

A SOCIO-STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF EUPHEMISTIC EXPRESSIONS AND SYMBOLISM IN THE DIRGES OF THE PEOPLE OF LUAPULA PROVINCE

Eunice Mukonde, Prisca Chikuta and Bwalya Lombe Musonda

University of Zambia

Abstract

*Among the people of Luapula Province (North-eastern Zambia) the life of a deceased relative is eulogised and celebrated through song and dance. These songs are dirges. Dirges are not only lyrical but also poetic in form. They are woven from the ethnic group's life experiences on various subjects and themes demonstrating the creative and manipulative nature of language. Of importance, is the ability of dirges to serve as a medium for performers to prove that orality is a system through which culture can be transmitted. Dirges are composed and performed orally at funerals. This article focused on exploring the perception of death among the people of Luapula Province through dirges, also known as *icimbo camalilo*, which are big songs performed at funerals. A socio-stylistic approach was used to analyse the euphemistic expressions and symbolism utilised in dirges to honour the deceased. The findings suggest that the dirges sung in Luapula Province are characterised by the deployment of euphemisms and symbols that are reflective of the region's way of life. The stylistic qualities in these dirges are based on and drawn from the local context, expressing the anguish of loss, death, the grave, and the significance of the deceased.*

Keywords: Dirges, Dance, Culture, Socio-Stylistics, Euphemism, Symbolism, Orality

Introduction

This article delves into the perception of death within the cultural context of Luapula Province, utilising dirges, commonly referred to as *icimbo camalilo*. The focus of this study was to examine the expressions and proclamations utilised within selected dirges to pay tribute to the deceased. Adopting a socio-stylistic framework, the discussion explored the euphemisms and symbols deployed during the performance of dirges to convey the intended message.

A dirge is a verbal performance in the oral tradition of Luapula Province. The province is endowed with several ethnic groups who speak dialects of Bemba (Kashoki, 1978; Marten & Kula, 2008; Mukonde, 2009; Mambwe, 2014; Simungala & Jimaima, 2021). The ethnic groups include the Ngumbo of Samfya, the Unga of Lunga, the Aushi of Mansa, the Luunda of Mwansabombwe and the Chishinga of Kawambwa and Mwense. Each ethnic group can be identified with a tempo of singing *icimbo camalilo*. Some perform it at a slower pace than the others. This difference, however, can only be observed by those who are well versed in singing dirges. Dirges are woven from the ethnic group's life experiences on various subjects and themes. They are a demonstration of the manipulative and creative nature of human language. To that end, this study will explore

how death is perceived through euphemisms and symbolism employed in traditional funeral songs sung by the people of Luapula Province.

Contextualising the Dirges Sung by People of Luapula Province

Death is an enigma that remains largely inexplicable, befalling all members of humanity indiscriminately. In response to its occurrence, individuals, being inherently social creatures, converge to mourn and pay tribute to the deceased. In Luapula Province, as is the case in numerous African cultures, grieving is not confined to wailing or weeping alone, but extends to the expression of sorrow through song. These musical renditions, performed during solemn social gatherings, are commonly referred to as dirges. A dirge, by definition, is a song or poem that serves to mourn or lament the loss of a deceased relative, typically performed at their funeral as a means of honouring their memory. According to Abrams (2005: 77), a dirge is ‘a versified expression of grief on the occasion of a particular person’s death.’ In the same vein, Akporobaro (2001:66) defines funeral dirge as ‘a highly stylistic form of expression that is governed by specific poetic recitative conventions used to express the feelings of the narrators in a determinate form and performance procedure.’ Abrams (2012:183) also adds that dirges are ‘solemn melancholy, and mournful songs or poems expressing mourning or grief ... in commemoration of the dead.’ Dirges are used to express grief, sadness and loss among other feelings. Ohwovoriele (2010:445) confirms that dirges are ‘songs, poems or dances performed on the death or during the funeral of someone with societal recognition.’ In Luapula Province, dirges are sung during the funeral of a woman, man, chief or child. However, they are not sung when an infant who is a few years old dies.

Dirges are characterised by their poetic lyrics and the use of call and response singing techniques. They are composed and woven around the livelihood of the Luapula people, which is mainly fishing and cultivation. In Luapula Province, dirges are mainly sung by elderly women. In recent years, it has been observed that younger women participate in the performances. The art of singing dirges is learned, and it is passed on from generation to generation. The learning for women begins when they are younger. The responsibility of teaching young women the art of performing funeral songs is culturally carried out by paternal aunties. Cultural norms guide the manner in which mourning is done. Elderly women take the lead in performing *icimbo*, one at a time. The singer is related to the deceased either by blood or clan and she often stands up gird in a wrapper around the waist called *icikwembe* and a head tie *icitambala*, while the rest of the women seat on the floor or ground. As she sings, she uses gestures that go along with the words in her song and points at the coffin of the deceased. The performer of the dirge gives a biography of the deceased in a polite way, and connects that information to the deceased clan’s history, and to those relatives who have died. As the performer sings, the entire group hums along rhythmically. The recitals done during funerals usually invoke emotions of sorrow and tears of those in attendance. The context in which funeral songs are sung demands that the narrators use polite terms as they express themselves and console other mourners of the family. Culture demands the avoidance of speaking ill of the dead as it is believed that people do not cease to exist when they die but transition to a life in a spiritual realm and are able to monitor the living. For the people of Luapula, like the

Abanyole of Kenya, death is an opening to another life not the end (Alembi, 2008). Therefore, mourning is viewed as a way of linking the past to the present, the dead to the living (Nketia, 1969). Dirges often feature lyrics of poetic nature that employ euphemisms and symbols to express the pain of loss, console the bereaved family and honour the deceased.

The dirges sung are characterised by the use of figurative language, and one of such is the use of euphemisms. Euphemisms are words or phrases that are used to replace harsh, offensive, or unpleasant words or expressions. They are often used in situations where a more direct or blunt way of expressing something may be considered impolite, insensitive, or inappropriate. They serve as a veil, and they substitute these expressions and words with more pleasant, less shocking ones according to necessity (Maoncha and Ndambuki, 2017). Yildz (2021:3) argues that ‘euphemisms are not fixed in language; they contain variables.’ Variables include the speaker’s characteristics and the context of use. Characteristics that may be attributed to the speaker can be based on two aspects. These are psychological and sociological. Euphemisms may vary according to the language of the speakers. For example, in the performance of dirges of the people of Luapula Province, euphemisms are more likely to be used to refer to death and other aspects related to it than in ordinary language uses. From a sociological perspective, euphemisms are context bound and culturally dependent. The context and people’s culture dictate which taboo words must be avoided and the euphemisms to use in a particular situation. For example, in English, the expression, ‘He died’ is more likely to be replaced with ‘He passed away,’ ‘He is gone’ and ‘We lost him’. The people of Luapula Province also have expressions they use to refer to words that they find uncomfortable to express publicly. Alternatively stated, euphemism is a way of expressing that which seeks to change the perception although the meaning does not change (Demirci, 2008). For instance, in most dialects of the Bemba language (M42) of Luapula Province, to refer to the dead, the word *abayaashi* is used, and this translates as ‘those who have gone’, *abantu baabeene* literally translated as ‘those who belong to others’ or *baalitangilako* translated ‘they have gone ahead of us’. In the expressions, *abayaashi* and *baalitangilako*, death is likened to a journey. The present study examined the euphemisms as deployed in the dirges of Luapula Province.

In addition to euphemistic expressions, symbolism is another tool employed in the dirges of the people of Luapula. It includes the use of symbols, images or objects to represent emotions or ideas. A symbol can refer to sign, visual or verbal, which represents something else in a speech community. Symbols enhance meaning and add aesthetics to the work (Mehdi & Basil, 2022). In the case of dirges, it is also used to express cultural identity as the Bemba word *icaato* translated as boat or badge. A boat is an important possession for the people of Luapula because their livelihood centres on fishing. The use of the tangible symbol like a boat, creates or conveys ideas in a way that can easily be comprehended by the audience. In light of the above, the article investigated how symbolism was employed in the dirges under study.

The Socio-Stylistic Approach

The socio-stylistic approach emerged from the integration of two distinct disciplines: sociolinguistics and stylistics. Sociolinguistics is concerned with the interplay between language

and society, investigating the impact of social factors on language usage. It recognises that language functions not only as a tool for communication, but also as a means of constructing social identities and maintaining social relationships. Furthermore, sociolinguistics underscores the importance of situational context in shaping language use, acknowledging that language is influenced by a variety of factors such as the communicative purpose and social norms of the speech community.

On the other hand, stylistics is defined as ‘the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation’ (Widdowson, 1975). This definition shows that there is a relationship between linguistics and literary discourse since one helps in the analysis of the other. Literary discourse, in this case, are the dirges used for this study. In addition, Jimoh and Odetade (2016: 46) argue that ‘stylistics involves the study of how linguistic features are used to achieve different meanings and purposes, especially in the line of creativity.’ Therefore, stylistics enables a person to discover the language, its forms and functions (Simpson, 2004). Socio-stylistics critically analyses the language of social groups in various social contexts (Ashipu, 2010). In this light, the socio-stylistics approach will be applied to the analysis of the dirges by examining how the use of figures of speech such as euphemistic expressions and symbolism in the selected dirges of Luapula Province reflects and reinforces the social identities and cultural beliefs surrounding death, mourning and afterlife.

Methodology and Data Collection

The present study adopted an ethnographic approach to gain insight into the intricacies of language use in dirges (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017). Empirical data were gathered through interviews and observation of dirge performances in Kang’wena area, situated within Chief Chimese’s chiefdom in Mansa District. The study focused on a purposive sampling of seven elderly women, aged between 58 and 67, who demonstrated expertise in singing *icimbo camalilo*. The choice of the elderly is supported by Maoncha’s (2015) argument that this group is most familiar with traditional funeral practices, as younger generations may lack knowledge due to the waning popularity of these customs in favour of Christian practices. The dirges collected were transcribed and translated, constituting the primary data used in the present study’s analysis.

Findings and Analysis of Dirges from a Socio-stylistic Approach

According to the socio-stylistic approach, the analysis of dirges involves examining the social and cultural context in which dirges are produced and performed and how they shape their stylistic features and meanings (Ashipu, 2010). One important aspect of the socio-stylistic analysis of dirges is the role of cultural traditions and beliefs. Like in many African cultures, the dirges sung in Luapula are deeply rooted in cultural practices and beliefs surrounding death and mourning. Another important aspect is the role language plays in the performance of dirges, how the singers use linguistic creativity to express grief as they mourn and praise within the confines of their culture. The language employed in dirges is inherently poetic, serving to express profound sorrow and venerate the deceased by the people of Luapula. This poeticism is demonstrated through the

use of figurative language, including euphemisms and symbolism, revealing the belief in the potency of language among the performers. Three Bemba dirges were analysed in this research study and the translation was provided for each dirge.

Dirge 1

<i>Ukushiwa búlwani</i>	Being an orphan is enmity
<i>Mwe bantu eee!</i>	You people!
<i>Mwe bantu mayo!</i>	You people!
<i>Mayo ubwana bwanshiwa búlwani</i>	Mother, being orphaned is enmity
<i>Cooba ee eemayi wee!</i>	Paddler O mother!
<i>Cooba ninaani?</i>	Who's the paddler?
<i>Taata ee!</i>	O Father!
<i>Wanshilafye mwabeene taata!</i>	You have left me in other people's homes
<i>Mwabeene ifyo mushaba kuwamya</i>	The way there is no doing good!
<i>Wanaya ubwali wanaya ubwakuteka!</i>	You cook nshima, you cook it raw
<i>Cooba ee mwandi mayi ee!</i>	Paddler.....mother!
<i>Mwe baleeya,</i>	You are going (ahead of me)
<i>Abashe caato icishiike-shiike!</i>	Who leaves the ferry carelessly?
<i>Elyo washiiikafye ukushaba balongo!</i>	You just anchor where there are no relatives!
<i>Mayi ee cooba ee!</i>	O mother ee!
<i>Nafikako tata!</i>	O let me stop!

Euphemistic Expressions as Used in Dirge 1: Enmity, Abandonment and Blaming Death

The dirge is performed by someone who is mourning the head of the family, parent or husband. The dirge above utilises a series of euphemisms that offer a revealing glimpse into the cultural values and norms of the people of Luapula regarding death. The dirge highlights a number of concepts, including enmity, abandonment and journeying.

The performer begins by looking at death as one that brings about enmity. In the expression *Ukushiwa búlwani* 'being an orphan is enmity', the mourner conveys the idea that being an orphan can be a difficult or challenging experience, as it involves the loss of one or both parents and the need to navigate life without their guidance and support. In modern societies, because of the high cost of living, looking after orphans is, especially difficult. Relatives who take up that responsibility must be ready to bear the economic burden that comes with taking on the guardianship of orphans. In many circumstances, orphans are either left to fend for themselves or taken in and treated as servants. The use of the word 'enmity' suggests that this experience may be characterised by feelings of hostility, animosity, or adversity, perhaps stemming from the challenges faced by orphans as they try to find their place in the world. Enmity suggests a difficult or adversarial situation, and the metaphor of 'journeying through paddling', conveys the idea of navigating life's challenges through hard work and perseverance because the *cooba* 'paddler' or

leader who guides the family dies. In this case, the Paddler is a parent who takes care of the family. If there is no paddler, the children or parents feel abandoned.

The performer feels abandoned as she laments of how she has been left in other people's homes where she may not feel accepted as in the lines below:

<i>Wanshilafye mwabeene taata!</i>	You have left me in other people's homes
<i>Mwabeene ifyo mushaba kuwamya</i>	The way there is no doing good!
<i>Wanaya ubwali wanaya ubwakuteka!</i>	You cook nshima, you cook it raw

The expression *Wanshilafye* 'you have just left me' from the verb *ukusha* 'to leave' has been used to avoid mentioning the verb *ukufwa* 'to die'. This brings to the fore the concept of abandonment in that the bereaved feels left without the support of the parents, and this leaves the mourner to complain of how difficult it can be to please other people if you are not a biological child. No matter what good thing one does, it cannot be easy to please others as brought out in the last part of the third line above: *wanaya ubwakuteka!* 'You cook it raw!' The phrase is used to refer to erring every time you are asked to perform a task in the eyes of orphan's guardian. Parents are considered to be protectors, friends, and allies, among many things and without them, one is on their own. The rest of the community is an enemy to you as they can never see you as your parents can nor can they love you as your parents.

The performer also alludes to the concept of journey or a transition as one is ferried from life to death as in the lines below:

<i>Mwe baleeya,</i>	Those who are going (ahead of me)
<i>Abashe caato icishiike-shiike!</i>	Who have left a ferry (that carelessly) anchors anyhow (Who leaves the ferry carelessly?)
<i>Elyo washiikafye ukushaba balongo!</i>	You just anchor where there are no relatives!

The implication is that life is a journey, and everyone is in transit. Therefore, the dead are believed to have crossed over to the other side where everybody else must go. In this part of the dirge, *Mwe baleeya*, 'Those who are going (ahead of me)', has been used by the performer to refer to those who have already died before her, in this context, the parent or husband, or pillar of the family. This is as viewed in other cultures like that of the Akan people (Baodi, 2013). Death causes pain and grief, it is true; but it also marks a hopeful transition from one abode to another of the same family and clan members. The expression *Abasha* 'those who leave ...' has been used by the singer to avoid using the more direct word *abafwa* 'those who die'. The performer is noted to also complain about how unfair death is because it chooses to anchor on one without relatives. The mourner in this case feels all alone.

The final line of the dirge *Nafikako tata!* 'O let me stop!' is particularly used to indicate the end of the dirge so that the next person can begin singing.

Symbolism as Used in Dirge 1

The phrase *búlwani* in this dirge is used metaphorically to mean ‘evil’. On the surface, the phrase *búlwani*, means ‘It is enmity’. In the context of the dirge, however, it symbolises something that should be hated and feared such as an animal that preys on humans (*Iciswango*). The narrator laments that being orphaned turns one into an evil being who cannot do any good at all, ‘*Mwabeene ifyo mushaba kuwamya, Wanaya ubwali wanaya ubwakuteka!*’ [In other people’s homes, the way there is no doing good! You cook nshima, you cook it raw.] Anything you do is wrong because you are an object that arouses hatred.

On the surface, the word *Cooba* (from *ukooba* – to paddle) refers to a paddler of a dugout canoe. By extension, it also refers to a coxswain of a power boat, ferry or ship. In this dirge, the word symbolises the forces that direct the fate of humans; the hand of fate. Thus, the cry:

<i>Cooba ee eemayi wee!</i>	Paddler ee o mother!
<i>Cooba ninaani?</i>	Who is the paddler?
<i>Taata ee!</i>	O father!
<i>Wanshilafye mwabeene taata!</i>	You have just left me in the other people’s home!

The phrase *mwabeene* [other people’s home] should be understood to mean ‘in a stranger’s home’ or ‘foreign land’. The narrator complains of having been left in a foreign land not because the land is indeed foreign, but, because those who are supposed to be relatives behave like strangers. The once upon-a-time loving uncles and aunties now treat the narrator with both disdain and aversion.

We should not confuse the subject of the verses above just because the lamentation ‘... *Wanshilafye mwabeene taata!*’ [You have just left me in other people’s home father!], comes immediately after *taata* and ends with the same word. The subject is *cooba*. In this context, *taata* is just an interjection to the preceding verse as well as the end of the current verse. It is *cooba* who has abandoned the narrator in a strange land. By implication, human fate is likened to a dugout canoe that can only go and anchor where the paddler wants it to. The implied dugout canoe here, is a symbol of human fate. It is driven by mysterious forces we can neither see nor know. All we know is each person’s fate has a coxswain. No wonder the narrator asks, ‘Who is the paddler?’ The narrator complains to those who have gone before [ancestral spirits] for leaving a ferry that anchors anyhow. ‘How can you leave us such fate!’ The narrator seems to exclaim. This is a rhetorical question that indicates human vulnerability at the hand of fate, for the departed were humans who could do nothing about their fate too. The ancestors were passengers on the ferry of fate but have since disembarked. Fate deals with us as it wills; without worrying about circumstances around us.

<i>Cooba ee ee ee mwandi mayi ee!</i>	Paddler ee ee ee o mother ee!
<i>Mwe baleeya,</i>	You who are going (ahead of me),
<i>Abashe caato icishiike-shiike,</i>	Who have left a ferry (that carelessly) anchors anyhow,

Elyo washiikafye ukushaba balongo!

You just anchor where there are no relatives!

Dirge 2

Alandakawila nafwa neemuneenu

Coobe ee

Abaana bakwa paapi bampaapike

Mwebantu kakaana no kusamino umuntu

Nalilufyafye neemintakalata kufwaya

Ndila nootupooopo napulumwine

Maayo pakushalafye namabuuku batyana bandi

Nee naKabwe nshilaala batyana bandi nafwae cobayo

Eco njimbila neecimbo cabupuba

Nkafwala kwisa icitenge cakubalaala

chitenge(wrapper)

Neemuneenu coba ng'ombe

Kabili natangishako abakunshiika

Balya abakumbashilako imbokoshi coba ee

Abakunjikalila paconto camalilo

Ebo naatangishako

Pabaana bakwa paapi nshilaala neemulanda nee

Econjimbile cimbo cacisela nafwa ee cooba oo

Nabaataata nshikwete mwisamba lya caalo

Nabaamayo beese bampandaule bantwale kwa Lesa

Nabaayaama bampandaule

Efilila abashala

I mourn me your friend

Paddler ee

Children of my younger sibling who were put on my back

You people, he has refused to lean on someone

I have lost what can't be found

I even mourn the still born babies I have had

I have just remained with books my helpers

Me mother of Kabwe I don't sleep my helpers

That's why I sing the foolish song

Where will I get the floral

Me your friend paddler of cows

I have let those who should bury me go before me

Those who should make a coffin for me

Who will sit around the fire during my funeral

Those I have let go before me

Over the children of my younger sibling

I the grieved one does not sleep

That's why I sing the game song

And a father I don't have on earth

And my mother let her come and cut me to pieces and take me to God

And my uncle let him cut me to pieces

That is how those who remain weep

Euphemistic Expressions Used in Dirge 2: Family Relationships, Care and Memories

The mourner's grief is expressed through a poignant depiction of the irretrievable loss of unique and incomparable relationships as the mourner states that *Nalilufyafye neemintakalata kufwaya* 'I have lost what can't be found'. The mourner's lamentation emphasises the irreplaceable bonds that exist between siblings, mother and child, and other family members, which cannot be replicated. The mournful tone reveals the bitter anguish of the mourner as she laments the loss of those who cannot be found, pointing to the significance of the familial relationships she has lost.

The use of the word *buuku* 'book' in this context, symbolises the significance of preserving memories of the departed. It highlights the importance of cherishing the memories and experiences shared with loved ones. Although the memories are not physically recorded, they are deeply ingrained within an individual's mind and serve as a source of comfort and solace during times of loss and grief.

Maayo pakushalafye namabuuku batyana bandi I have just remained with books my helper

When a loved one dies, what remains for a long time are memories. The line above shows that the mourner is aware of the presence of close friends among the mourners. The use of the term 'helpers' performs a role of completing the expression as well as acknowledging to the friends and fellow mourners the support the bereaved receive during the period of mourning, including when the dirges are sung. *Umutyana* is a helper. He helps the paddler of a boat. His main duty is to ensure that water does not fill the canoe or boat by removing it.

Moreover, the concept of care is explored extensively in Dirge 2, as evidenced by the mourner's lamentation over her inability to carry her deceased sibling on her back. The mourner's expression of distress over the loss of her loved ones underscores the profound sense of grief experienced in death and the crucial role of communal and familial support in coping with loss. At the beginning of the song, the performer sings about how she will not be able to carry her sibling's children on her back in the following line:

<i>Abaana bakwa paapi bampaapike</i>	Children of my younger sibling who were put on my back
<i>Mwebantu kakaana no kusamino umuntu</i>	You people, he has refused to lean on someone

The two lines above depict what happens in the Zambian culture where an older sibling is expected to help to take care of the siblings' children. The older sibling, in this case, is female. The younger sisters' children look up to her as a mother and the younger brothers' children as the female father figure; a very important role in the extended family arrangement. From a tender age, the female child is expected to help the mother by tending younger siblings; putting them on her back so that the mother can attend to other chores. So, here, the mourner, despite not being young anymore, uses such a reference to show the aspect of care. She laments about how the younger sibling's child has refused to lean on someone. When a child is put on the back, they lean on that person. In

the dirge, ‘the child refuses to lean on anyone’ is used to avoid saying the child has died. Care is also explored in the use of a *chitenge* ‘wrapper’. A Zambian woman values a *chitenge* ‘wrapper’ and an elderly one who receives one from a sibling’s child is grateful and feels taken care of materially.

The notion of care is further explored as the mourner wonders who will make funeral arrangements when she dies as those who are supposed to do that have died before her.

<i>Kabili natangishako abakunshiika</i>	I have let those who should bury me go before me
<i>Balya abakumbashilako imbokoshi coba ee</i>	Those who should make a coffin for me
<i>Abakunjikalila paconto camalilo</i>	Who will sit around the fire during my funeral
<i>Ebo naatangishako</i>	Those I have let go before me

And interestingly so, the performer sings about what happens during a funeral. In the African culture, usually, when someone dies, relatives, neighbours, friends and colleagues go to the house of mourning and in the evenings, sit around a fire to keep themselves warm. This is usually done by the men as they are the ones who sleep outside the funeral home, while the women sleep on the floor inside the house. So, the mourner laments about who will do so. The younger siblings’ children, in this case, are male and they are the ones who make all the funeral arrangements in terms of buying the coffin. Therefore, she wonders who will do this. Moreover, the mourner feels left alone with no younger sibling or child to bury them as put in the clause *Kabili natangishako abakunshiika* ‘I have let those who should bury me go before me’. In the African culture, it is believed that younger siblings and children are supposed to bury their parents or their elders and not the other way round. The performer uses the word *lost* to refer to death. And since the performer feels abandoned, she wishes for death as she suggests that she should be cut into pieces by using the word *bampandaule*. This seems like a gruesome death because the pain felt is excruciatingly painful.

Symbolism as Used in Dirge 2

In this dirge, we only have *cooba* symbolising the director of human fate.

Dirge 3

<i>Yoyoyo mwane (times 4)!</i>	Yoyoyo honourable one
<i>Maayo ubwana bwanshiwa takwaba Mukulu.</i>	O mother! Being orphaned there is no adult
<i>Yoyoyo mwane (times 2)!</i>	Yoyoyo honourable one!
<i>Naani uushakoma akalonde kucuulu?</i>	Who has not dug with a small hoe on an anthill?
<i>Yoyoyo mwane (time 2)!</i>	
<i>Imputo 'bwingi shakubyalamo kalundwe!</i>	Many are the ridges for planting cassava

<i>Yoyoyo mwane!</i>	Yoyoyo honourable one
<i>Emo twabyala baamaayo baana Nkanda!</i>	There have we planted my mother, Mother of Nkanda!
<i>Yoyoyo mwane!</i>	Yoyoyo honourable one
<i>Twabyalamo na baataata ba Chipulu.</i>	We have planted even my father, Mr. Chipulu
<i>Yoyoyo mwane!</i>	Yoyoyo honourable one
<i>Maayo baatusha pacaabu cakulooleela.</i>	They have left us at the harbour of waiting
<i>Yoyoyo mwane!</i>	
<i>Maayo kamayo kaaya kung'anda yabule ciseko.</i>	O mother! She has gone to the house without a door
<i>Yoyoyo mwane.</i>	
<i>Basha bakobaika abaana kumyembe.</i>	They have left the children hanging from mango trees
<i>Yoyoyo mwane!</i>	Yoyoyo honourable one!
<i>Kapeepa fwaka wabulo mulilo.</i>	He has smoked the unlit cigarette (without fire)
<i>Yoyoyo mwane!</i>	Yoyoyo honourable one!
<i>Mayo baniina mubwato bwabulo mumana!</i>	O mother! They boarded a boat with no river
<i>Yoyoyo mwane!</i>	Yoyoyo honourable one!

Euphemisms Used in Dirge 3: Grave, Death, Burying and the Coffin

Dirge 3 is characterised by repetition of some words such as *yoyoyo mwane* 'Yoyoyo honourable one'. It employs euphemistic expressions of the grave, death, burying and the coffin. The performer avoids the word burying but uses the word plant to refer to the act as indicated in the phrases below:

<i>Imputo 'bwingi shakubyalamo kalundwe!</i>	Many are the ridges for planting cassava
<i>Emo twabyala baamaayo baana Nkanda!</i>	There have we planted my mother; Mother of Nkanda!
<i>Twabyalamo na baataata ba Chipulu.</i>	We have planted even my father; Mr.
Chipulu	

The planting of the mother and father simply refers to the burying. And the first stanza talks about *imputa* 'ridge' to refer to the grave. In the Zambian culture, and Luapula itself, when a person is buried, a coffin is lowered into the grave that was dug and then the soil is heaped onto it in a ridge-like. Most graves have a heap of soil instead of a flat surface. Only after the family decides to put a tombstone will there be a flat surface, but this is not a common thing. So, the performer laments about the many ridges (graves), which could be used to plant cassava instead of the people buried

in them. Planting Cassava has been mentioned as it is a type of farming common among the people of Luapula.

Another concept brought in is that of life as a journey. The performer, in the clause, *Maayo baatusha pacaabu cakulooleela* translated as, 'They have left us at the harbour of waiting,' cries about how she has been left at the harbour of waiting. Life is seen as a journey, and everyone is at the harbour waiting to be picked or transitioned unto death. This simply shows the belief that we live to die.

Moreover, the performer interestingly also avoids the use of the word grave but gives it many other expressions. A grave been called *imputa* 'ridge', *kung'anda yabule ciseko* 'a house without a door'. The word house is used, as a house is considered as a place of rest from all the hustle and bustle of the world. When one goes for work, they come back to a house to rest for the day or night. However, in this case, this particular house has no door. A grave is seen as a place of resting. When one dies, it is believed that they have gone to rest. But this kind of resting is done in a grave that is all covered with soil and enclosed in a coffin, which when shut, it is done forever. In addition, the door gives one access to the other side. However, the expression the 'house without a door' can be used to refer to the inability of the living to have access to the dead because now, they are in different spaces and forms.

Abandonment is another phenomenon that is developed in this dirge. The performer laments about how the one who has died has abandoned the children.

Basha bakobaika abaana kumyembe 'They have left the children hanging from mango trees' A mango tree is used here as it is a fruit that is wildly grown in Zambia and more so, Luapula itself. The mango fruit trees are either planted by a person or they just grown on their own in the wild or where people have not settled as long as one passed through that place and threw the mango seed. In the dirge, it is seen in relation to a mango tree that has been planted and it has an owner who protects it from others who would wish to pluck the mango tree in any way that they so wish. When plucking mangoes, passers-by would just grab a stone and throw at it. Only if the owner is around would they protect the mangoes from being stoned. A parent is seen as a protector in the family. So, if they die, then that hedge of protection that the children have is removed. This then subjects the children to all sorts of harsh conditions and mistreatment from the society. Anyone would have the right to throw stones at them since they are just hanging from a mango tree.

Additionally, death has been referred to as an unlit cigarette, in the clause, *Kapeepa fwaka wabulo mulilo* translated, 'He has smoked the unlit cigarette (without fire)'. In this dirge, the idea of a lit cigarette is seen to refer to life and an unlit cigarette as death. The one who has died is said to have smoked an unlit cigarette.

Another phenomenon is that of a coffin, which is referred to as a boat. The one who died is said to have boarded a boat which is *ubwato* as used in the clause.

Maayo baniina mubwato bwabulo mumana! 'O mother! They boarded a boat with no river'

The word 'they' in this case, is referring to everyone that died including the one the dirge is being sung for. The boat is always expected to be on a river so that it ferries people or could be used for

other activities on the river. A boat is made of wood and so is a coffin. However, this particular boat (coffin) does not go on water but instead, it goes to the ground in a grave.

Symbolism Used in Dirge 3

The use of concrete objects helps to create a clear connection to the external world through the lyrics. The poetic function of the concrete objects denoted in the poems is to externalise the deep sorrow of the mourner. The mourner, as it were, suppresses her personal feelings of pain and loss by projecting them onto concrete objects of symbolic meaning (Boadi, 2013). Here the performer points to external things as expressed in '*Imputo 'bwingi shakubyalamo kalundwe*' [... Many are the ridges for planting cassava ...]. Here, the word *imputa* [ridges] symbolises grave mounds, while *kalundwe* [cassava] symbolises the corpses therein. The many grave mounds remind the narrator of ridges in a cassava field. In these cassava-field-like mounds has the narrator buried her father and mother.

<i>Emo twabyala baamaayo baana Nkanda!</i>	There have we planted my mother, Mother of Nkanda!
<i>Yoyoyo mwane!</i>	Yoyoyo honourable one!
<i>Twabyalamo na baataata ba Chipulu.</i>	We have planted even my father, Mr. Chipulu.

The narrator indicates that the two have gone, but they have left us to wait for the same fate '*... batusha pacaabu cakulooleela ...*' [they have left us at the harbour of waiting]. She reminds us of the fate of man; we shall all die. We shall all go '*... kung'anda yabule ciseko ...*' to a house without a door. The symbol of a house without a door is an important reminder of the view of the people of Luapula concerning the finality of death. Although, like others in the Bemba linguistic grouping, they believe in reincarnation; they recognise that there is no coming back from the grave. At least, not in the form you went. When the time comes for us to die, our bodies shall depart for the graveyard in a boat that floats not on a river (*mubwato bwabulo mumana*), but the shoulders of men. The boat referred to here is symbolic of a coffin.

The analysis above has revealed intertextuality through the expressions used and the meaning they wished to convey in the context of the dirges used in the study. The context of use and the cultural factors surrounding the use of euphemisms and symbolism informed this study of the interpretation of the figures of speech as discussed in this article.

Summary and Conclusion

The dirges of the Luapula people are closely tied to their living situations, reflecting the centrality of these contexts to their cultural and social practices. The dirges discussed in this article are sung by individuals who reside near rivers and engage in farming as a way of life. Words such as 'river,' 'boat,' 'anchoring,' and 'harbouring' are associated with water-based livelihoods, while references to 'digging,' 'small hole,' 'ridges,' 'planting,' 'cassava,' and 'mango trees' evoke the agricultural

practices of the region. Through these expressions and symbols, the dirges capture the deep-rooted connections between the Luapula people and their natural environment, as well as their ways of sustaining themselves.

At the same time, the dirges also serve as a means for the bereaved to express their grief and sorrow in the face of death. The dirges examined in this article shed light on the various consequences of death, including feelings of abandonment experienced by those left behind. To navigate the emotional terrain of loss, the Luapula people use euphemisms to avoid direct references to death-related concepts such as 'grave,' 'burying,' and 'coffin.' By doing so, they create a symbolic language that conveys their profound emotions, while also respecting cultural taboos and practices surrounding death and mourning.

References

- Abrams, M.H. (2011). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Tenth Edition. Cengage Learning.
- Abrams, M.H. (2005). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Eighth Edition. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Akporbaro, F.B.O. (2001). *Introduction to African Oral Literature*. Lagos: Princeton Publishing Company.
- Alembi, E. (2008). 'The Abanyole Dirge: Escorting the Dead with Song and Dance.' *Folklore* 38 (7): 7–22.
- Ashipu K.B.C. (2010). 'A Socio-Stylistic Analysis of Some Selected Bette Dirges.' *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 7(2), 113-124, 2010.
- Boadi, A.L. (2013). 'Remarks on J.H. Nketia's 'Funeral Dirges of the Akan People.' *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 24, 1-17.
- Demirci K. (2008). 'On the Concept of Covering (Euphemism).' *Milli Folklor* 77, pp. 21-34.
- Denzin, N.K., and Lincoln, Y.S. (2017). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications: USA.
- Kadhim, H.A.S., Mehdi, M.K., and Basil, A. (2022). 'Symbolism in Literature: A Socio-stylistic Study.' *Linguistics and Education Vol. 71*, September 2022, 101060.
- Jimoh, R., and Odetade, I.O. (2016). 'A Socio-stylistic Analysis of Niyi Osundare's Blues for the New Senate King.' *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, Vol.4, No.1, 45-52.
- Kashoki, M.E. (1978). 'The Language Situation in Zambia,' in Ohannessian, S., and Kashoki, M.E. (eds.) (1978). *Language in Zambia*. London: International African Institute, pp. 9-46.
- Mambwe, K. (2014). *Mobility Identity and Localisation of Lusaka in Multilingual Contexts of Urban Lusaka*. Cape Town: University of the Western Cape. (Ph.D. Thesis).
- Marten, L., and Kula, N.C. (2008). Zambia: 'One Zambia, One Nation, Many Languages.' *Language and National Identity in Africa*, 291-313.
- Maoncha, J.N. (2015). *Euphemisms in Traditional Dirges of the Abagusii of Kenya*. MA Thesis, Laikipia University, Kenya.

- Maoncha, J.N., and Ndambuki, M.J. (2017). 'Euphemism Use as a Mirror of the People of People's Worldview: The Case of the Abagusii Dirges of Kenya.' *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies, Vol 10, No.1.*
- Mukonde, E. (2009). *A Pragmatic Analysis of Requests in Bemba.* Master's Dissertation. University of Zambia.
- Nketia, K.H. (1969). *The Funeral Dirges of the Akan People.* Achimota: James Townsend and Sons Ltd.
- Ohwovoriele, F. (2010). 'Eschatological Motifs and Socio-Spiritual Aspects of Urboho Funeral Poetry.' *The Journal of International Social Research* 3 (11): pp. 445–454.
- Simpson, P. (2004). *Stylistics. A Resource Book for Students.* London: Routledge Publishers.
- Simungala, G., and Jimaima, H. (2021). 'Multilingual Realities of Language Contact at the University of Zambia.' *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 56(7), pp.1644–1657.
- Uzdu Yıldız, F. (2021). 'Use of Euphemisms in Youth Language.' *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(Special Issue 2), 1117–1128, ISSN: 1305-578X.
- Widdowson, H.G. (1975). *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature.* London: Longman Group Ltd.