.

C. Eee. line 92

B. Ndaaneenkerwa mwaari Kanyiiri tukariithie Muuti jwa kiama. line 93

Consequently, I was given a girl called Kanyiiri to take the herd to Muuti jwa

kiama (place name)

C. Eee. line 94

B. T haa thiita ciakiinya ndooria mwaari Kanyiiri niaatia utiikuutheeka. line 95

At midday I asked Kanyiiri why she was not laughing.

C.Eee. line 96

31

LU JSSEH (2013) VOL. 1: NO.1

B. Ndaiikaiikia njaara ndagwaata kioongo ambiira nii magaanjo jaa riuua. line 97

I stretched my hand and touched her head upon which she told me (that was not the right place to touch since) that was the old place for the sun.

C.Eee. line 98

B. Ndakaaiikia njaara kaiiri ndagwaata nkiingo ambiira nii magaanjo jaa mikaathi. .line 99

Again I stretched my hand and I touched the neck, and she told me (that again was not the right place to touch since) that was the place for necklaces.

C.Eee. line 100

B. Ndaiikaiikia njaara kaiiri ndagwaata kiuu ambiiraa nii magaanjo jaa biakuuria... line 101

Further, I stretched my hand and touched her stomach, and she told me not to touch there either since) that was the place for food.

C.Eee. line 102

B. Muukui naa nkaai ndaiikaiikia kaairi ndagwaata mutendeeria kinuu. line 103

Even further, I swear by my testicles, I extended my hand and I touched her pubic region (and she consented).

C.Eee. line 104

B. Niaatia karuume ndaiigua ndookia. line 105

How I became sexually aroused.

C. Niaatia karuume ndaiigua ndookia. line 106

How I became sexually aroused.

A. Ndaigaambairia bwa Kioorone ntiuumba nguutu ntuura yaa Kiuuga. line 107

I was courting at Kioorone (place name), and I do not want gossips of Kiuuga village.

C. Ndaigaambairia bwaa Kioorone ntiuumba nguutu ntuura yaa kiuuga. line 108

I was courting at Kioorone, and I do not want gossips of Kiuuga village.

A. Iii Muriiruu iii Mutabuui. line 109

(I swear by) Muriiruu and Mutabuui (as said elsewhere Muriiru and Mutabuui are the mythical forefathers of the Meru people).

C. Iii Muriiruu iii Mutabuui. line 110

(I swear by) Muriiruu and Mutabuui

Ituu waiigua Muriiruu Mutabuui ncaabu yaa mwaana irii nthii. line 111

When you hear Muriiruu (and) Mutabuui, the foreskin of the child is down.

C.Eee. line 112

B. Riuu ummenye njaara kujuukia nii taa muguguuku. line 113

(Also,) now know that the hands are stretched to take the way overgrown grass takes.

C.Eee. line 114

B. Mumeero kumeeria niita ngitiriithua. line 115

Further, the throat swallows like when one is fucking.

C.Eee. line 116

B. Buuria ukoorua utiigaakane. line 117

So what you will be asked, do not deny.

B. Buuria ukoorua utiigaakane. line 118

So what you will be asked, do not deny.

C. Tooo. line 119

Attack.

D. Muuthi ukuutha reekia kiuuthi kuuri muuthi uungi ukweenda kuutha. line 120

The player who is playing, leave the play because another is keen on playing.

32

LU JSSEH (2013) VOL. 1: NO.1

C. Muuthi ukuutha reekia kiuuthi kuuri muuthi uungi ukweenda kuutha. line 121

The player who is playing, leave the play because another is keen on playing.

E. Ukaiigua nkeenye cietaana bagitiindo kithiciiro ikimwee. line 122

If you hear girls calling each other friends of the day, their fucking place is one.

D. Tooo (attack) line 123

B. Muuthi muuga oomuuga. line 124

The performer, I greet you and I greet you.

C. Muuthi muuga oomuuga. line 125

(you) player, I greet you and I greet you.

B. Muuuthii muuga ngukethie kaiiri naa kathaatu muuntu utaani atikethagua

rimwee kiinya utaani waa muuka. line 126

(you) player, I greet you once, two times, and threefold... because a circumcised man is never greeted once, even if it is a circumcised woman

C.Eee. line 127

B. Niiku kanyooni gaaka kauuma keeja gukuura tuungi miriiri iii Njaagi? line 128

Where is this bird coming from to start removing others feathers, I swear by Njaagi (proper name)?

C. Iii Muriiruu iii Mutabuui. line 129

I swear by Muriiru and Mutaabui.

E. Mbitaagwa Mugambi mwaana waa M'Rutere naa rukuungi ntiiri. line 130

I am Mugambi son of M'Rutere and I have no mental sickness.

C.Eee. line 131

E. Rukuungi rwaa gwikiirwa tiiru rwaa muciarwa. line 132

An imposed mental sickness is not like the one by birth.

C.Eee. line 133

E. Ntaano ni makwiiri makuthaatu ruuria ukweenda rwiiku. line 134

There are two and three-fold circumcisions styles; so, say which one you want.

C.Eee. line 135

E. Urieenda ruuru rwa mwicuuka kariinga kathiige? line 136

Do you want the one of Chuka, a pruned tree?

C.Eee. line 137

E. Kaana nii ruuru rwaa mweembu nkaraanga itii maatu? line 138

Or the one of Embu, a basket without ears?

C.Eee. line 139

E. Kaana nii ruuru rwaa nkorothooro raa baa juuju beetu? line 140

Or this one of our forefathers, of full (foreskin) removal.

C.Eee. line 141

D.Tooo. line 142

Attack.

B. Ikaaba twijiire gwa Muthoomi kariimba wanoora kuuria Ncincigiiri ikuugwa ikooja
mpiindi yaa mweere mambuura kuuria nakwaambamba. line 143

It is good we came at Muthoomi's, Muthomi is a self sufficient person, where
Ncincigiiri the bird lands and picks a grain of millet; ceremony is to eat and
move around happily.

C. Mambuura kuuria naa kwaambamba. line 144

Ceremony is to eat and move around happily.

33

LU JSSEH (2013) VOL. 1: NO.1

E. Iitu kariinguri nkiiri yaa taata naau ukwaambamba tiino tuuri ndakiira buuria
maraandu ii Njaagi. line 145

Kindly, small boy, the pride of my mother where you are trotting is not where we are; I fear
that you may incur debts, I swear by Njaagi

C. Iii muuri iru iii mutaabui. line 146

I swear by Muriiru and Mutaabui.

B. Ndikuuria bukaiiriima kaana butiriima. line 147

I am wondering whether you will endure or not.

C.Eee. line 148

B. Bukairiima micariica yaaba Cioondaatu igambaaga manida agiikia kaana
butiriima? line149

Will endure the cracking whips of Cioondaatu which crack during small hours of the night or
not?

C.Eee. line 150

B. Mwiji wandumiire uri cukuuru geeta mwaarimu agutethie. line 151

Boy you insulted me while in school now call the teacher to help you.

C. Mwiji wandumiire uri cukuuru geete mwaarimu agutethie. line 152

Boy you insulted me while in school now call the teacher to help you.

E. Naagwe kiuu kineene M'Ituuru utiteethia kaana uteethia uungi iii Njaagi. line 153

You the big stomach M'Ituuru you cannot help yourself or others, I swear by Njaagi.

C. Iii Muriiru iii Mutaabui. line 154

I swear by Muriiru and Mutaabui.

B. Baamo naayo nkooma ikaaria ndamitiira ikoone ndaau kwaa Muruunga. line 155

My friend if the devil talks, I will hit it, and later it will be punished by

God.

C. Nkooma ikaaria ndamitiira ikoone ndaau kwaa Muruunga. line 156

If the devil talks I will hit it, and later it will be punished by God

D. Tooo. Toonya. Muruugi maarwa tii muthuuku baata yaraara nthii naa mukiiki.... line 157

Attack and attack. The brewer of millet beer is not bad, but the problem is only with the person sharing it out.

C. Muruugi maarwa tii muthuuku baata yaraara nthii naa mukiiki. line 158

The brewer of millet beer is not bad, but the problem is only with the person sharing out.

Kiama Song

A. Kiama nijaa ndwaari muthenya muui naa mweega. line 159

Kiama is like sickness a good day or bad.

B. Abaagu waa kiama nuriiku keenda tukameenya kugaamba? line 160

Who is your father of kiama so that we can argue?

A. Ndiia irii Mutoonga iriigwuura ithaagu ikagwiika. line 161

The deep waters in Mutoonga raise one wing and close.

B. Muriigi jwaa gicaancana jutiteemekaga nii iriigi. line 162

A rope of a tender plant cannot be cut because it is raw.

A. Kajiji kaa mbuuri ntuurutu/mbuuri mpoondu nii ciaoo mbuuri ukuuthuta?.... line 163

A penis of a thin goat, whose goats are you fucking?

C. Toonya. line 164

Attack

34

LU JSSEH (2013) VOL. 1: NO.1

B. Niaatia ntigwiiritue riiria ngweete muthuuri naa kauujo? line 165

Why should I not be happy when I am holding a bowl of soup?

A. Karacianaanga uncuuku karaigiriira magaamba. line 166

It garnished itself and got into problems.

B. Ntiriika yaaba ngiiti itiiriima igikuunjwaa. line 167

An idiot of stubborn man, I wonder if you will endure.

C. Taanda nyaama twiriire tii mwarouari waa nyaakwe ukuriirwa. line 168

Cut the meat so that we can eat, it is not being eaten in honour of your sister.

Analysis and Discussion

Conversational songs by Meru men present a narrative of the Meru as a proud people with no reference to any other 'superior' culture in capturing their own realities and in their interpretation of the cosmos. The Meru conversational songs are characterized by a performer taunting his

interlocutor with witty statements (proverbs). Njuno or proverbs in Kimeru are ‘wise sayings’ whose meaning is ‘difficult to unravel’ unless one is properly schooled in the ‘ways of knowing’ of the community. Proverbs are a kind of ‘secret or allusive language’ (Finnegan, 1970). These proverbs, like other artistic expressions, ‘are a rich source of imagery and succinct expression’ expressed through ‘compressed and allusive phraseology’ (Finnegan, 1970: 390).

In Meru community, proverbs are very common in adult speech. Indeed, knowledge of proverbs demonstrates the user’s linguistic prowess and wisdom. Somebody was regarded mature, intelligent and linguistically competent in the language of the community if they knew how to use proverbs. Proverbs draw images from real life and are a popular genre of literature throughout Africa. As Madu (1992: 190) observes ‘[P]roverbs originate in all life circumstances, social and historical, and thus reflect the various viewpoints’. Further, it is observed that a proverb is ‘a proposition or group of propositions deriving from the experiences of the wise men of the society affirming either clearly or metaphorically popular indisputable truths (Mulyumba Wa Mamba quoted in Madu, 1992: 19). ‘Wise men’ and ‘indisputable truths’ are controversial concepts since women can also be wise. However, in the context of highly patriarchal societies, one can appreciate the use of the term.

As various strands of knowledge are commonly communicated in speech, any adult ignorant of proverbs in Meru is assumed to be an idiot. Ignorance of proverbs is also inexcusable because from an early age, children are instructed by use of proverbs. Although children in Meru and elsewhere in Africa may not regularly use proverbs and other aphoristic structures used by adults in speech, the children still understand the messages put across in proverbs. Boateng (1952: 330) argues that ‘[P]roverbial sayings’ are an aspect of traditional education passed from one generation to another.

Use of proverbs in Meru is a highly respected art ingrained in the culture of the community.

Proverbs are valued for their educative value to ensure social harmony, an idea supported by several scholars. Reinforcing the use of proverbs among the young and old, Boateng (1952) for example, observes that among the Fante and Asante of Ghana, it is common for adults to moralize and communicate indirectly to children by the use of proverbs (quoted in Samjumi and Rutere, 2011: 3).

Even further, the underpinning of proverbs in enriching speech and for educational utility is cited and discussed by other scholars. Emphasizing the value of proverbs in Igbo language, Achebe (1994: 1) observes that ‘proverbs are like palm oil in which words are eaten’. Essentially, when palm oil is used for cooking food, it makes it tasty, tender and easy to swallow. Also, by similar additive principle, when proverbs are incorporated in speech, they make it interesting and economical because messages are delivered in few words.

In support of Achebe’s view, Ene (2006) contends that ‘[...] in Igbo society of Nigeria in West Africa, proverbs are used in speech for the purpose of inspiring and enthralling the audience as well as showing the linguistic prowess and wisdom of the speaker’(quoted in Samjumi and Rutere, 2011: 1). Among the TIV people of Nigeria, a person who exhibits ability in utilizing proverbs competently ‘in all social situations gains respect, not only of his peers but also of his juniors and seniors as well’ (Bergsma, 1970: 162).

Samjumi and Rutere (2011) acknowledge the indispensable role of proverbial wisdom encoded in pithy, witty expressions popularized by accurate and frequent use in communicating ideas.

Understandably, proverbs constitute a major linguistic input of many languages in Africa since they communicate messages clearly, precisely, and truthfully in addition to imparting wisdom in a reciprocal way to both the user and the listener. The users and listeners are both the young and

old.

Kirarire and the Embedded Proverbial Wisdom

Kirarire contains advisory instructions coded in proverbs and imagery and is sung on the eve of circumcision with parts of it repeated at various moments in the morning while taking the candidate to the river to wash and in the circumcision field during circumcision itself (Nyaga, 1997).

Expert performers give moral instructions to the candidates through this song. The candidates are not only taught rules of good conduct befitting a circumcised person, but they are also instructed on the importance of maintaining one's dignity as well as 'impressing on the candidates that their years of childhood had gone and that, besides beginning a new life, they had to maintain high moral standards so as to keep on the same moral level with their forefathers' (Nyaga, 1997: 58).

The Meru, like other African communities believed that it took the whole community, and not an individual, to bring up a child.

Kirarire is sung after all other songs and dances have stopped. It is sung with everyone sitting or standing quietly, and is done in a serious tone in front of the house of the candidate's mother.

The candidate, together with others, is supposed to be either inside the mother's house, or somewhere among those nearest to the entrance. Nyaga (1997) notes that Kirarire is a really fascinating song and everybody, young and old, loves it because of its melodiousness and sublime moral teaching. Due to the nature of this song, crowds of people are often seen flocking to spend the night in the village where it is being sung. Parts of this song sometimes have a mythical character and because of its allegoric nature, it is very difficult to give it a direct English translation; in fact, such translation would not make sense. The song is long and complex and is sung in various tones intermixed from verse to verse.

Intonation and Words of Kirarire

In analysing the words and intonation of kirarire and other songs Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory and Grice's (1975) Theory of Conversational Implicature will be used.

In the Speech Act theory, the effect of utterances on speakers and hearers takes a threefold distinction:

(i) Locutionary Act; This is the act of making an utterance or a meaningful linguistic expression in which S (speaker) says X (an utterance) to H (hearer). For example, X can be equivalent to, say a curse, as in *urokinywa nii ndamba* 'may you be inflicted by a bug' (directed at a perceived sorcerer). (Line 59)

(ii) Illocutionary Act; This is the force / value of the utterance or the intended / import of the utterance in which case an act is performed in accomplishing P (the action) by saying X.

For example, P can be equivalent to *Kirumi*, the curse.

(iii) Perlocutionary Act; This is act of having an effect of the utterance on the hearer i.e., an act is performed by making H believe in P. For example, H believes that he is cursed *naarumi* (he is cursed) by S.

In Leech's (1983) theory, words in conversation may imply rather than directly state certain beliefs. In the politeness principle stated in his theory, positive formulations / beliefs should be maximized, in certain circumstances, while negative formulations/beliefs should be minimized in other circumstances.

The words used in Kirarire differ slightly from place to place but the substance of its teaching remains the same. Before the soloist starts singing, he first draws the attention of his audience to

the fact that he has brought blessings to the home of the boy to be circumcised (see Leech's op.cit. politeness principle). The song starts in the following manner:

Soloist: like the one starting ntiambagia

To weave a basket, kirumi,

I don't begin with an insult muchii jwa mukabua,

In such a home ta mwambia,

Which will turn out well wa katheti.

Chorus: That is true. Eee

In this verse there is deliberate attempt to lighten up the tension that has built up due to the seriousness of the occasion and in a way observing Leech's (op.cit.) Politeness Principle.

Continuing with his song, the soloist changes tune and tells the mother of the candidate, and everybody else, in a rather serious tone the following:

Soloist: when you hear it sung and said: waigua, iimuriru-

I, When you hear (iimuriru-Iimutabui) said, then, know that ii muta-buui

The foreskin of your child is umenye nhabu

Already cut and dropped down ya mwaana iri nthi.

Chorus: That is true Eee.

37

LU JSSEH (2013) VOL. 1: NO.1

Here Austin's (1962) Illocutionary Act takes effect demonstrated by the fait accompli nature of ii Muriru ii Mutabui words. Once these special words of circumcision are uttered, it signals that the operation has been accomplished. Circumcision can never fail to take place once such words have been uttered.

Kirarire could also start as follows:

Soloist: Eh Njagi, oh, it is dawn, li mukui-I, ii Njagi,

Chorus: Eh Njagi, oh, it is dawn. li mukui-I, ii Njagi.

Soloist: Eh Njagi, oh, it is dawn, li mukui-I, ii Njagi,

Chorus: Eh Njagi, oh, it is dawn. li mukui-I, ii Njagi.

Soloist: Eh, dawn has risen, it has arisen, li mikui yatema uu yatema,

Chorus: Eh, dawn has risen, it has arisen. li mikui yatema uu yatema.

Soloist: The council had enmity kiama kirari uthu na mutethia.

With the one who assists it.

Chorus: The council had enmity kiama kirari uthu na mutethia.

With the one who assists it.

Soloist: Eh, snakes go up the pool, li miraru iraitia na ia,

Chorus: Yes, that is what is required. Yii –iii –uu-i.

Soloist: If you cannot take a plunge into li ndia ikarema uchierie nteere.

the pool, bathe at the sides.

Chorus: If you cannot take a plunge into li ndia ikarema uchierie nteere.

the pool, bathe at the sides.

(Nyaga, 1997)

Kirariire and Kiama songs are open performances to any willing and able performer. The participants comprise the soloist and a choral group doubling as the audience and interlocutors.

The performance is done in conversational turns, and in all cases it is an engagement of two

participants and a back up chorus which acknowledges every proverb (njuno in Kimeru) a

performer expresses. Elders in the homestead where Kirarire was performed assessed if it was

well conducted or not and would order for more food to be brought if they were impressed.

Besides moral teaching, Kirarire was intended to encourage the candidate to face circumcision courageously, to be industrious, and to be of high moral standing among others.

The soloists in Kirarire engaged in mock rivalry, which at face value appear to be engaged in a rivalry to outdo each other in respect of their knowledge of proverbs with the best advisory value. The chorus comprises circumcised men who gather for Kirarire. Many a time, if a proverb is not well expressed, a member of the chorus may interject to correct it. If the proverb is perfectly put across, the interjector utters the word too or 'attacks' to encourage the immediate performer/soloist to carry on with more witty proverbs to challenge his 'rival'. Conversely, when the alternate soloist is challenged, he endeavours to counter the challenge accordingly.

Since challenges and responses are instantaneous, a performer is supposed to be alert in structuring the part due to him. However, when a performer cannot produce a proverb with the required wording, he can creatively come up with an acceptable equivalent. Of course the chorus/audience will cheer him for this achievement; thus, approving the continuity of the performance. Although the deviation from the required song wording is excused, it is not

38

LU JSSEH (2013) VOL. 1: NO.1

encouraged to go for long because it may spoil the quality of the song. Thus, one of the roles of the chorus is not only to audit the quality of the song, but also to keep the tempo of Kirarire high and lively.

In general, success of Kirarire is judged by the accuracy of the wording, originality and excitement elicited by use of proverbs in instructing the candidates. There is no formal structure for which one has to conform to or deviate from. Women and children cannot be soloists,

audience or judges, but they can act as spectators.

Meru conversational songs such as Kirarire and Kiama address the moral aspect of behaviour and are sung to initiate deep discussion in important topics such as how to live within the family and the community. The songs focus closely on the fundamental and recurrent problems of social relations; the qualities of love, the nature of obedience, the ethics and sanctions of social relations, etc. Sometimes they focus on questions arising from the mishandling of either relationships or problems brought about by misfortune.

If a Kirarire or Kiama song is sung badly, the bad singing will be seen as an affront or compromise to the continuity of the community's tradition of passing knowledge to the next generation through song. The audience will respond with judgements that impugn the legitimacy, veracity as well as the fluency of the artist/soloist. Virtue, in the context of the Meru conversational songs, resides both in the ability to sing eloquently and in the ability to demonstrate a command of performing the tradition of men's conversational songs. What matters is the flow of the songs in raising moral issues or recreating the issues through proverbs and not necessarily in offering a solution. Through song, the customary practices of the community are rehearsed and celebrated, time and time again, from one generation to another.

Each soloist who participates in a men's conversational song tries to use proverbial wisdom to put his interpretation of the situation in the best possible light. There is no argument over the facts of the issues of the conversation as the artists are free to interpret events the way they feel best. The group's direction of events becomes something of a corporate process in which an influential member expresses the mood of the group to which everybody assents because of his 'eloquent summation' (Abraham, 1983).

The lines in the songs are short and sharp and the message is usually clear and epigrammatic.

Many of the moral songs reflect upon the condition of the community such as how people act in times of insufficiency. Most important is the emphasis placed on the sharing of resources, which is usually illustrated by the selflessness of one character or another.

Analysis of Sample Lines from Kirariire and Kiama Songs

Many lines in the proverbs are poetic in form and are replete with figurative language. In ndiia iiri Mutonga iriigwuura iithagu ikagwiika (the deep waters at Mutonga river raises its wings and covers them) (line 161...), deep water is metaphorically given animate qualities of a bird with wings. Deep waters in Meru are feared and sometimes used as places of drowning wayward people. Indeed, the soloist is forewarning his opponent about his potency to engage in 'endless' song. This proverb teaches us not to underestimate other people's ability

In another case, the soloist wants millet to be brewed for his jingles to drink; 'mbeere yaakwa nikuriama niurugiirwee maarwa ikuunde' (line 40), (brew millet beer for my failing jingles).

This is a polite way of demanding payment to begin a performance and therefore observing Leech's (1983) politeness principle. Jingles are important musical accompaniments in the Meru community and 'brewing millet beer' for them attests to this importance; hence the need to give millet beer to the performer who is entertaining was considered a gesture of goodwill. The proverbial wisdom underlying line 140 is that a good turn is repaid with another good turn as in the English saying, 'scratch my back I scratch yours'.

Some metaphors have political overtones such as 'turiima ni twiiri Guuamba (a mythical place)...Kamwe nii Kiraitu Meru naa KANU yatuunywa iiratu' (line 38); meaning, (there are two mountains in Guuamba; one is Kiraitu (Murungi) who is a popular politician in Meru, who among other things campaigned to dislodge KANU supremacy in Meru in 2002 General Elections. So literally put, Kiraitu robbed KANU (a former ruling party in Kenya) of its shoes.

Whereas KANU is metaphorically presented as a person and a loser, Kiraitu is immortalized by being a mountain in Meru politics because of his relentless fight for the interests of the Meru community in post Moi era in Kenyan politics. The hidden proverbial wisdom in this song line is that heroism is a virtue and well recognized in Meru community.

In Kajijiji ka mbuuri nturutu ni mburi ciau ukuthuuta? (Line 163) (... the penis of a cursed goat, whose

goats are you mounting?' is a case in which the penis of a goat is metaphorically addressed as if it were a

human being. In this song line, and others of a similar kind, Leech's (1983) politeness principle is

suspended so as to lighten the seriousness of certain taboo topics such as sex. This proverbial expression

is a light warning (its illocutionary force) to circumcision candidates to avoid indiscriminate sex.

In Njeetu nii ta mucii jwa njuura (our home is like a beehive...) (line 23), a soloist's home is compared with that of a bee hive because there is plenty. Having plenty is a mark of wealth and the import of this expression is to encourage search for wealth. Similarly, in Kiama nita ndwaari (line 159), kiama, which is a secret organization, is like an illness in which there is an indirect comparison (simile) of 'illness' sickness and 'Kiama'. Just like one cannot avoid illness when it comes, so one cannot avoid participating in Kiama song when it is initiated by the opponent. The proverbial song line underlines that you cannot run away from responsibility.

In '... nthaaka nitumaagwa kaana ititumagwa...?' (line 89), the question on whether circumcised men are sent on small (domestic) errands or not, the illocutionary force of this statement (see Austin's, op.cit. illocutionary act) is a warning to mothers and other unauthorized people which is given in the form of a rhetorical question. In Meru culture, it is an affront to male integrity to

send circumcised men on domestic errands.

In 'Kirimaara kiirari bwa ruguuru, niku kiauma gaiti..?' (line 84), 'Mount Kenya has always been on the west, how come (you say) that it is now in the east', is a rhetorical challenge; an indirect indictment on the part of the interlocutor, and indeed for anybody who gives falsehood.

In 'uukariwa nii muuthwa' (line 59), (you will be eaten by ants); The illocutionary force of this statement is a reminder about the mortality of human life. Ants are perceived as carnivals capable

of eating human beings in which 'hyperbole and exaggeration are frequent motifs' (Finnegan, 40

LU JSSEH (2013) VOL. 1: NO.1

1970). The idea here is to educate the audience on the worthlessness of a dead body and therefore to know that it is advisable to be good while one is alive.

In many of the songs, the mood is light-hearted as in 'mbeere yakwa niurugirwe marwa ikuunde' (brew millet beer for my jingles) (line 40), in which the main interest of the audience is the rhythm and melody of the song. Here the main audience comprising men and spectators who are largely women and children standing a safe distance away are invited to enjoy the rhythmic sound of jingles as the stage is being set for a more serious encounter. Repetition of the lines is very common, especially for choral responses.

In many songs, there is a series of antiphonal love lines in which there is an exchange between the soloist, the audience and the alternate soloist. The soloist is in control of the song, deciding its direction, in contrast with the chorus which is more or less fixed. The soloist often improvises his part as he pleases. Sometimes his lines are deliberately fragmented, leaving the listener to fill in for themselves, especially the missing lines in love songs or other lines with explicit sexual

overtones. In some cases, the words are mumbled (or ‘swallowed’ in Kimeru idiom) to avoid explicit expression.

Several songs retain their original form as sang in the Meru community but words can change with different soloists to reflect new realities in the community or to change the mood of the song. Finnegan (1970: 267) argues that ‘even with a familiar song, there is room for variation on either words or tune in actual delivery so that each performance in a sense is a ‘new’ song’.

Creative variation in the choice of words and /or tune is quite common in Meru songs and the main idea is to avoid the monotony of some familiar song line. New verses may be added arising from the basic theme recognized in the song. Unless there is reason to retain sanctioned or fixed words as in the fixed renditions in actual circumcision, there is variation in each performance depending on the creativity of the soloist.

In Kirarire and Kiama conversational songs, the performer is urged on by the chorus/audience with ‘nonsense’ chants of Eee, Eee, upon which the alternate soloist is worked up into a frenzy to come up with a more witty response. Another performer is inspired and joins into the fray with even more witty lines. Evidently all these responses underline proverbial wisdom. Note how the following lines show a soloist working another soloist into frenzy:

B. Thaa thiita ciakiinya ndooria mwaari Kanyiiri niaatia utiikuutheeka. line 95

At midday I asked Kanyiiri why she was not laughing.

C.Eee. line 96

B. Ndaiikaiikia njaara ndagwaata kioongo ambiira nii magaanjo jaa riuua. line 97

I stretched my hand and touched her head upon which she told me (that was not the right place to touch her since) that was the old place for the sun.

C.Eee. line 98

B. Ndakaaiikia njaara kaiiri ndagwaata nkiingo ambiira nii magaanjo jaa mikaathi... line 99

Again I stretched my hand and I touched her neck, and she told me (that was not the right place to touch her either since) that was the place for necklaces.

C.Eee. line 100

B. Ndaiikaiikia njaara kaiiri ndagwaata kiuu ambiiraa nii magaanjo

jaa biakuuria. line 101

41

LU JSSEH (2013) VOL. 1: NO.1

Further, I stretched my hand and touched her stomach, and she told me (that it was still not the right place to touch her since) that was the place for food.

C.Eee. line 102

B. Muukui naa nkaai ndaiikaiikia kaairi ndagwaata mutendeeria kinuu. line 103

Even further, I swear by my testicles, I extended my hand and I touched her pubic region (and she consented).

C.Eee line 104

B.Niaatia karuume ndaiigua ndookia. line 105

How I became sexually aroused.

B. Niaatia karuume ndaiigua ndookia. line 106

How I became sexually aroused.

Some lines in the songs are short and sharp as in the actual circumcision and the proverbial message is usually clear and epigrammatic as in ‘iii Muriiru iii Mutabui’ (line 109) ‘I swear by Muriiru and Mutabui’. Muriiru and Mutabui are mythical fathers of the Meru community. In invoking the names of the forefathers of the Meru community, a solemn stage is being set for an

important function; that of circumcision. However, the physical act of circumcision on its own, both for men or for women, may not have any significant biological benefit as such, and can even be harmful to women, but its socio-cultural and symbolic value for the Ameru is enormous and complex. Without a suitable replacement to circumcision, age-old knowledge expressed through song in its context may be lost forever.

The thread of proverbial wisdom running through most of the conversational songs captures various themes such as reciprocity, knowledge retention, truthfulness, generosity, respect for the old, etc. In particular, many of the moral songs reflect upon the condition of the community such as how people act in times of insufficiency and the most important thing is the emphasis placed on the sharing of resources, usually illustrated by the selflessness of one character to another.

Thus in *Turiina na turare* (we shall sing and sleep over), and *Nyongu nii ya M'Marete* (the pot belongs to M'Marete); 'sharing', which is considered a virtue in the Meru community, is demonstrated by M'Marete's generosity (M'Marete is a fond name for a generous person).

A related theme to that of 'generosity' is that of 'do-unto-others what you would like them to do to you', a form of reciprocity or lack of it as demonstrated by *Jukia mwari wa chia ugambie* (you are free to court my sister), and *waaku niwe uriuntu* (but your sister is a problem) (line 11).

Some people like to benefit from others but such people become stingy when it comes to their turn to have other people benefit from them; hence the analogy of refusing to have one's sister courted yet one wants to court other men's sisters. The deep sense of sarcasm is therefore expressed by the soloist with his curting, proverbial remarks as a general castigation of a person who wants to benefit from others but he himself is averse to letting others benefit from him.

In Meru community, certain expressions such as those involved in making certain commitments in such ceremonies as marriage, paying or receiving debts, naming, burying, etc, are taken very

seriously for their expected 'truth value'. Such expressions find themselves in certain songs and are 'equivalent to actions' (Austin, 1962). Austin observes that saying is equal to doing.

In Austin's Speech Act theory, much of language is used as a tool to do things with words.

Indeed, in Meru conversational songs by men, language is used to admonish, to counsel, direct,

42

LU JSSEH (2013) VOL. 1: NO.1

swear, declare, just to mention a few. This theory demonstrates that even in these songs,

knowing a language is not simply knowing how to literally encode a message and to transmit it

to a second party. Language is interpreted differently according to the circumstances of its use.

The Meru songs indicate that language has verbal power over certain aspects of life in the Meru community.

In invoking the names of the forefathers who founded the Meru tribe (as in *ii Muriiru ii*

Mutabuui..!) at the start of a male circumcision ceremony, for example, an illocutionary act is

performed because without uttering these words, then circumcision is not perceived to have

taken place. Consider the complete circumcision song below:

Ii Muriiru ii Mutabuui! X 2 (in the name of *Muriiru* and *Mutabuui*)

Waigua Muriiru na Mutabuui umenye ncaabu ya mwaana iri nthii (when you hear the

names *Muriiru* and *Mutabuui* know that the foreskin of the child is down) (line 111).

Circumcision cannot be considered complete without such an utterance said by the right people at the right time and at the right place; what Austin refers to as 'felicity conditions' for an act to be valid.

Another theme is one where the beneficiary of a good deed may answer his benefactor with scorn or even harm.

Nthenge irii nyiro yatunga muriithi (a well fed goat gores the shepherd)

Many of the songs focusing on aspects of living ‘correctly’ and ‘collectively’ reveal consequences of a contrary behaviour. Consider how a curse constitutes the illocutionary force (Austin, 1962) of the following statement:

Murogi ukundoga, murogi ukundoga---urokinywa nii ndamba naa ngakua utinduuma nii muthua wathinjira (you sorcerer, you sorcerer bewitching me, you shall be inflicted by a bug because if I die you cannot eat me, you only slaughter me for ants). (Line 59)

Some songs emphasize truthful and honest behaviour to avoid bad consequences; consider Muntu wa muromo twamutiigire Kianiangiiri (we threw the gossip in the Kianiangiiri water fall).

Certain songs castigate selfishness. For instance, Kaguutu kamwe gaika kariira bangi bwaura (one girl weds and tells the others that they are doomed) (line 59). This is equivalent to ‘on your way up remember those behind you because you might need them when you are coming down’ or ‘do not burn your bridges.’

Although in many societies certain words or behaviours are frowned on, forbidden or considered taboo (Fromkin et. al. 2011), there is a ‘licence’ to use sexually expressive language in Meru male circumcision songs to lighten the seriousness of the moment. This also helps to shed off shyness from the initiates as they prepare to face adult life of courtship. According to Fromkin et. al. (2011: 472), people know ‘the social situations in which they are desirable, acceptable, forbidden, and outright dangerous to utter’. Consider the following:

43

LU JSSEH (2013) VOL. 1: NO.1

...muukui na nkai ndaikaikia njaara ndagwataa mutenderia kinuu—niatia karume

ndaigwa ndookia!(line 103 and 105) (I swear by my testicles, I extended my hand and I touched her pubic hair—and how, my buddy, I felt horny!)

Such sexually expressive language is also characterized by euphemisms and implicatures.

Fromkin et. al. (2011.) argue that the emergence of taboo words and ideas motivates the creation of euphemisms. In Meru, euphemisms become morally expedient whenever it is not suitable to use taboo language. In the male conversational songs, for example, *gukunda mbaaki* (literally ‘to take tobacco’) is a euphemism for ‘sexual intercourse’).

Use of euphemistic language further echoes what intrigued Grice (1975) in his Cooperative Principle that despite people being expected to be ‘cooperative’ in their conversation, they were not always forthright in their contribution. Instead they say less than expected and listeners are forced to draw inferences from what has been said concerning what has not been said. In Grice’s theory, there are overriding principles in people’s conversations; being informative, relevant, clear and truthful but sometimes these principles are violated to uphold certain polite ‘guidelines’. Leech (1983) calls these guidelines ‘politeness principles’ which simply address the issue of maximizing one’s polite beliefs in stating something positive as well as minimizing ones impolite beliefs in stating something negative.

Leech (1983) came up with his Politeness Principle to explain why speakers are not always ‘cooperative’ in their communication by apparently withholding some information. He concluded that speakers withhold some information out of politeness since giving full information might hurt others. In the politeness principle, positive formulations / beliefs should be maximized while negative formulations/beliefs should be minimized. The latter is achieved through euphemisms as in referring to having sex being referred to in Kimeru as ‘taking tobacco’.

Conclusion and Way Forward

This study has demonstrated that the Meru have a unique genre of songs identified as conversational songs performed by adult males. Important knowledge materials such as advisory information, is passed on from generation to generation through these songs. The language of the songs is aphoristic (proverbial) in nature and its melody and poetry is quite appealing to the audience who comprise initiates in male circumcisions. The import of this study is to demonstrate how knowledge can be passed in the medium that is appealing to the culture of a people: conversational songs in Meru, for example. Meru men are portrayed as disciplined and respectful and conversational songs are one way through which such virtues are acquired. Conversational songs and their song structure should be preserved and encouraged for use in schools as an important method of knowledge delivery. Much more research should be done on other songs with similar value performed by adult males from the Meru community.

References

- Abraham, R. D. (1983) *African Folktales*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Achebe, C. (1994) *Things Fall apart*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Austin J.L. (1962) *How to do Things with Words*. Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press.
- Bergsma, M. H. (1970) TIV Proverbs a Means of Social Control. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 40.2. 151- 163.
- Boateng, F. (1952) African Traditional Education: A Method of Disseminating Cultural Values. *Journal of African Studies* 13.3. 321- 336.
- Cole, P. and Morgan J.L. (eds.) (1975) *Syntax and Semantics, 3. Speech Acts*. New York and London: Academic press.
- Ene. O. (2006) *M. Igbo Idioms Kwenu*. <http://www.kwenu.com/igbo/idioms/intro.htm>

2006<<http://www.kwenu.com/igbo/idioms> [Last accessed in April, 6 2012]

Finnegan, R. (1970). *Oral Literature in Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.

Fromkin F., Rodman, R. & Hyams, N. (2011). *An Introduction to Language*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Grice, H.P. (1975). *Logic and Conversation*. Cambridge. In Cole, P. and Morgan, J,L.. Pg. 4-48.

Leech, G.N. (1983) *Principles of Pragmatics*. London. Longman.

Madu, O. R. (1992) *African Symbols, Proverbs and Myths: The Hermeneutics of Destiny*. New York: Peter Lang.

Mbiyu, C. (2011) *Discursive Construction of Social States Across Gender: A study of Mugiithi Song and Dance*. Unpublished MA Thesis. Egerton University, Kenya.

M'Imanyara, A. (1992) *The Restatement of Bantu Origin and Meru History*. Nairobi: Longman.

Nyaga, D. (1997) *Customs and Traditions of The Meru*. Nairobi: EAEP.

Samjumi Z. N. and Rutere, A. M. *Classification and Functionality of Hausa and Meru Proverbs: Retention/Utilization of African Proverbial Wisdom in Literary Construction of Religious Instruction*. Lagos: Gazubu Prints.

Spear, T. (1981). *Kenya's Past*. Nairobi: Longman.

Notes

The following resource people (adult men) from the Meru community who were performers of the

conversational songs helped in data collection:

1. Counsellor Gachaura - 60 years - Mitunguu location
2. Father Joseph Kabeeria - 56 years - Maua location
3. Mbae Kirito - 70 years - Nkuene location

4. Tarasisio Maching'a - 40 years - Mikinduri location
5. Musa M'Ithinji (now deceased) - 80 years - Mitunguu location
6. Mburugu Nyonta - 57 years - Nkuene location
7. Silas Kinoti (deceased) - 54 years) - Nkuene location
8. Julius Kathia - 58 - Mikumbune sublocation
9. M'Riria Nkamani - 70 years-Mikumbune sublocation
10. Joel Meme – 62 - Mikumbune sublocation

Although the full text of conversational songs by Meru men and their literal translation are available and were fully analysed, Kirariire songs (version i and ii) and one Kiama song have been presented for this paper. Kirarire i and kirarire ii differ in style and mood of delivery.

These songs were chosen because of their popularity and versatility. They have been sung with changing imagery incorporating modern life styles and have easily been adapted to fit noncircumcision contexts such as church weddings and other occasions. Other songs such as reenta by the elderly and nchiibi by the very elderly are now obsolete. The selected songs have been translated to English in their literal sense and analyzed to unravel the hidden proverbial wisdom in each of them.

45

LU JSSEH (2013) VOL. 1: NO.1

Key: A and B are performers, while C is the chorus and the audience. D is an interjector who directs the song performance in terms of correction or incitement or finality. He is any respected or acceptable member of the audience. E is another performer who intervenes to rescue a poor performer. Note that, the structures, optional Jii jii or you you, which is an emphatic alert of one performer to the other about the point to be made, and the responses Aaaa and Eee, which means

structural words which underline proverbs