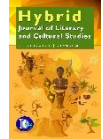




A gerontological imagination of age and ageing in Burundian proverbs: From a lexical to a contextual analysis



Review article



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Audace Mbonyingo¹ & Epimaque Nshimirimana²

¹ Department of English, University of Burundi, Burundi

² Department of Kirundi-Kiswahili, University of Burundi, Burundi



Abstract

It is now widely accepted that “age” and “ageing” are cultural concepts that are open to questions. The thinking encouraged by critical gerontology has been crucially important in provoking questions about the complexities of later life, age and ageing. Similarly, the interrogation of stories of age and ageing via literary approaches and as found in proverbs are increasingly recognized as an important source of knowledge for mining the intricacies of later life. This article represents an attempt to examine some of the ways in which Burundians conceive of later life through Kirundi proverbs. The critical question here is “how do Burundians, even within the same age or sex, conceive or represent old age?” To answer this question, a number of proverbs about both males and females have been examined to decorticate the underpinnings in old age and ageing. This analysis was enhanced by reference to critical gerontology, which among other tenets, postulates that “aging [is] a multifaceted change” where “aging involves biological changes in individuals at varying rates. The transitions associated with growing older are probably related to chronological age, and the process of aging itself is multidimensional in nature”. The objective is thus to examine, through carefully selected proverbs, the representation of old age in Burundian proverbs and secondly, to offer a linguistic analysis of the ways in which the meanings have been packaged. The article concludes with suggestions concerning the uses that perspectives from critical gerontology could have for these discourses and some of the questions it might help scholars of ageing ask about proverbs of “age”.

Keywords: culture, Kirundi proverbs, linguistic analysis, gerontology, old age

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Introduction

In this study, gerontology should be understood as “the scientific study of the processes and problems of aging from all aspects-biological, clinical, psychological, sociological, legal and political”. Most developed countries have generally accepted the chronological age of 65 years as the definition of an ‘older person’ (World Health Organisation (WHO) 2009). In addition to chronological age, the age of a person can be defined in many ways, encompassing biological, psychological and socio-cultural processes (Cohen 2002). For example, age can be defined by the social roles one occupies, by a person’s level of physical ability, by a subjective assessment of how old one feels, as well as their chronological years (Barrett & Cantwell 2007). The individual differences among older people, even those who are in the same age group, illustrate the vitality of the field of gerontology.

This article offers an understanding of the social and societal implications of aging and the rationale is twofold: first and foremost, we are all ageing. Yet ageism is the most commonly experienced form of prejudice and discrimination. Other forms of discrimination, such as racism and sexism, are rightly regarded as unacceptable, yet ageist assumptions and attitudes often go unchallenged. Secondly, negative stereotypes of older people as lonely, vulnerable, in poor mental and physical health, and an economic burden are sadly all too familiar.

Unlike geriatrics, which concentrates on the medical aspects of aging bodies and how they change and adjust to change in elderly years, the field of gerontology has a multidisciplinary focus. Physical factors such as facial looks, hair colour and body image have been highlighted in the literature as defining features of ageing. Mental alertness and mobility have also been considered particularly important criteria in defining an older person (Musaiger & D’Souza 2009). However, even the chronological age at which a person is defined as an older person varies widely. In fact, chronological age used to be the major point of definition, but now there are generational and historical differences related to what has impacted people. In Burundi today, the term “mutama” is not necessarily referring to “the old”. A young rich man, as well as a highly estimated political authority can be referred to “mutama”.

I. Background on Kirundi Proverbs

Oral literature is still a living art in Burundi. It is present all along the human everyday life and is part and parcel of communal property. There are various genres in Kirundi oral literature and according to the taxonomy/classification done by Jean Baptiste Ntahokaja (1979), the main ones are: *Ibisokoranyo* (riddles), *Imigani* (tales), *Ibitito* (romance-tales), *Ivyugumbiro* or *Ibihozo* (lullabies), *Imvyino* (choral songs), *Indirimbo* (songs in solo), *Inanga* (recital with the accompaniment of the harp), *Ibicuba* (pastoral poetry), *Amazina* (praise poetry), and *Imigani* (proverbs) which have been later on called *Imyibutsa* to distinguish them from the category of *Imigani* (tales). In fact, in Kirundi oral literature, there is a distinction of two types of proverbs: anterior proverbs (*imyibutsa y'akame* = from anterior tradition) and posterior proverbs (*imyibutsa y'imituzuka* = from posterior tradition or those that seem to be variants created by contemporary generations).

The specific Kirundi term for 'proverb' is *umwibutsa* from the verb *kwibutsa* (ku-ibuk-i-a = "to remind or cause somebody to remember"). Sometimes they call it *umugani* from the verb *kugana* (ku-gan-a = "to narrate"). But as already mentioned above this is a general term to refer also to tales or folktales in which, most often than not, a proverb comes in to summarize the tale or folktale or gives the moral lesson. In Kirundi, according to Ntahokaja, a proverb (*umwibutsa*) is any brief formula of popular wisdom in declarative form that is used because of a lived situation or experience that it recalls to the mind, no matter the degree of semantic transparency or the level of its aesthetics. In other words, a proverb is a lapidary formula in which popular wisdom expresses the cultural understanding of life experience, at the same time transmits them to the next generation.

The genre of Kirundi proverbs includes proverbs in classic sense, aphorism, dictum and maxim. Francis Marie Rodegem collected 4,000 proverbs under the title *Sagesse Kirundi (Proverbes, Dictons, Locutions Usitées au Burundi)* (1961) which was later edited and published under the title *Poroles de Sagesse au Burundi* (1983) and contains 4,456 proverbs. It is this same source that was used to sample thirty (30) proverbs related to age and ageing. The corpus of the proverbs examined in this paper concern both aged males and females. The proverbs collected in this paper are from Burundi and written in Kirundi, but the English language used here has its own challenges. Indeed, in the process of translation, some linguistic and aesthetic aspects have been altered and this might have affected, in one way or the other, the whole linguistic and semantic contexts.

Proverbs in general have been defined in various ways by different scholars. Some of the definitions are:

1. "A proverb is usually stated in the form of a maxim, epigram or aphorism" (Kipury, 1983).
2. "A proverb is a short familiar sentence expressing a supposed truth or moral lesson; a byword; a saying that requires explanation" (*Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*).
3. A proverb is "a short well-known saying usually in a popular language" (*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*).

4. A proverb is “a short saying of wisdom in general usage” (Akivaga and Odaga, 1982).
5. A proverb is “a saying in more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and salt and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it” (Finnegan, 1970).
6. A proverb is ‘a short pithy statement containing folk wisdom” (Nandwa and Bukenya, 1983).
7. A proverb is “a terse, compact, pithy statement of popular wisdom accepted as an expression of truth” (Sunkuli and Miruka, 1990).

While it is easier to adopt any of the above definitions, it is perhaps better to consider all of them and compile a list of common features with regard to form, substance and context. From these definitions above then, it emerges that a proverb is characterized by these features: short, terse or brief (**form**), indirect, obscure or gnomic (**Context/ substance/content**), relatively invariable/fixed (**form**), statement (**Form**), and full of wisdom, truth or meaning (**substance**). It also emerges that many books equate proverbs with sayings. This may be loosely accepted but for purpose of scholarship, it is better to be specific because the word “saying” is rather general and vague. It may be regarded as a general category for proverbs, aphorisms, dictums, maxims, slogans, idioms and euphemisms. Therefore, proverbs may be called sayings but sayings may not always be proverbs.

With reference to Kirundi proverbs, this article therefore demonstrates the way in which “old age” escapes from its comfortable chronological delimitations. In modern Burundian society, for instance, a relatively young man can be considered old, treated as an old man, even if he is not actually old. The uncertainty of age in both life and art is therefore exposed. There need to posit that the model of reflection in imaginative literature today fails to take full account of the way in which old age discourses shape both the experience of ageing and how it is perceived and represented by others.

II. Critical gerontology: An overview

One of the impulses of critical gerontology is to go beyond accepted explanations of age and ageing to plumb the underlying processes that shape these explanations and thereby to elucidate social, cultural and individual experiences of ageing. Critical gerontology therefore provokes a reconsideration of conventional ways of thinking about age and even the discipline of gerontology itself. Its advocates are equally interested in the particular and in the general, querying prevailing norms that define ageing as well as probing how age is experienced by an individual within a specific historical moment. In this way, the thinking encouraged by critical gerontology “... enlarges our perceptions and so calls attention to what more positivist approaches cannot or do not notice” (Holstein & Minkler 2003: 788). Structuring and Constructing the Stories of Age: Considering Narrative Gerontology.

Here, literary gerontology is a framework or structure for teaching, it is a technique. The composition of oral stories is considered. Students are taught to identify key fragments of a story from a personal account and "... to look beyond the literal or surface meaning to find story structures" (Shenk et al. 2008: 245). It is thus a means of connecting students with the lived stories of older people, the storied nature of our lives, the ways in which we structure our life stories and with metaphysical concepts of "self". Literary gerontology as a tool for teaching relies on the recognition that life can be thought of as an actively constructed text that must be part fiction. Just as the stories in novels are made up so we "make ourselves up" when we relate the substance of our lives. Therefore, the act of reading lives is similar to the act of reading novels or "fictions"

Clearly, the notion of proverb is at the heart of literary gerontology. It is perhaps curious that literary gerontology considers the concept of a proverb carefully, those engaged with literary texts generally take it for granted that there is a shared understanding about the components of a fictional story. As outlined, some narrative approaches stress the similarity between lives and literary texts, yet there are important distinctions to be made between "life" stories and those found in literature. One of the most glaring differences is the overt plea that fiction makes to a reader's imagination. The story of a life as told by the person who has lived it, although composed using the imagination and in some ways "fictional", necessarily bears some relationship to reality as experienced by the storyteller. However, the stories contained within literature make no such claims. Fictions call upon us to participate in the act of creation and the call to a reader's (or an audience's) imagination is an essential part of the author's purpose in telling her story. In her book "Mystery and Manners" Flannery O'Connor (1961) makes a point about short stories that relates to the distinct nature of fictional stories in general:

A story is a way to say something that can't be said any other way, and it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is. You tell a story because a statement would be inadequate (O'Connor 1961, p. 87).

In contrast, the stories that people tell us could be (and often are) told another way. Hence the interest in narrative gerontology in how a story is structured and constructed. However, as Flannery O'Connor indicates, a fictional story embodies its meaning. This meaning is fleshed out by the reader's imagination whereas personal life-stories do not appeal to our minds and imaginative abilities in the same way.

Images of older people in a specific form of fiction are therefore examined through the lenses of age and "used" within a wider proposition: concerning the normally derogatory notion that older people are trapped in a state of childishness. In this way, this article demonstrates the potential that proverbs can have to question and unsettle jaded assumptions about older people. To do so, we appreciate the nuances in proverbial representations of "age" and the way these are inherently linked to historical context and the society's concerns. In the

analysis, we try to avoid the facile categorisation of older people as a blurry homogeneous group. In this, this article displays a criticality that invites us to question superficial and established notions of what old age is or how it is represented.

III. A lexical and Contextual Analysis of the Proverbs

A. Proverbs that concern both sexes:

1) **Agasáza k'í bwámi kabaza kúmvise** 'Who got old at the royal court asks even if h/she has understood'

a-ka-sáaza ka-a i bu-aámi ka^H-Ø-báz-a

AUG-PN₁₂-old PP₁₂-CON LOC₁₉ PN₁₄-royal SUB₁₂.CONJ-PRES-ask-IPFV

ka-Ø-uúmv-it-ye

SUB₁₂-PRES-understand-DER-PFV

Every word in the proverb is meaningful. Agasáza 'the old man' refers to anyone of advanced age regardless of gender: "agasáza k'í bwaámi" the old man of the royal court 'is a noun phrase where the connective ka establishes a relation between the old man and the royal court to indicate the identity of the old man in question. The old man from the royal court is different from the ordinary old man because of his experience. Thus, in the old man of the court, kubáza 'to ask, to inquire' and kwúumva to hear 'must be complementary actions but not separate. For someone who has lived at the royal court, the acute sense of information (which can be seen through the verb kubáza 'to ask, to inquire') is a quality which is acquired with the age of the individual and in a well-defined living environment, that is to say i bwaámi 'at the royal court'. To reinforce this idea of quality, the nominal prefix ka (class 12) used in agasáza 'the old man' and which serves as an index of syntactic agreement with the connective ka and the verbs kabaza and kúmvise, is a mark of the diminutive with value hypocoristic or appreciative semantics.

2) **Agashitsí ká kêra kavumbika umuriro** 'An old strain keeps well the fire'

a-ka-shitsi ka-a kéera ka-Ø-vuumbik-a u-mu-riro

AUG-PN₁₂-strain PP₁₂-CON old SUB₁₂-PRES-keep.fire-IPFV AUG-PN₃-fire

The meaning of this proverb rests on three main terms namely agashitsí 'a strain', the verb kuvumbika 'to keep fire' and umuriro 'fire'. The name agashitsí 'a strain' is here supplemented by kaa kéera 'from the past' to form a unique nominal phrase agashitsí kaa kéera 'an old strain' referring to the idea of many years that have passed so that said strain have the physical appearance she has when she speaks. By metaphor, agashitsí kaa kéera 'an old strain' refers to an elderly person, regardless of gender. This metaphor is justified by the use of the verb kavumbika 'keep the fire' which denotes a human action: an old strain is an inanimate being which does not perform actions attributable to man. Finally, the name umuriro 'fire' is a symbol of light, of home life. Ultimately, the proverb means that the old man (agashitsí kaa kéera 'an old strain') is a holder of the secret of life to enlighten society. The use of the nominal prefix ka (class 12) in agashitsí and in its morphosyntactic agreement with the connective ka (in kaa kéera

'of old') and with the verb kavuumbika 'it preserves fire' is a process of expression of diminutive with appreciative or hypocoristic semantic value.

3) **Agatēbo gaciṣé kayōra ivú** 'A basket with holes serves to pick up the earth'

a-ka-teebo ka-Ø-ci^h-ik-ye ka-Ø-yoor-a
 AUG-PN₁₂-basket SUJ₁₂-PRES-with holes_{REL}-POSIT-PFV SUJ₁₂-PRES-pick-PFV
 i-Ø-vú
 AUG-PN₅-the earth

The meaning of the proverb is based on the nominal phrase subject agateebo gaciṣé 'a basket with holes' and the verbal phrase kayoora ivú 'he picks up the earth'. The agateebo basket is an object for domestic use which is used to transport food. When it is pierced, a sign of old age, it is directly assigned to another use less important than the transport of food: it only serves to collect the earth (kuyoora ivú) before it is thrown away. By analyzing the meaning of kayoora 'it picks up', it is an action verb attributable to man. As a result, agateebo gaciṣé 'a basket with holes' becomes, by metaphor, an image of a person worn down by the weight of age, that is to say an old man. By associating it with the action of kuyoora ivú 'collecting the earth', this means that the old man is no longer useful to society. Thus, someone who has become old no longer serves as before, their role in society is relegated to a very secondary level. The use of the nominal prefix –ka- (class 12) marks a diminutive with hypocoristic semantic value.

4) **Agatūmbwe gaca ku rihíye** 'The green fruit falls (sometimes) before the ripe one.'

a-ka-tuumbwe ka-Ø-ci-a ku ri-Ø-hí-ye
 AUG-PN₁₂-fruit.green SUJ₁₂-PRES-falls-IPFV LOC₁₇ PP₅-PRES-ripen-PFV

The meaning of this proverb is based on the combination of the three lexicological units: the name agatuumbwe 'the green fruit', the verb gaca 'he passes' and the nominalized verb irihíye 'what is ripe'. The verb gaca 'he passes' is a movement verb, the action expressed by this verb cannot be attributed to an inanimate agent like agatuumbwe 'the green fruit'. This is a metaphor that the green fruit takes the place of a young man. In other words, the greenery of the fruit signifies the youth of man. As for irihíye 'what is ripe' whose initial vowel falls from the fact that it is preceded by the rental preposition ku, it denotes a ripe fruit ready to be picked. In contrast to the metaphor of youth symbolized by the green fruit, irihíye 'what is ripe' or more precisely the ripe fruit takes the place of the old man, likely to end his days like a ripe falling fruit. By bringing these different images together, the proverb means that it is normal for a young man to die before an old man as a green fruit can fall before the one who is ripe. Therefore, old age is not a fatality that condemns man to die before others, rather it is a stage of life that has no direct relation to death. This can strike the young before the old because gaca ku rihíye 'it passes on what is ripe' has no other meaning than to pass from this world before the old.

5) **Ibūngo rihīshíye ricībwakó n'ígitūmbwe** 'The green fruit is (sometimes) harvested before the ripe one.'

i-Ø-buungo ri-Ø-hīshir^H-ye ri-Ø-ci-bu-a-kó
 AUG-PN₅-fruit SUBJ₅-PRES-ripen_{REL}-PFV SUJ₅-PRES-pass-PASS-LOC
 na i-ki-tuumbwe
 PREP AUG-PN₇-fruit.green

The meaning of this proverb is built on a double image. On the one hand, we have Ibuungo 'a fruit of the previous one'. When associated with the verb rihīshíye 'which is ripe, it simply means a ripe fruit ready to be picked or ready to fall. By metaphor, ibuungo rihīshíye 'a ripe fruit' stands for an elderly man ready to be killed. On the other hand, igitūmbwe 'a green fruit' symbolizes a young man. The two images of the man (the old man = ibuungo rihīshíye and the young man = igitūmbwe) are linked by the verb gucá 'to pass' comprising a passive derivative -bu- and a locative enclitic -kó to form -cībwakó' to be passed over. Igitūmbwe 'the green fruit' (or the young man) becomes the passive agent of the verb gucá 'pass' which means that the young can fall before the old. In other words, old age does not imply immediate death, the young can take precedence over the old.

6) **Amavámuhirá yatwâje ingabo umusâza** 'With the first ardor, an old man commands troops'

a-ma-va-muhira a-á-twáar-i-ye i-n-gabo
 AUG-PN₆-coming. from-logis SUJ₆-PE-command-APPL-PFV AUG-PN₁₀-troops
 u-mu-sáaza
 AUG-PN₁-old

The meaning of this proverb results from the bringing together of three lexical elements namely amavámuhirá 'first ardor', gutwáara ingabo 'command the troop' and umusáaza 'an old man (without distinction of sex)'. Here, amavámuhirá 'first ardor' means an ephemeral quality of someone clinging to his work; umusáaza 'an old man' symbolizes someone who is physically depreciated so that he is no longer able to perform certain tasks; gutwára 'to administer, to govern' is a transitive verb which requires semantically an object like ingabo 'a troop' for example. By analyzing the grammatical structure of the proverb, amavámuhirá 'first ardor' is a quality applied to umusáaza 'an old man' by means of the applicative derivation suffix -- allowing to pass from the verb gutwára 'to administer, to govern' to gutwáaza 'to govern with, by means of'. Thus, amavámuhirá 'first ardor' represents the means by which umusáaza 'an old man' can lead a troop (gutwáara ingabo 'command the troop'). In short, the proverb insists on the pride of the old man by his achievements of yesteryear, despite his physical weakness due to the weight of age. The old man knows in advance that he no longer has the physical stamina required to command a troop, which he is capable of is only limited to the first minutes of the exercise.

7) **Iyigéze kure ntâ yitáyigéra ihémbe** ‘A cow becoming older receives blows from the horns of all other cows

i-i-Ø-ger-ye kure ntáa yi-ta-Ø-yi-ger-a
 AUG-PP₉-PRES-arrive-PFV far COP_{NEG} PP₉-NEG-PRES-IO₉-measure-IPFV
 i-Ø-heémbe
 AUG-PN₅-horn

In this proverb, two homophone verbs built on the radical –ger- play an important role in meaning. The first –ger- ‘to arrive’ is nominalized iigeze ‘one who arrives’ then completed by the adverb kure ‘far’ to form a nominal phrase iigeze kure ‘one who arrives far’. The distance in question in this case is not spatial but rather temporal, from where ‘iigeze kure’ means ‘one that has lasted too long’. Thus, applied to animated beings and especially the cow implied by means of the pronominal prefix of class 9, ‘iigeze kure’ denotes a cow which has lasted a long time, an old cow. However, in Burundian culture, a heifer is comparable to a young girl in marriage. The old cow thus becomes the image of the old woman. The second –ger- ‘measure’, also a nominalized verb, is a transitive verb completed by the object iheémbe ‘a horn’ which symbolizes here the weapon of the cow. kugera iheémbe ‘measuring his horn to’ then means ‘giving horn to’. The one who receives the blow of horn is materialized by the object index - taking the place of the old cow (iigeze kure) already mentioned in the first part. The two parts of the proverb are linked by a negative predicative copula ntaa which, associated with the negative mark –ta- of the verb yitáyigéra, positive the meaning of the sentence. Thus, the proverb means that every old cow receives blows from the horns of all other cows. On the human side, the proverb insists on the vulnerability of the old woman for the sole reason that she is no longer useful to society.

8) **Igití cūmyé cēgamira kibísi** ‘A dry tree leans against a green one’

i-ki-tí ki-Ø-úum^H-ye ki-Ø-éeg-am-ir-a
 AUG-PN₇arbre SUJ₇-PRES-becomes.REL-PFV SUJ₇-leans-POSIT-APPL-IPFV
 ki-bísi
 PN₇-green

The meaning of this proverb is based on the image of the igití ‘tree’. This can occur in two opposite states: either it is dry igití cūmyé (where cūmyé means ‘which is dry’), or it is still green kibísi. The difference between the two types of trees is the position they take: the first leans on the second ceegamira while the second supports the first. Through this proverb, the position taken by the dry tree - égamira ‘to lean on’ is also applicable to humans. Thus, the dry igití cūmyé tree symbolizes the old man metaphorically, while the green igití kibísi tree is a metaphor for a young man. In this case, –égamira ‘relying on’ takes the meaning of ‘depend on’. Ultimately, this proverb simply means that a man who has become too old depends materially on the younger ones. He insists on the material and total dependence of the old

people on the young ones who are still dynamic because the old man no longer has the strength to take care of himself. It must be fully supported by the youngest.

9) **Ijīsho ry'úmusóre ryānka umusâza**

'The eye of a young man disdains an old man'

i-ri-íiso ri-a u-mu-sóre ri-Ø-áank-a u-mu-sáaza

AUG-PN₅-eye PP₅-CON AUG-PN₁-young man SUJ₅-disdain-IPFV AUG-PN₁-old

In this proverb, the meaning rests on the synecdoche materialized by ijīsho ry'úmusóre 'the eye of the young man'. This is a part of the body used to signify the young man himself. The fact that this proverb caught the eye but not any other part of the body is to attract the young man's visual attention. What he sees with his eye is nothing but physical appearance. Thus, umusáaza 'an old man' is no longer beautiful to see by his physical features. This is how, through the verb ryaanka 'he disdains', the young man feels disdain for the old man; he would only like to see those who still have a more charming physical appearance.

10) **Urya umusâza ukaruka imví** 'If you eat an elderly person, you vomit his grey hair.'

u-Ø-ri-a u-mu-sáaza u-ka-Ø-ruk-a

SUBJ_{2sg}-PRES-eat-IPFV AUG-PN₁-elderly SUBJ_{2sg}-SUBS-PRES-vomit-IPFV

i-n-ví

AUG-PN₁₀-grey.hair

The meaning of this proverb is mainly based on the verbs urya 'you eat' and ukaruka 'and then you vomit'. These two verbs are all direct transitives, which is why they take the compulsory supplements umusáaza 'an old man' and imví blancs white hair, respectively. By associating each verb with its obligatory complement, we obtain verbal syntagms whose meaning returns each time to a hyperbola because one cannot eat an old man (urya umusáaza 'you eat an old man') or vomit grey hair (ukaruka imví 'and then you throw up grey hair'). The two actions expressed by the verbs are linked by a consequence relation. Indeed, the use of the mark of the subsequent mode -ka- in ukaruka 'and then you vomit' indicates that the second action is consecutive to the first. Thus, vomiting grey hair is a consequence of eating an old man. By combining the hyperbole used and the consequence expressed, we come to see that this proverb insists on the sacredness of the elderly. Whenever the old man is hurt (urya umusáaza 'you eat an old man'), there is always an unfortunate consequence (ukaruka imví 'and then you throw up grey hair').

11) **Ushâka ibitwēnzo vy'úmusâza amuryāmika mū ntózi** 'He who wants to see the laughter of an elderly lays him down in red ants.'

u-u-Ø-shaak-a i-bi-tweeng-i-o bi-a u-mu-sáaza

AUG-PP₁-want-IPFV AUG-PN₈-laugh-APPL-FV PP₈-CON AUG-PN₁-elderly

a-Ø-mu-ryáam-ik-a mu n-tózi

SUJ₁-PRES-IO₁-lay down-POSIT-IPFV LOC₁₈ PN₁₀-red.ants

The key words on which the meaning of this proverb is based are *ibitweenzo* ‘laughter’ and *intózi* ‘red ants’. The term *ibitweenzo* ‘laughter’ is supplemented by *umusáaza* ‘an old man’ to form a noun phrase *ibitweenzo vy’umusáaza* ‘the laugh of an old man’ which indicates a sign of joy. On the other hand, *intózi* ‘red ants’ preceded by locative “mu” constitutes with it a locative phrase *muu ntózi* ‘in red ants’ whose meaning corresponds to an environment of suffering. This is understandable when we associate the verb *amuryaamika* ‘he lays him down’ at his own moment of place *muu ntózi* ‘in red ants’. As we know, when you lie down in red ants, they hurt. It is the same case that occurs when the old man, who appears under the mark of the object index *-mu-* in the verbal structure, finds himself in the same situation. Surprisingly, by combining *ibitweenzo* ‘laughter’ with *amuryaamika muu ntózi* ‘he lays him down in the red ants’, we feel an incompatibility of situations: on the one hand, it is a question of wanting the laughter of the old man (*usháaka ibitweezo vy’umusáaza*), on the other hand, we witness the suffering of the old man (*amuryaamika muu ntózi*). From there, we understand that it is a question of drawing laughter from the suffering of an old man. In other words, the meaning of this proverb emphasizes sadism or cynicism of men towards the elderly. Men are happy when the old man suffers a lot.

B. Proverbs that concern the male sex:

12) **Agatāma kayērēra ahó kabá** ‘The old man walks around where he lives’

a-ka-taama ka-Ø-yéerer-a a-ha-ó ka-Ø-ba^H-a

AUG-PN₁₂-old SUBJ₁₂-PRES-walk-IPFV AUG-PP₁₆-DEM SUBJ₁₂-PRES-live_{REL}-IPFV

The meaning of this proverb rests on three lexical elements namely the name *agataama* ‘the old man’, the verb *kayereera* ‘he walks’ and the nominal phrase *ahó kabá* ‘where he lives’. The name *agataama* ‘the old man’ refers to an old man as opposed to *agataamakazi* ‘an old woman’. The action attributed to such an old man is that of *kuyéreera* ‘wandering’ but within a very small perimeter *ahó kabá* ‘where he lives’. By combining these three lexical units, the proverb expresses a category of people (of male sex) with reduced mobility because of the weight of the age but which endeavors to keep in action at least at home (*ahó kabá* ‘where he lives’). Here, home (*ahó kabá* ‘where he lives’) is also a very important notion in this proverb because, according to Burundian culture, a man who has no home is not considered as such in society. Hence the proverb means that an old man is appreciated if he has a clean space (a home) where he performs all his movements. The nominal prefix *ka* (class 12) in the noun *agataama* ‘the old man’ and in morphosyntactic chords with the verbs *kayereera* ‘he walks’ and *kabá* (verb to live in relative mode) is used to express the diminutive with appreciative semantic value.

13) **Intāmbara y’úmutāma iva ku muriro** ‘The war provoked by an old comes from fire.’

i-n-taambara i-a u-mu-taama i-Ø-vu-a ku mu-riro

AUG-PN₉-war PP₉-CON AUG-PN₁-old SUJ₉-come.from-IPFV LOC₁₇ PN₃-fire

In this proverb, the key words for meaning are *intaambara* ‘war’ and *umuriro* ‘fire’. On the one hand, the name *intaambara* ‘a war’ is followed by a complement *umutaama* ‘an old man’ to

clarify which war it is: the war of an old man. The gender of the old man who shines through *umutaama* ‘an old man’ as opposed to *umutaamakazi* ‘an old woman’ is very important because, in Burundian society, war was a men's affair; women and children were not directly affected by the war. On the other hand, *umuriro* ‘du feu’ represents something that is always present in homes and that is easily obtained. For the old man who no longer has the strength to work, to go away from home, he spends most of his time warming up around the fire. For him, fire is something important for his life while the value of fire is of secondary importance to others. *Intaambara y'umutaama* ‘the war of an old man’ is connected to *umuriro* ‘of fire’ by the verb *iva* ‘it comes from’ which indicates the direct cause. To say that an old man's war is due to fire has a double interpretation. From the point of view of the old man himself, the cause of the fight is all that is essential to him for his daily life, despite that it is considered worthless by others. From the point of view of the not old, the old is likely to quarrel with anyone even for a cause which should not be one. From this last point of view, the proverb means that the old man is a man who is easily irritated, angry regardless of the cause.

14) **Umusâza asâza amîra ntásâzá arîma** ‘The elderly ages while swallowing, he does not age while digging.’

u-mu-sâaza a-Ø-saaz-a a^H-Ø-mir-a
 AUG-PN₁-old SUBJ₁-PRES-age-IPFV SUBJ₁.CONJ-PRES-swallow-IPFV
 nti-a-Ø-saaz-a a^H-Ø-rim-a
 NEG-SUBJ₁-PRES-age-IPFV SUBJ₁.CONJ-PRES-dig-IPFV

Besides the lexical meaning of the terms used in this proverb, there are two images and an opposition on which the meaning rests. On the one hand, the verbs *amîra* ‘by swallowing’ and *arîma* ‘by digging’ are adverbialized using the conjunctive mode to serve as a circumstantial complement in the same verb *asaaza* ‘he ages’. The same verbs connote respectively two activities of the old man namely to eat and to work / produce. On the other hand, the use of the negation *nti-* on the second verb *ntasaaza* ‘he does not age’ establishes a relation of opposition between eating (*amîra* ‘by swallowing’) and producing and (*arîma* ‘by digging’). An antithesis is thus constructed which shows that the old man (here, the term *umusâza* does not distinguish the sexes) eats without producing anything. By this antithesis, the meaning of the proverb insists on the idleness of the elderly.

15) **Umusâza ntârushá iyó atsîtâye aba agûye** ‘The elderly does not tire, when he hurts his foot, he falls immediately.’

u-mu-sâaza nti-a-Ø-rush-a iyó a-Ø-tsîtaar^H-ye
 AUG-PN₁-elderly NEG-SUJ₁-PRES-tire-IPFV SUB SUJ₁-Ø-heurt.the.foot-PFV
 a-Ø-ba a^H-Ø-gu-ye
 SUJ₁-PRES-to be-IPFV SUJ₁.CONJ-PRES-fall-PFV

To understand the meaning of this proverb, one must start from its grammatical structure. This proverb corresponds to a sentence made up of an independent proposition *umusâza ntârushá*

‘the old man does not tire’ and of a complex sentence *iyó atsiitáaye aba agúuye* ‘when he hurtts his foot, he falls’. The independent proposition constituting the first part of the sentence is a constative statement, it translates reality as it is lived: an elderly *umusáaza* is a physically weak being. The second part of the proverb, the aforementioned complex sentence, is presented as an explanation of the state of affairs expressed in the independent proposal. In this second part of the proverb, this is where the deeper meaning of the proverb is found. Indeed, there are two adverbialized verbs thanks to the conjunctive mode *atsiitáaye* ‘he collides with the foot’ and *agúuye* ‘he falls’ which are circumstances. Between these two circumstances, there is established an equivalence relationship made possible by the use of the verb *aba* ‘he is’. In other words, for an elderly person to stumble (*atsiitáaye* ‘he collides his foot’) is equivalent to fall (*agúuye* ‘he falls’). From this, we understand that the proverb insists on the frailty of the elderly because, it is obvious that when they stumble, they fall directly; they no longer have the strength to maintain themselves.

16) **Umusáza w’ímaángu agwāana irabura**, ‘An old mallet falls with a bark of a ficus.’

u-mu-sáaza a-a i-n-maángu a-Ø-gu-an-a
 AUG-PN₁-elderly PP₁-CON AUG-PN₉-mallet SUJ₁-PRES-fall-REC-IPFV
i-Ø-rabura
 AUG-PN₅-bark.of. ficus

The meaning of the proverb goes through the images constructed on the terms *imaángu* ‘a mallet’ and *irabura* ‘a bark of a ficus’. In traditional Burundi, *imaángu* ‘a mallet’ is an object used to make clothes from *irabura* ‘ficus bark’. *Imaángu* ‘a mallet’ is therefore a valuable object, useful to society. To speak of *umusáaza w’ímaángu* ‘an old mallet’ refers to the idea of something useful worn out by long-term work. When this nominal phrase of *umusáaza w’ímaángu* ‘an old mallet’ is compared to the verb *agwaana* ‘it falls with’, these two elements are semantically incompatible: *agwaana* ‘it falls with’ translates a state attributable to man but not to an object like *imaángu* ‘a mallet’. So, we come to deduce that *umusáaza w’ímaángu* ‘an old mallet’ symbolizes an elderly and experienced person in any trade. In *agwaana irabura* ‘he falls with a ficus bark’, there is the idea of clinging to a material used in a given trade. By combining the different lexical elements of the structure of the proverb, its meaning insists on hanging on to one's profession despite the weight of age, the fact of remaining useful even though one is old.

17) **Umusáza yanka gusimbana imví akazívumbana** ‘The elderly refuses to jump with his grey hair, but begs what to drink with them.’

u-mu-sáaza a-Ø-áank-a ku-siimb-an-a
 AUG-PN₁-elderly SUBJ₁-PRES-refuse-IPFV PN₁₅-JUMP-REC-IPFV
i-n-ví a-ka-Ø-zi-vúumb-an-a
 AUG-PN₁₀-grey.hair SUBJ₁-SUBS-PRES-IO₁₀-beg.to.drink-REC-IPFV

In this proverb, the two key elements of meaning are the verbal phrase *gusiimbana imví* ‘to jump with white hair’ and *akazívuumbana* ‘he asks to drink with white hair’. On the one hand, with the first phrase, *-siimba* ‘to jump’ means to do any activity that requires physical effort. When this verb passes to *gusiimbana* ‘jump with’ thanks to the associative derivation morpheme *-an-*, this new verb requires a complement specifying what one has when performing a task. Thus, *imví blancs* ‘white hair’ comes to play this role. For an old *umusáaza*, *gusiimbana imví* ‘jumping with white hair’ means doing any activity that requires physical effort. On the other hand, in *akazívuumbana* ‘he begs to drink with white hair’, we identify the verb *-vuumba* ‘beg to drink’ which denotes a kind of shameful behaviour. This is an attitude banished in Burundian society because it negatively affects the social status of a given person. In the verb *-vuumbana* ‘beg to drink with’, there is the associative derivation suffix *-an-* which implies the use of a nominal complement represented by the object index *-zi-* (= white hair). The use of the modal morpheme of the consecutive *-ka-* in the same verb indicates that the action expressed by the verb is a direct consequence of a situation / action which precedes. In our case, *akazívuumbana* ‘he asks to drink with white hair’ is therefore an action consecutive to *yaanka gusiimbana imví* ‘he refuses to jump with white hair’. In short, the proverb means that any old man who refuses to make an effort to produce what makes him live on the pretext that he is old, he will find himself begging for drink or begging. The proverb therefore insists on the sense of effort among the elderly.

18) **Umutāma ntásunikwa aba atēmba** ‘An old should not be pushed, if so, he falls.’

u-mu-taama nti-a-∅-sunik-u-a a-∅-ba
AUG-PN₁-old NEG-SUBJ₁-PRES-push-PASS-IPFV SUBJ₁-PRES-to be.IPFV
a^H-∅-téemb-a
SUJ₁.CONJ-PRES-fall-IPFV

This proverb concerns old men as it is indicated by the name *umutaama* whose feminine counterpart is *umutaamakazi* ‘an old woman’. The semantic interpretation of this proverb is based on the type of relationship established between *-sunikwa* ‘to be pushed’ and *atēmba* ‘he falls’. The use of the verb *aba* ‘it is’, creates an equivalence relation between the two verbs, that is to say that, for an old *umutaama*, to be pushed (*-sunikwa*) is equivalent to fall (*atēmba* ‘he falls’). Thus, this verb provides information on the frailty of the elderly; these no longer have sufficient strength to maintain themselves. The use of the *nti-* negation on the first verb introduces an idea of advice for non-old people: do not push the old man at the risk of causing him to fall immediately.

C. Proverbs that concern the female sex:

20) **Ahó umukěcuru atōyé uruhĩndu ahĩta urugānda** ‘Where an old woman finds a pin to braid, she names it a forge.’

a-ha-ó u-mu-keécuru a-∅-tá^H-uur-ye
AUG-PP₁₆-DEM AUG-PN₁-old.woman SUBJ₁-PRES-find_{REL}-REVER-PFV

u-ru-hiíndu a-Ø-ha-ít-a u-ru-gaánda
 AUG-PN₁₁-pin.to.braid SUBJ₁-PRES-IO₁₆-name-IPFV AUG-PN₁₁-forge

The meaning of this proverb emanates from the bringing together of two syntagms: the nominal syntagm consisting of the demonstrative ahó 'where' serving as an antecedent to the relative subordinate proposition umukeécuru atooie uruhiíndu 'an old woman who finds a spindle to braid' and the verbal syntagm ahiita urugaánda 'he calls it a forge' which takes the place of the main proposition of the sentence. In the relative subordinate, the name umukeécuru 'an old woman' indicates the sex of the person who finds an object (a braiding pin) in a determined place indicated by the demonstrative ahó 'where'. It is this same umukeécuru 'an old woman' who becomes the subject of the verb ahiita 'he calls it' in which the first morpheme a- is a personal index which replaces umukeécuru (class name 1) and the morpheme -ha- is an object index that replaces the whole nominal phrase built around ahó 'where'. Thus, a relation of equality can be established between the different elements of the sentence: ahó umukeécuru atooie uruhiíndu 'where an old woman finds a pin to braid' = -ha- 'index rental object' = urugaánda 'a forge' by through the verb kwiita 'to call, to name'. In other words, for umukeécuru 'an old woman', where she finds an object from the forge is the forge itself. This proverb thus insists on the fact that an old woman can no longer distinguish places where different activities are carried out because of her advanced age. In short, for umukeécuru 'an old woman' aging is tantamount to losing the faculty of memory.

20) **Ibúguma ntírōngōra izíndi iba igémuye inyama** 'The old cow does not lead the herd if it does not want to be transformed into meat'.

i-Ø-búguma nti-i-roongoor-a i-zi-ndi i-Ø-ba-a
 AUG-PN₉-old.cow NEG-SUBJ₉-lead-IPFV AUG-PP₁₀-herd SUBJ₉-PRES-to be-IPFV
 i^H-Ø-gemur-ye i-n-nyama
 SUJ₉.CONJ-supply-PFV AUG-PN₁₀-meat

In this proverb, ibúguma 'an old cow' symbolizes an old woman. This is understandable when we associate this name with the verb kugemura "to supply" which denotes human activity. Besides, in Burundian culture, a heifer (inyána) is comparable to a young girl at the age of marriage. As a result, it is normal for an old cow to be assimilated to an old woman. Thanks to this image, the proverb is conceived as being formed of two parts ibúguma ntíroongóra izíndi and igémuye inyama linked by the verb kubá 'être' (in its conjugated form iba) translating an idea of equality. Thus, for ibúguma 'an old cow', kuroongora izíndi 'driving other cows' it is (iba) kugemura inyama 'supplying meat'. Here, the proverb insists that the old cow or the old woman is no longer worth anything, she is condemned to die when she tries to put herself in front of the others. This is the reason for the use of the nti- negation in the first part of the proverb to warn the old cow or the old woman who is likely to be transformed into meat (case of the old cow) or to be killed (for the old woman).

21) **Ibúguma ntíyānká umuyōnga iba itáwurágiwe** ‘An old cow does not refuse greener pastures, if only it is not pastured there’.

i-Ø-búguma nti-i-Ø-áank-a u-mu-yoonga
AUG-PN₉-old.cow NEG-SUBJ₉-PRES-refuse-IPFV AUG-PN₃-greener pastures
i-Ø-ba-a i^H-ta-Ø-wu-ragir-u-ye
SUBJ₉-PRES-to be-IPFV SUBJ_{9,CONJ}-NEG-PRES-IO₃-pasture-PASS-PFV

In this proverb, *ibúguma* ‘the old cow’ and *umuyoonga* ‘the greener pastures’ respectively symbolize the old woman and all that is good for the health of the human person. Refusing the regain *kwáanka umuyoonga* (or good things) is not characteristic of the old cow (or of the old woman), because the negation *nti-* (in *ntiyaanká* ‘he does not refuse’) is used to signal that the old cow is never ready to do it. The verb *iba* ‘it is’ indicates an equivalence relation between the first part *ibúguma ntíyānká umuyoonga* ‘the old cow does not refuse the greener pastures’ and the second part *itáwurágiwe* ‘when it is not pastured there’. In this last part of the proverb, the verb *-ragir-* ‘to graze’ is transitive and requires an object *umuyoonga* ‘greener pastures’ replaced by the index object *-wu-*. In this same part, the passive morpheme *-u-* indicates that the action denoted by the verb *-ragir-* is performed by someone else. Thus, the proverb means that to refuse good things is to refuse to be grazed in the recovery, which is not the case for an old woman. The main idea developed is therefore the fact that, despite limited means, the old woman is still ready to accept good things offered to her by someone who can.

22) **Inká irasáza ikícwa n’úmwúzikuru** “The old cow is killed by her grandson”

i-n-ká i-Ø-ra-sáaz-a i-ka-Ø-íic-u-a na
AUG-PN₉-cow SUJ₉-PRES-DISJ-old-PFV SUJ₉-SUBS-PRES-kill-PASS-IPFV PREP
u-mu-uúzikuru
AUG-PN₁-grandson

The meaning of the proverb is based on the combination of three lexical elements: *inká* ‘a cow’, *ikiicwa* ‘he is killed by’ and *umwuúzikuru* ‘the little child’. The cow is appreciated in Burundian culture so as to be assimilated to a young girl in marriage. Because of this cultural consideration, the cow here symbolizes the woman. When the term *inká* ‘a cow’ is associated with the verb *irasáza* ‘it ages’ to form *inká irasáza* ‘a cow ages’, it means that a cow that has become old corresponds, by metaphor, to an old woman. She has a kinship relationship with her grandchildren represented by *umwuúzikuru* ‘the little child’. In this relationship, the passive verb *ikiicwa* ‘he is killed by’ spoils the relationship between the old woman and her grandchildren. Indeed, while we expected good relationships based on family ties between the old woman and her grandchildren, the verb *ikiicwa* ‘he is killed by’ shows that *umwuúzikuru* ‘the little child’ dares to get rid of his old mother by killing her. It is for this purpose that we understand that the meaning of *umwuúzikuru* ‘the little child’ is extended to the young generation which no longer respects the values of society. Killing your grandmother is an abominable crime in Burundian society, but if that happens, you see a degradation of manners, a transgression of human and social values. Ultimately, the proverb in question means that the

young generation no longer has a sense of human and social values until they commit the irreparable.

24) **Inkūnguzi y'úmukécuru ibāndwa Rubāambo atá ho vyābonetse**

“The old woman's indelicacy creates spells that have never been seen elsewhere.”

i-n-kuunguzi i-a u-mu-keécuru

AUG-PN₉-indelicacy PP₉-CON AUG-PN₁-old.woman

i-Ø-band-u-a ru-baámbo ata ha-ó

SUJ₉-PRES-create-PASS-IPFV PN₁₁-grand.initiate.of.Kiranga COP_{NEG} PP₁₆-SUBST

bi-á-bón-ik-ye

SUJ₇-PE-see-POSIT-PFV

To understand the meaning of the proverb, one must start with the term Rubáambo. This is a surname attributed to a follower of Kiraanga (that is to say a mythical hero in Burundian culture who served as an intermediary between God and men in Burundi), he was one of the great initiates of Kiraanga. Rubáambo served as one of the key figures in the cult of kubaandwa - the cult of possession by the spirit of Kiraanga. So Rubáambo was never worshiped, he was always present in worship to help others worship and pray the spirit of Kiraanga. Through ibaandwa Rubáambo ‘he is possessed by Rubáambo’, to see someone who worships the spirit of Rubáambo was unheard of as the part of the proverb atá ho vyaákabonetse shows ‘when it has never been seen’. Such sacrilege could only be a matter of umukeécuru ‘an old woman’ from which he is attributed the lack of indecency through the term inkuunguzi ‘shameless, shameless’. In short, this proverb shows the loss of memory for the old woman so that she confuses things, situations; she no longer knows what to do and what not to do in a given situation. The old woman allows herself to violate prohibitions, in particular by venerating the spirit of Rubáambo.

25) **Umukécuru ahimvyé akina n’imyēnge** ‘A fed up elderly woman plays with holes of the house.’

u-mu-kéecuru a-Ø-híimb^H-ye a-Ø-kin-a na

AUG-PN₁-elderly.lady SUBJ₁-PRES-fed.up_{REL}-PFV SUJ₁-PRES-play-IPFV PREP

i-mi-eéngé

AUG-PN₄-holes.of.the.house

The meaning of the proverb is based on the following three terms: umukeécuru ‘an old woman’, akina ‘he plays’ and imyeéngé ‘slits of a hut’. The noun umukeécuru ‘an old woman’ is completed by an adjectivated verb thanks to the relative mode ahiimvyé ‘which is satiated’ to insist on the state of the old woman. The verb akina ‘she plays’ shows an activity of the old woman when she finds herself in a state specified by ahiimvyé ‘who is satiated’. While knowing that the old woman no longer has the strength to play, she only allows it when she is full, it is as if being full is equivalent to a state of ecstasy because the old woman no longer knows where she is and what to do because of intense joy. This idea of ecstasy is reinforced by the type of play that the

old woman Akina doesn't like 'she plays with slots in a hut'. Imyeéngé 'from the slots of a hut' symbolizes here something worthless, anything. Thus, the proverb means that the old woman goes into raptures every time she satisfies her basic need.

26) **Umukécuru atarí nyoko agushimira inda yā mbere** 'An old woman who is not your mother congratulates you on your first pregnancy.'

u-mu-keécuru a-ta-Ø-ri^H nyoko
AUG-PN₁-old.woman SUBJ₁-NEG-PRES-be_{REL} your.mother
a-Ø-ku-shiim-ir-a i-n-da i-a mbere
SUJ₁-PRES-IO_{2sg}-congratulate-APPL-IPFV AUG-PN₉-pregnancy PP₉-CONJ before

The meaning of the proverb is based on the words umukeécuru 'an old woman', agushiimira 'he thanks you / he congratulates you' and inda 'pregnancy'. The old woman in this proverb is not just anyone, she is umukeécuru atarí nyoko - an old woman who is not your mother. The use of negation in the verb atarí 'which is not "establishes an opposition between the old woman umukeécuru and nyoko 'your mother"'. This opposition already refers to an idea of something negative because, the positive would be advocated if umukeécuru and nyoko were the same. Here, what is at stake is the positive relationship that unites the Nyoko mother and her daughter, because it is the latter who can be pregnant. The old woman who is already viewed negatively is not happy with the pregnancy of girls who are not hers. This is why, to hide herself, she pretends to congratulate the daughter of others for her first pregnancy only inda yaa mbere. In short, the proverb insists on the wickedness of the old woman towards young women with whom she is not related.

27) **Umukécuru atūnzé ntáburá abúzikuru** 'A rich old woman does not lack small children'.

u-mu-keécuru a-Ø-túung^H-ye nti-a-Ø-búr-a
AUG-PN₁-old.woman SUJ₁-PRES-be.rich_{REL}-PFV NEG-SUBJ₁-lack-IPFV
a-ba-uúzikuru
AUG-PN₂-small.children

In this proverb, the verbs atuunzé 'who is rich' and ntaburá 'it does not lack' play a very important role in the meaning. On the one hand, the verb adjectivated by means of the relative mode atuunze 'who is rich' plays the role of a qualifying adjective to specify the old woman of which it is a question: it is that which is rich. The verb ntaburá 'there is no lack of' establishes a kinship relationship between the old woman and the small children abúzikuru 'small children'. This relationship is not natural, it is artificial and ephemeral because it is created with the wealth of the old woman and is erased as soon as this wealth disappears. This is what can be read through the use of the negation nti- in the verb ntaburá 'there is no shortage of'. In short, the proverb insists on the value of the wealth of the old woman: she creates friendships, relationships that did not exist until now. In this context, abúzikuru 'small children' takes the place of young profiteers of the wealth of old women. In other words, young people only care about the old woman when she has to give.

28) **Umuříndi w'úmukécuru uhiinda uhéra** 'The noise of the footsteps of an old woman start while ending.'

u-mu-riíndi u-a u-mu-keécuru u-Ø-hiind-a
 AUG-PN₃-noise.of.footstep PP₃-CON AUG-PN₁-old.woman SUBJ₃-PRES-start-IPFV
 u^H-Ø-end
 SUJ₃.CONJ-Ø-end-IPFV

The meaning of this proverb rests mainly on the image of umuriíndi 'a sound of steps'. This noise symbolizes the ardor with which we do a job. In this case, we are talking about umuriíndi w'úmukeécuru 'the sound of an old woman's footsteps' or just the hard work for an old woman. Through the verb uhiinda 'he rumbles', one feels that the noise of the old woman's footsteps is so great that it looks like she is working hard. Far from it, the verb uhéra 'in ending' is adverbialized using the conjunctive mode to serve as a complement to the verb uhiinda 'it rumbles. Thus, uhiinda uhéra 'it rumbles with decreasing intensity' means that the rumble is only of a very short duration. When this verbal phrase is associated with its subject of umuriíndi w'úmukeécuru 'a sound of an old woman's footsteps', it means that the ardor of the old woman at work does not last long because she is sufficiently amortized. The proverb therefore informs about the old woman's lack of stamina.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to analyse an erstwhile neglected genre in the Burundian literary arena: proverbs, with a focus on the gerontological conceptions of old age and ageing. In the course of the analysis, it was discovered an awareness that "age" and "ageing" encompass more than straightforward physical decline and decrepitude, that alone these categories explain nothing about an individual and that we need to change our minds about what "age" can be, is as reflected in Burundian proverbs as is also found at the heart of critical gerontology. If "age", "ageing" and even "age-related" mis/conceptions cannot be accepted unquestioningly, then it follows that a consideration of structural inequalities, power relations, concepts of successful ageing, thoughts about our ageing bodies are all open to more examination. These insights, the urgency of questioning the stories of age be they wholly or partly fictional, is at the core of how critical gerontology can contribute to literary gerontology. The discourses of critical gerontology can be used to help us reconfigure what culturally has been casually accepted. When these perspectives are applied to Burundian proverbs of age, innumerable interesting questions start to form about the intricate interplay between the personal, emotional and the social, political, cultural constructions of age/ ageing/older people. These questions include querying the age ideologies that underpin a proverb, interrogating how age and gender interact to shape the stories that we are told, examining how the proverbs under consideration relate to other stories and discourses on age, considering how far "age" is a relative concept that is unrelated to the years that a person or character has lived, asking how the proverbs that we use age us and considering how the proverbs that we are told about age

can be challenged and changed. The world is changing, representations modify, and languages evolve. In the context of Burundian proverbs, they have to integrate the universal aspiration to human rights, which are the fundamental rights of men and women, the young and the old. In other words, these proverbs have to promote equality between human beings, taking into account their specific characteristics.

These are general queries, but there may be some specific ways in which critical gerontology can provide clarification for the discourses discussed here. Literary gerontology, as a tool for teaching could be sharpened by explicit reference to questions about the interplay of individual agency with social structure, the way these shape experiences of ageing. Further, students might be alerted to the problematic nature of “age”, which is not a simple explanatory concept. The use of narrative to critique social policy is invaluable but might benefit from micro-level insights, the inclusion of voices from those who are “on the ground”. This in turn may prompt more scholarship that is personally engaged. The study of more Kirundi proverbs may benefit from the above critical questions about how lives are experienced, the incomplete way in which they are often lived.

These are both out-workings of humanistic gerontology and have emerged in parallel with critical perspectives. It is thus these areas that this article has discussed here, critically. The purpose was not, however, to provide an exhaustive analysis of literary gerontology. Nor did we aim to offer a comprehensive overview of the genesis of critical gerontology. Nevertheless, the intricate pulling together of many proverbs to illustrate our points and the careful and critical contextualisation of each text or work referenced, exemplifies how literature and concepts from gerontology might best be integrated.

List of Abbreviations

- 2 sg : second person singular
- APPL : applicative
- AUG : augment
- CAUS : causative
- CON : connective
- CONJ : conjunctive mode
- COP : copula
- DEM : demonstrative
- DER : verbal derivative
- DISJ : disjunctive marker
- IO₅ : index object of the 5th nominal class
- IPFV : imperfective marker
- LOC₁₇ : locative of the 17th nominal class
- NEG : negation marker
- PASS : passive
- PE : Far past

PFV : perfective marker

PN₃ : Nominal prefix of the 3rd nominal class

POSIT : positional

PP₄ : pronominal prefix of the 4th nominal class

PREP : preposition

PRES : present marker

REC : reciprocal

REL : relative mode

REVER : reversive

SUB : conjunction of subordination

SUBS : subsecutive mode

SUBST : substitutive

SUBJ₂ : Subject index of the 2nd nominal class

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