TRENDS IN GENDER ISSUES IN MARAGOLI CHILDREN'S PLAY POETRY: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract

There are observable trends in gender issues in children's play poetry among the Maragoli yet little or no studies have been carried out to ascertain these trends. The aim of this study was to establish the existence of gender issues in Maragoli children's play poetry. Specifically the study sought to examine trends in gender issues in Maragoli children's play poetry as well as analyze the subtexts in Maragoli children's play poetry. It also examined personification and symbolism in Maragoli children's play poetry. The population of the study comprised one hundred and thirty respondents who gave one hundred and thirty nine Maragoli children's play poems. The respondents were purposively sampled from the following four strata, each representing an age group: sixty one to ninety five, forty one to sixty, twenty one to forty and eight to twenty. Data was collected by observation and oral interviews with eight focus groups. The data was then analyzed qualitatively and presented in prose form as well as in tables. The results of the study showed that there were trends in gender issues in Maragoli children's play poems in poems with similar themes and characters on account of different issues articulated by different strata and gender.

Key words: Trends, Gender issues, Children's play poetry, Maragoli, subtexts, personification, symbolism

1. INTRODUCTION

Children's play poems entail poetry that children recite, chant or sing as they play. Gender issues on the other hand refer to covert or overt statements that the play poems make with regard to females or males or mixed gender, meaning females and males. In short, children's play poetry among the Maragoli, rendered by children at different times in the community provide trends. The statement of the problem was that although there existed noticeable trends in gender issues in children's play poetry, research that addresses these trends has hardly been conducted, yet gender issues in children's play poems in any given period of time are puzzles that need to be unraveled by analyzing them for their subtexts.

According to Bwonya (2010) "The Maragoli are a Bantu-speaking community of the larger Abaluhya community of Western …Kenya. The Maragoli speak Lulogoli …." The proper linguistic name for a Maragoli person is Umulogoli for the singular form and Abalogoli or Avalogoli for the plural form. They trace their ancestry to Mulogoli whose first wife was Kaliyesa. This is justified by Were (1967: 7) who states:

> The ancestors of Abalogoli migrated from Arabia; they travelled up to the Red Sea and then crossed it into Egypt. They continued travelling, this time on a boat on the Nile until they eventually arrived in Uganda. . .They crossed the lake (Victoria) and reached Seme. When they left Seme they moved to Maseno; then they came . . . to Maragoli… According to other informants the ancestors of Abalogoli came from Egypt . . . When the migrants left Uganda following the lake, they later arrived at Rusinga. At this point one group lost their way and continued their journey on the lake until they finally reached Kisii. The party which went to Kisii was led by Chimangati and Lugaga; those who came here were led by Mulogoli.

In short, the Maragoli migrated to present day Vihiga and Sabatia districts of Vihiga County.

2. Literature Review

Researchers from East Africa such as Okot p'Bitek, Odaga and Alembi have conducted studies in children's play poetry but none of them addresses trends in gender issues or the subtexts in the gender issues. Okot p'Bitek (1974) for instance, discusses Acoli children's songs and games by stating that:

> Acoli children have a large repertoire of games and most of them are accompanied by singing. For example *Dini-dini ye …* is a "hide and seek" game. A little boy or girl kneels before the "referee" who drums his or her back quite hard with his fists, while singing the solo. The rest of the children take up the chorus and dance to the rhythm of the "drum". The singing and dancing stops when the referee sings *Lamanya-manya puk*, and closes the eyes of the "drum"; and the rest of the children run and hide themselves. When the drum's eyes are opened, he endeavours to chase and touch any of the other children before they return to the spot where the referee is standing. The child who is touched becomes the next drum.

The relevance of the description above is that it explicitly states that both the feminine and masculine genders are involved in the hide and seek poem. The shortcoming is that it does not discuss any subtexts in the poem.

Odaga (1985) is another literary scholar who refers to children's play poems as songs and games. In her "Mindhere mindhere min Akelo min dhere gindha", which she does not translate, she explains how it is performed by stating that:

> Sing it repeated counting touching on the participants out stretched legs, and whoever the song ends with singer's hand on his leg folds leg on which the singer hand resting. Anybody who folds both legs goes out of the game. The last person to survive either with one leg or both wins the game and becomes the soloist.

Odaga describes the performance of the poem but she does not show the genders that performed it. This study not only shows the genders that rendered the poems, but also examines the subtexts in the poems.

Alembi (1991) gives examples of play poems with their accompanying patterns and the gender roles of children in each game. For instance, he states that the song "where are you taking me to?" is a hide-and-seek game performed by a group of girls. Nevertheless, he fails to add that the fact that the girl being carried is told by the others that she is going to be sold in Maragoli for eighteen head of cattle is an early psychological preparation for the girls that their society expects girls to get married when they are of age and that bride wealth is given to a girl's family.

The research questions were:
1. Are there trends in gender issues in Maragoli children's play poetry?
2. Are there subtexts in Maragoli children's play poetry?
3. Are personification and symbolism evident in Maragoli children's play poetry?

3. Materials and Methods

The methodology included research design, study area, study population as well as sample and sampling procedure.

3.1 Research Design

The descriptive design was used to determine the frequency with which certain play poems occurred. According to Kombo and Tromp (2006), the descriptive design not only reports findings but "may often result in the formulation of important principles of knowledge and solution to problems… They involve measurement, classification, analysis, comparison and interpretation of data." Therefore, through the focused group discussions and primary school children's performances, the children's play poems were classified according to gender – whether feminine or masculine or mixed gender poems. This classification proved that there existed three gender categories of poems in Maragoli children's play poetry. The study was confined to Sabatia and Vihiga districts of Vihiga County where a majority of the people speak Lulogoli. A total of eight locations were used, five of which were from Sabatia while three were from Vihiga. Vihiga District has five locations and a total of eighty two thousand, nine hundred and ninety five (82,995) people while Sabatia District has eight locations with a population of one hundred and seventeen thousand, eight hundred and sixty three (117,863).The population of the study consisted of play poems collected from primary school going children aged between eight and fourteen, teenagers aged between fifteen and twenty and men and women of varied age groups ranging from age twenty one to ninety-five.

The total number of respondents who gave the play poems was one hundred and ten. Eighty respondents formed the focus group discussions while the children were thirty.

3.2 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study used the purposive sampling procedure to get adults in three strata namely: Stratum 1, ages sixty one to ninety five; Stratum 2, ages forty one to sixty and Stratum three, ages twenty one to forty. Stratum 4, ages eight to twenty comprised mainly of children and teenagers. Two primary schools were purposively sampled from Sabatia District. The researchers relied on the teacher of each sampled school to provide the pupils to participate in the study. The two primary schools, Keveye situated in West Maragoli and Tsimbalo in Idzava South locations all from Sabatia were used in the study. The method of proportional allocation as propounded by Kothari (2003) was applied to the study. According to him, "the sizes of the samples from the different strata are kept proportional to the sizes of the strata." In other words, all the play poems collected were added up and then divided by four to get the proportion of poems used in the study. The data used in the study was collected using oral interviews in focused group discussions. Focus group discussions targeting ages: sixty one to ninety five, forty one to sixty, twenty one to forty and eight to twenty were conducted in Sabatia and Vihiga districts. Each focus group discussion comprised five females and five males. The principal researcher took notes during the focus discussions while the two other researchers conducted the actual discussions in the focus groups.

4. Conceptual Framework

The study was guided by two theories: the social learning theory as propounded by Hogben and Dyrne as well as the schema theory propounded by Gregoriou.

In their discussion of the social learning theory, Hogben and Dyrne (1998) state that:

> The major concepts of social learning theory rest on a series of assumptions about humans and human behavior…First and foremost theorists and researchers assume that people are social beings in that they pay attention to the environment around them. An important addition to this assumption is that people react to the environment or respond to stimuli in the environment.

The position above was found to be relevant to this study because children's play poems are a reflection of the environment in which the children live.

The schema theory was also useful in understanding and analyzing the subtexts in Maragoli children's play poetry as supported by Gregoriou's (2009) position that:

> Since schemata are abstract cognitive structures which incorporate generalised knowledge about objects and events, containing slots which are filled with specific information bits as a text or message is processed, these are bound to vary depending on the culture and overall personal background and experience that each one of us has had.

In short, schemata pertain to the mental process where information is processed in accordance with the cultural dictates and personal experiences.

5. Results and Discussions

A total of one hundred and thirty nine poems were collected. These were divided by four, being the number of strata used in the study. The result was thirty four point seven which was rounded to thirty five. Since the study was a stratified one, all the poems in each gender category of every stratum were added up. In Stratum 1, there were sixteen feminine, ten masculine and ten mixed gender poems. They all added up to thirty six. There were twelve feminine, eight masculine and fourteen mixed gender poems in Stratum 2. Their total was thirty four. In Stratum 3 there were fourteen feminine, ten masculine and sixteen mixed gender poems whose total was forty. There were four feminine, three masculine and twenty two mixed gender poems in Stratum 4 which added up to twenty nine.

The proportional allocation of the poems that were used in the study for each stratum was then calculated by multiplying the total number of poems in each stratum by thirty five (being the proportional allocation of all the poems used in the study) and divided by one hundred and thirty nine (the total number of poems). This is represented in table 1.

Table 1 Proportional allocation of stratified poems used in the study

Stratum	Proportional allocation	Result	Number of poems used in the study
1	36 × 35 ÷ 139	9	9
2	34 × 35 ÷ 139	8.5	9
3	40 ×35 ÷ 139	10	10
4	29× 35÷ 139	7	7

Since the stratified study was on gender issues, the proportional allocation of the poems that were used in the study by each stratum and gender was calculated as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Stratified proportional allocation of poems per gender.

Stratum	Proportional allocation of poems by females	Proportional allocation of poems by males	Proportional allocation of poems by males and females	Total	Deviation
1: ages 61-95	16 × 35 ÷ 139 = 4	10 × 35 ÷ 139 = 2.5, rounded to 3	10 × 35 ÷ 139 = 2.5, rounded to 3	4 + 3 + 3 = 10	+ 1
2: ages 41-60	12 × 35 ÷ 139 = 3	8 × 35 ÷ 139 = 2	14× 35 ÷ 139 = 3.5, rounded to 4	4+ 3+ 2= 9	0
3: ages 21-40	14 × 35 ÷ 139 = 3.5, rounded to 4	10 × 35 ÷ 139 = 2.5 rounded to 3	16 × 35 ÷ 139 = 4	4+ 3 +4 = 11	+ 1
4: ages 8-20	14× 35 ÷ 139 = 1	3 × 35 ÷ 139 = 0.7, rounded to 1	22 × 35 ÷ 139 = 5.5, rounded to 6	1= 1 + 6 = 8	+ 1

There were two focus group discussions for each stratum except Stratum 4 that had only one focus group discussion because the two primary schools children also belonged to this stratum. Table 3 shows the number of respondents in every focus group discussion, the district and location, the stratum as well as the number of genders per group.

Table 3: Number of interviewees showing district, location, stratum, three gender categories of each focus group discussion.

District	Location	Stratum	Female respondents	Male respondents	Total	Stratum total
Sabatia	Busali West	1	5	5	10	
Vihiga	Central Maragoli	1	5	5	10	**20**
Vihiga	South Maragoli	2	5	5	10	
Sabatia	Wodanga	2	5	5	10	**20**
Vihiga	Mungoma	3	5	5	10	
Sabatia	North Maragoli	3	5	5	10	**20**
Vihiga	Central Maragoli	4	5	5	10	**10**

The research conducted revealed that each stratum, namely 1 (ages 61-95), 2 (ages 41-60), 3 (ages 21-40) and 4 (ages 8-20) had three gender categories by: females, males and mixed gender. All the one hundred and thirty nine poems that were collected were separated according to the three gender categories as depicted in table 4.

Table 4 Representation of number of poems in each gender category per stratum

Stratum	Number of poems by females	Number of poems by males	Number of poems by mixed gender	Total
1	16	10	10	36
2	12	8	14	34
3	14	10	16	40
4	4	3	22	29

In Keveye Primary School there were ten girls and six boys making a total of sixteen. Tsimbalo Primary School had a total of fourteen pupils, eight of who were girls and six boys.

5.1 Maragoli Children's Play Poems on Tugs of War

It was found out that all the poems on tugs of war were between the females and males in all the four strata. The poems 1- 4 were presented showing the ages that performed them.

Example 1: poem by females and males, Stratum 1, ages 61-95

Soloist: *Kiloko*	Kiloko
Chorus: *Ngolodi*	Ngolodi
Kiloko	Kiloko
Ngolodi	Ngolodi

Soloist: *Kogodagode*	Let us turn and turn
Chorus: *Ngolodi*	Ngolodi
Soloist: *Kogodagode*	Let us turn and turn
Chorus: *Ngolodi*	Ngolodi
Soloist: *Kogodagode*	Let us turn and turn
Chorus: *Ngolodi*	Ngolodi

Soloist: *Lugaga lwadinya*	Is the fence firm
Chorus: *Lwadinya*	It is firm
Soloist: Lwadinya	Is it firm
Chorus: Lwadinya	It is firm

Soloist: *Kolonde yaha*	Let us pass here
Chorus: *Ngolodi*	Ngolodi

Soloist: *Lugaga lwadinya*	Is the fence firm
Chorus: *Lwadinya*	It is firm
Soloist: *Lwadinya*	Is it firm
Chorus: *Lwadinya*	It is firm

(Pull – tug of war between men and women)

Example 2: mixed gender poem, Stratum 2, ages 41-60

Soloist:	*Ni kihambe*	It is a tug of war
Chorus:	*Eee*	Ee
Soloist:	*Ni kihambe*	It is a tug of war
Chorus:	*Eee*	Eee
Soloist:	*Nyola mundu ng'usa*	Get a person and pull
Chorus:	*Eee*	Eee
Soloist:	*Ni kihambe*	It is a tug of war
Chorus:	*Eee*	Eee
Soloist:	*Ni kihambe*	It is a tug of war
Chorus:	*Eee*	Eee
Soloist:	*Nyola mundu ng'usa*	Get a person and pull
Chorus:	*Eee*	Eee
(Vang'uusana)		(They pull each other)

Example 3: poem by both females and males in Stratum 3, ages 21-40

Soloist:	*Nziye kolola*	I have gone to see
Chorus:	*Mmmh*	Mmmh
Soloist:	*Mwana wa mama*	Mother's child
Chorus:	*Mmmh*	Mmmh
Soloist:	*Cheza Kibaringo*	Play the Baringo way
	Cheza Kibaringo	Play the Baringo way

Chorus: *Mmmh* 　　　　　　　Mmmh
Soloist: *Nziye kolola mwana wa mama* 　　I have gone to see mother's child
Chorus: *Mmmh* 　　　　　　　Mmmh
Soloist: *Cheza Kibaringo* 　　　　Play the Baringo way
Cheza   Kibaringo 　　　　　　Play the Baringo way
Chorus: *Mmmh* 　　　　　　　Mmmh
Soloist: *Cheza   Kibaringo* 　　　　Play the Baringo way
Chorus: *Mmmh* 　　　　　　　Mmmh
　Ni kihambi 　　　　　　　It is a tug of war
　Ni kihambi 　　　　　　　It is a tug of war
　(*Vang'usana***)** 　　　　　(They pull each other)

Example 4: poem by females and males, Stratum 4, ages 8-20

Girls:　*Ngolilo* 　　　　　Ngolilo
Boys:　*Ndondo* 　　　　　Ndondo
Girls:　*Nugunani yigu* 　　　And this ogre
Boys:　*Ndondo* 　　　　　Ndondo
Girls:　*Gwamala avana* 　　　Has finished the children
Boys:　*Ndondo* 　　　　　Ndondo
Girls:　*Gwenya kungumila* 　　It wants to capture me
Girls:　*Ndondo* 　　　　　Ndondo
Girls:　*Ni kihambe* 　　　　It is a tug of war
Boys:　*Ndondo* 　　　　　Ndondo

Girls: *Baba alisema tuvute sigara* 　　Father said we should smoke cigarettes
Na mama akasema tusivute sigara 　　And mother said we should not smoke cigarettes
Hebu tujaribu 　　　　　Let us try
Moja mbili tatu 　　　　　One two three
(Vang'usana) 　　　　　(They pull each other)

5.2 Maragoli Children's Poems about the Cat

The study revealed that there were two poems, 1 – 2, about the cat, 1 by females in Stratum 3 and 2 by mixed gender in Stratum 4.
Example 1: feminine gender poem, Stratum 3, ages 21-40

Kibusi changada kilamboliza 　　A cat cheated me it would seduce me
Lwali ulugano lwa changuba 　　It was a riddle it played on me
Chajila ninguliza mulingeti gwange The reason I sold my blanket
Lelo ngonanga ni nzeteji 　　Now I sleep while squatting
Kusieve lipala 　　　　　Let us dance lipala
Kusieve lipala 　　　　　Let us dance lipala
Kusieve lipala 　　　　　Let us dance lipala
Kusieve lipala 　　　　Let us dance lipala

Example 2: mixed gender poem, Stratum 4, ages 8-20

Kibusi changada kilamboliza 　　A cat cheated me that it would seduce me
Lwali lugano lwa changuba 　　It was a riddle it played me
Chajila ninguliza mulingeti gwange 　The reason I sold my blanked
Lelo ngonanga ni nzetegi 　　Now I sleep while squatting

5.3 Maragoli Children's Poems about the Squirrel

The study also showed that there were two poems, 1 and 2 by females in Stratum 1 and males in Stratum 2 about the squirrel.
Example 1: feminine gender poem, Stratum 1, ages 61-95

Nakamuna	Squirrel
Avana ni vanga	How many are the children
Vatano na mulala	Five and one
Kambe mulala sambe	Then give me one to roast
Sambili uludada	Roast for the pouch
Uludada lwa vahizi	The pouch of the hunters
Vahizi Valongosyo	The Valongosyo hunters
Avita Sang'ang'a	Who killed Sang'ang'a
Valeka ni yama	And left him germinating
Lyama lye kihindi	The germination of the trunk

Example 2: masculine gender poem, Stratum 2, ages 41-60

Siolindanga vwila	Can't you wait till nightfall
Ukasomola amaduma	Then you pull maize
Siolindanga vwila	Can't you wait till nightfall
Ukasomolanga amaduma	Then you pull maize
Nakamuna iwe iwe	You you squirrel
Nzogu yu guzumbuzu	Elephant of the bushy tail
Nakamuna iwe iwe	You you squirrel
Nzogu yu guzumbuzu	Elephant of the bushy tail

Research Question 1 Are there trends in gender issues in Maragoli children's play poetry?
Research Question 2 Are there subtexts in Maragoli children's play poetry?
Research Question 3 Are personification and symbolism evident in Maragoli children's play poetry?

5.4 Definitions of terms
5.4.1 Definition of Trend
The word trend, according to *The Free Online Dictionary* (2011) refers to "a general tendency or inclination".

5.4.2 Definition of Subtext
The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2011) defines the word subtext as "any meaning or set of meanings which is implied rather than explicitly stated in a literary work …." In other words, subtexts are not directly stated but they are covert.

5.4.3 Definition of Paradox
According to Gill (1995), a paradox "is an apparent contradiction which says something strange yet true.

5.4.4 Definition of Personification
According to Gill (ibid), personification is "The effect created when a non-human object or quality is written about as if it were a human being."

5.4.5 Definition of Symbolism
Murray (1978) defines symbolism as, "the art of expressing emotions not by describing them directly, nor by defining them through overt comparisons with concrete images, but by suggesting what these ideas and emotions are by re-creating them in the mind of the reader …." The research revealed that though the content in some poems rendered by different strata was similar, there were noticeable trends in view of the fact that the poems were performed during different times. It was observed that all the four strata had mixed gender poems on the tug of war where females and males pulled each other. However, each stratum depicted issues peculiar to the time the interviewees were children. The issues were mainly articulated in the subtexts of the poems.

In Stratum 1, the tug of war had a subtext that showed incest prohibition among clans' people. This is supported by Mwanzi (2006) who posits that children were, "Socialized into regarding the girl or boy next door as a blood sibling, anyone who, on turning into an adult expected or had sex with a clansman/ clanswoman got banished. The experience of being forced out of one's home was as bitter as it was humiliating and devastating." This is supported by the Busali West Mixed Gender Focus Group Discussion of Stratum 1 (Personal interview, 2009) virginity was highly valued among the Maragoli.

To this effect, a girl's loss of virginity was known on her wedding day and this was disgraceful to herself and her parents. As such, when boys and girls played together, the girls were expected to be cautious and defend themselves against boys who would force themselves on girls when sexually aroused. Therefore, the question *Lugaga lwa liga* whose translation is "Is the fence firm was directed to girls to ascertain if they had preserved their virginity. As such, the Maragoli cultural issues of incest prohibition and preservation of virginity were important for boys and girls in Stratum 1. This particular poem is no longer performed by children due to the facts that the Maragoli community is no longer largely communal as it was then and also because virginity is not emphasized as a norm as it was then.

A different trend was evident in the subtext of the poem about a tug of war by individuals aged from forty one to sixty. According to the South Maragoli Mixed Gender Focus group Discussion of Stratum 2 (Personal Interview, February 2009), the tug of war was about marriage by abduction for girls and captivity into forced labour for boys evident in the subtexts of the lines below.

Soloist: *Ni kihambe*   It is a tug of war
Chorus: *Eee*   Eee
Soloist: *Nyola mundu ng'usa*   Get a person and pull
Chorus: *Eee*   Eee
(*Vang'uusa*)   (They pull)

They added that boys were also expected to fight relentlessly to protect themselves from strong adult men who would capture them and take them to various places like Kibuguti as labourers on sisal farms with meagre pay. The abduction of young men is supported by Fitzgerald (2002) who posits that in one type of abduction "people are seized from their homes to be sold as chattels and forced to work against their will …." This poem is no longer performed because the issues of marriage by abduction for young women and the captivity of young men into forced labour are no longer practiced in Maragoli.

The issues articulated in the poem about the tug of war by Stratum 3, ages 21 – 40 not only demonstrate the closeness of relationship among siblings but also underscore the importance of a mother in the early developmental stages of children in the lines below.

Soloist: *Nziye kolola*   I have gone to see
Chorus: *Mmmh*   Mmmh
Soloist: *Mwana wa mama*   Mother's child

The subtext of the poem was evident in the actual tug of war between females and males to highlight incest prohibition among siblings. The poem reveals that at the time its composition, the focus of family in Maragoli had shifted from the clan as demonstrated in Stratum 1 (ages 61-95) to the nuclear family in Stratum 3. This demonstrates trends in Maragoli cultural issues. The poem by Stratum 3, ages twenty one to forty used Kiswahili words, "Cheza Kibaringo", translated as "Play the Baringo way". Kiswahili in the poem indicates the influence of Kiswahili on Lulogoli. The subtext in the words is that children love adventure and novelty and Baringo is a place that is far from Vihiga. The line therefore means that the men and women in their childhood visited Baringo and copied a dancing style from there. The tug of war in Stratum 4 ages 8 – 20, depicts the dilemma children find themselves in about the issue of drug use and abuse among children. It was observed that parents fail to agree on whether or not to allow their children to smoke cigarettes as exhibited in the lines below.

Vakana: *Baba alisema tuvute sigara*
              Na mama akasema tusivute sigara
              Hebu tujaribu

Girls: Father said we should smoke cigarettes
              And mother said we should not smoke cigarettes
              Let us try

The fact that the children express their dilemma in Kiswahili in the lines above indicates that cigarette smoking is an issue of national concern in Kenya because Kiswahili is the national language.It was also observed that Maragoli children grew up with the knowledge that they would one day experience courtship and marriage according to Maragoli cultural norms. However, females in Stratum 3, ages 21 – 40, found out that men were insincere in matters of courtship as depicted in their poem about the cat.

The poem shows that a girl was seduced by a man only for him to dump her and leave her regretting in the line "Lelo ngonanga ni nzeteji", translated as "Now I sleep while squatting". The girls sang a second stanza that states they should dance "lipala". This is a type of dance where a person moves both feet rhythmically, holding the waist and the forehead accompanied by song. According to the North Maragoli Focus Group Discussion by Females (Personal Interview 2009), the dance ameliorates a girl's feelings of sadness and regret at having been lured into a false relationship. This poem was performed at the time when it was the norm among the Maragoli for men to propose to women. The study revealed that females no longer performed this poem on their own because the issue of courtship was no longer left to men alone. This was justified by the performance of the same poem without the second stanza by primary school boys and girls in Stratum 4, ages 8 – 20. The poem they rendered showed that both girls and boys were victims of seduction and later dumped by their lovers leaving them suffering emotional trauma. The performance of the poem by both girls and boys shows that life styles in Maragoli have changed because both men and women now approach one another for relationships.

The poem about the squirrel by females aged from sixty one to ninety five depict the feminine gender role of roasting meat because the female persona asks the squirrel how many children it has. The squirrel's response that it has five and one young ones demonstrates that society expected young girls to know simple arithmetic. This is further shown when the female persona asks the squirrel for one of its young ones to roast, meaning the squirrel will be left with five young ones. The subtext here is that the squirrel was part of the Maragoli community's cuisine. Another subtext is a paradox. According to the East Maragoli focus Group Discussion (Personal Interview, 2009), the hunters removed Sang'ang'a's limbs and threw his body onto the open ground to decompose because he had stolen their game. The truth is, according to the same focus group, since hunting was a masculine gender role, men set traps for their game and no one was expected to steal another's game. The penalty was death. As such, if men did not go home with their catch, it meant the women would have no meat to demonstrate their skill of roasting meat for their men. As such, the women were expected to roast meat for the cruel and inhuman men who had just killed and mutilated a game thief. The study showed that this poem was not performed by any other respondents – an indication that subsequently, the Maragoli stopped eating squirrels and men also stopped hunting.

The poem by men aged from forty one to sixty is a complaint that the squirrel steals their maize in broad daylight in the lines:

Siolindanga vwila	Can't you wait till nightfall
Ukasomola amaduma	Then you pull maize
Siolindanga vwila	Can't you wait till nightfall

The lines above are an insult that the persona hurls at the squirrel for stealing his maize; an indication that the squirrel is a pest. The subtext in the lines above according to the South Maragoli Masculine Gender Focus Group Discussion (Personal Interview, February 2009), the poem is a married man's complaint about another man who shamelessly has an affair with his wife. The persona – the married man – insults the other man in the line "Elephant of the bushy tail" is a reference to the man's phallus. The insult reveals the man's lustful nature which is against the Maragoli community's cultural norms. Therefore, apart from depicting theft as a vice, the subtext is that the society abhors infidelity in marriage. The two poems on the squirrel show that the Maragoli community at an earlier time ate squirrels and this also ensured ecological balance because the feminine persona asked for one of the squirrel's six young ones. However, due to changes in life styles, the Maragoli stopped eating squirrels which became pests to farmers during the time the men aged from forty one to sixty were children.

Are personification and symbolism evident in Maragoli children's play poetry?
The study revealed that personification and symbolism were evident in Maragoli children's play poetry.

5.5.1 Personification in Maragoli Children's Play Poetry
The cat which is part of the Maragoli community's tame fauna is personified as seducing the persona. Seduction is perceived as a human attribute. To start with, the cat that normally is either a pet or domesticated to kill rats in homesteads becomes a person that seduces another person. The images evoked in personifying a cat are auditory, visual and covertly, tactile because we perceive a cat touching the person as it asks that person into a relationship; we also see the cat with that person. Personifying a cat that is a domestic animal reveals insincerity in human beings who approach young members of the opposite sex for love relationships; yet the seducers' intentions are to ruin those young people as indicated in the lines:

Chajila ninguliza mulingeti gwange	The reason I sold my blanket
Lelo ngonanga ni nzetegi	Now I sleep while squatting

The squirrel is also personified in the two poems. In the poem by men aged from forty one to sixty, the squirrel is personified to depict a man who lusts for another man's wife and has an affair with her. Although the personification of the squirrel falls within a metaphor where the squirrel is said to be an elephant with a bushy tail, the personification is more pronounced than the metaphor. This is supported by Leech and Short (1981) who posit, "The personifying metaphor is so consistently employed that the 'metaphor' almost ceases to be the appropriate term". The personification shows that though the squirrel is a small animal, it causes destruction of immense proportions.

5.5.2 Symbolism in Maragoli Children's Play Poetry

Some of the subtexts in the poems were symbols. The tug of war rendered by interviewees aged from sixty one to ninety five, the line; "Lugaga lwa liga" whose translation is "Is the fence firm" is symbolic because the word fence is a symbol. This, as already pointed out in the subtext of the poem is a symbol of virginity. The question was directed at girls then to find out if they had preserved their virginity. The children's play poem about whether or not to smoke cigarettes is stated symbolically in the lines below.

Girls: *Ngolilo*	Ngolilo
Boys: *Ndondo*	Ndondo
Girls: *Nugunani yigu*	And this ogre
Boys: *Ndondo*	Ndondo
Girls: *Gwamala avana*	Has finished the children
Boys: *Ndondo*	Ndondo
Girls: *Gwenya kungumila*	It wants to capture me
Boys: *Ndondo*	Ndondo

The ogre is a visual image that symbolizes destruction because the female persona tells us that it wants to capture her. This is supported by Sunkuli and Miruka (1996) who posit that ogres are "often cruel, sadistic, greedy and cannibalistic hence may be seen to represent evil villainy, and guile." In other words, the female persona in the poem states that the ogre wants to capture her, meaning it wants to destroy her. The symbol shows the character trait of the female persona as someone intelligent because she notices the ogre's intention of capturing her and tells an unstated subject about it.

The word "blanket that has a visual appeal in the example below symbolizes self worth and dignity. According to the persona, the cat's seduction made him/her sell his/her blanket. This means the persona was lured into losing his/her self worth and dignity in the lines:

Chajila ninguliza mulingeti gwange	The reason I sold my blanked
Lelo ngonanga ni nzetegi	Now I sleep while squatting

The symbol shows that the persona is gullible and it highlights insincerity as the major theme of the poem. Another symbol is exhibited in the word "squatting". The symbol has a visual appeal as we are able to "see" the persona squatting and probably weary from this posture. "Squatting" therefore symbolizes discomfort and suffering and reveals the persona's feelings of regret.

6 Conclusions

The study showed that Maragoli children's play poems fell in three categories namely poems by: females, males and mixed gender. It also revealed that there were trends in gender issues in Maragoli children's play poetry because each period of the interviewees' childhood was found to have different societal and even national issues that affected children which they demonstrated in their poems. The study also showed that children's play poetry enabled children to use figures of speech as the interviewees' explanations about the subtexts in the poems exhibit. The subtexts were also tied to contexts or times of performance thereby enabling respondents in their childhood to depict norms the society underscored during those times. For instance, incest prohibition among clans' people was depicted by respondents aged between sixty one and ninety five while incest prohibition among siblings was highlighted in the poems by respondents aged between twenty one and forty. This trend showed change in the focus of family from communal to nuclear. The poems under study were examined for personification and symbolism.

The analysis showed that some of the subtexts in the poems were personification or symbolism. The male interviewees' explanation which is a subtext that the squirrel is a married man who has an affair with another man's wife shows that Maragoli children understood personification. Similarly, explanation of the subtext in the mixed gender poem on the tug of war by individuals aged from sixty one to ninety five that the fence refers to a girl's preservation of her virginity is also a symbol.

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