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OPENING AND CLOSING FORMULAE IN TSWANA FOLKTALES: A STRUCTURAL AND FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

1.0   Introduction

Opening and closing formulae are acknowledged by many research workers and specialists of folktales. It is herefore a pity that although most researchers have recognized it, here is a tendency to neglect the layout of the structure and the functions played by the formulae. In this discussion attention will be paid to the structure and the various functions of the formulae, because the opening and closing formulae, as a unity, contstitute one of the main structural features of folktales.

2.0   Opening formulae

2.1   *What is an opening formula?*

An opening formulae can be described as a sentence or sentences used to open a folktale and as such to announce the onset of the tale itself.

Example:
Ga te ekilê ya re bogologolo ga bô go na le Phiri le Phokojê le Pela
It is said that a long time ago, there were a hyena, a jackal and a rockrabbit.

2.2   *Recent acknowledgements of the opening formula*

The following researchers have paid attention or recognized the opening formula in their study of folktales: Mbiti (1966:26) states that a folktale can be started by using several forms of opening formulae. He mentions that narrators can implement formulae of their own choice. According to *Guma* (1967:33) the following is the form that is used most commonly in Southern Soho folktales:

> Ba re e nê e re ...
> They say it happened that ...

He also mentions the fact that the general form is subject to variation and that the folktale commences immediately after the opening formula has been announced. Finnegan (1967:85-86, 1970:379) deals with the subject in her study of Limba stories and also her book which covers oral literature

41

in Africa. She recognizes the formula and points out the fact that even the audience can take part in the opening process and therefore stimulate the telling of folktales. Scheub (1975:9) mentions the formula and stipulates the following opening formulae for Xhosa:

Kwathe ka kalokhu ngantsomi ...
Kwa suka-sukêle ...
Yathíntsomi ...
Kwahła kwa-intsomi ...

Marivate (1973:31) calls the opening formula an "operative phrase" in his study of Tsonga folktales. He, like Finnegan, states the fact that the audience takes part in the process.

Neethling (1979:172-196) makes an effort to find a standardized form for the formula by giving a list of the formulae which occur in the data collected for his thesis. He recognizes the other formulae which differ from the standardized form as variants of the original form. He states the following example as the standardized form for Xhosa:

Kwathi ke kalokhu ngantsomi ...

Out of 45 folktales which he collected, 16 make use of the standardized form, while the others are variant forms. Neethling's main contribution lies in the fact that he recognizes the opening formula as a structural element in the folktale.

2.3   After these viewpoints have been studied, the following conclusions can be drawn:

—   the opening formula is recognized by all researchers;
—   several forms of the formula are recognized;
—   certain formulae occur more frequently than others;
—   sometimes the audience takes part in implementing the formulae.

2.4   Opening formulae in Tswana folktales

All Tswana folktales commence with an opening formula. For a meaningful discussion of the opening formula, it is decided to distinguish between a full form and its *variants*. This viewpoint accommodates a more scientific way of dealing with the opening formulae. A syntactical and morphological analysis constitutes the following for Tswana:

i.   Indefinite subjectival concord ga plus the verb re/say;
ii.   a noun as subject;

42

iii.   definite or indefinite subjectival concord plus auxiliary verb *kilê/rilê*;
 iv.   definite or indefinite subjectival concord plus *re*;
  v.   temporal adverb;
 vi.   a noun as subject;
vii.   a associative or identifying copulative *-na le/le*;
viii.   a noun subject; and
 ix.   a verb plus object and adverb.

This full form, as stipulated above, accommodates all the opening formulae distinguished for Tswana. In certain instances some of the elements are elided and the formula can thus be seen as a variant form of the full form. A further characteristic of the formula, is the set order which the elements' maintain. Each narrator chooses the opening formula for his particular folktale out of his full form. This fixed order causes the opening formula to show a standardized form. The following are examples collected during fieldwork done amongst the Tswana people:

Full form

Ga te + noun + kilê + re + temp.adv. + noun + ass./id.cop. + noun + verb.

Variants

Ga te +_____+ e kilê + ya re + bogologolo +_____+ ga bô go na le +
Phiri le +_____
Phokoje le
Pela

Ga te +_____+ e kilê + ya re +_____+_____+ e le + Tselane
le + _____
mmaagwe

_____+_____+ E kilê +_____+_____+_____+ ga bô go na le +
Monna le +_____
 mosadi

Ga te +_____+_____+ e rilê + ka nako + ê nngwe + ga bô go na le +
Tau le +_____
Mmutlê

Ga te + badisa + ba kilê +_____ +_____+_____ +_____+ _____+ ba
kôpana.

Included in the opening formulae is the following essential information:

— time suggestion (long ago);
— the introduction of the leading characters in the folktale; and
— circumstances that form the background.

Examples: Ga te e rilê ka nako ê nngwe ga bo go na le ...
                 It is said that once upon a time there were ...

                 Tau le Mmutle ...
                 Lion and Rabbit ...

                 Ga te e kilê ya re e le ...
                 It is said that there was ...

                 Mosetsana ...
                 A girl ...

                 A se na mmaagwe ...
                 Who did not have a mother ...

No evidence has been found that the audience participates in the opening of the folktale.

3.0 CLOSING FORMULAE

3.1 What is a closing formula?

The closing formula consists of a short phrase that is used to end the folktale.

Example: Tsa bê di hêla!
              It came to an end!

3.2 Recent acknowledgements of the closing formula

Closing formulae are also generally acknowledged in the various studies of folktales, but as is the case with the opening formulae, little attention has been paid to in-depth study of the element and basically the subject is only mentioned by the different researches.

Examples:

Mbiti (1966:29) only states that there are several formulae for the closing of

Akamba stories. According to Guma (1967, p. 33-34) the closing formula appears to be "a fixed formula". The Southern Sotho folktales usually end in this way:

> Ke tshomo ka mathetho.
> It is the end of the story.

Finnegan (1970:87) has ascertained that the closing formulae show a more fixed structure than the opening formulae, and therefore display a restricted character. This character is found in Xhosa folktales which are traditionally ended by these formulae. Scheub (1970:13) quotes the following for Xhosa:

> Phela phela ngantsomi!
> Phela!

After having implemented a frequency test, Neethling (1970:177-180) stipulates the structure which is most commonly used in Xhosa. He too mentioned the fixed character of this formula.

Marivate (1973:56) mentions the role played by the audience in the ending of Tsonga folktales. He calls it "the killing of the tale".

3.3 The following conclusions can be drawn after studying the above viewpoints:

— closing formulae are generally acknowledged; and
— the formulae are used to end a folktale and show a more fixed form than the opening formulae.

3.4 Closing formulae in Tswana folktales

Tswana folktales are always ended by using a closing formula. This formula is implemented by the narrator and no evidence has been found of the audience taking part in the process. The formulae show, as is the case in other languages, little variation. By means of a syntactical and grammatical analysis, a full form and its variants can be identified. The full form is constructed by the following:

    i.   Definite subjectival concord of the *di*-class plus auxilliary verbs *ba/bô/bê;*

    ii.   definite subjectival concord of the *di*-class plus the verbs *fela/felêla;* and

    iii.   a locative adverb *fa/fao.*

45

All the variants are dirived from this full form. The elements in the formulae are always restricted to the same order, and thus reflect a bounded form, which subsequently displays very little variation. Examples of closing formulae:

Full form:

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subjectival + ba/be/bô + subjectival + fêla + fa/fao
concord                   concord       fêlêla
Di            +    bê    + di          + fêlêla + fao
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Variants
Bê + di + fêlêla + fao
Bê + di + fêla
    Di + fêla + fao

Sometimes the subjectival concord in the initial position occurs in the consecutive form *tsa.* Synonymous verbs for *fêla* are also used, like *êma/* stop; *feta/* passed. The subjectival concord *di* probably recalls the noun *dikgang* which means things/story/plot.

4.0 FUNCTIONS FULFILLED BY OPENING AND CLOSING FORMULAE

Opening and closing formulae fulfil several functions when folktales are told. These functions must be viewed against the background of the whole narrating process namely the narrator, situation, audience and the tradition. The following functions can be fulfilled by them:

4.1 Guides the audience into a fictitious world

According to Sutherland and Arbuthnot (1965:150) the formulae lead the audience into and out of a fictitious world. They say:

> "Such folktale conventions do more than convey an idea of long ago, they carry the reader at once to a dream world where anything is possible".

During fieldwork, collecting Tswana folktales, this was definitely found to be the case.

Bascom (1965:6) even stresses this point further by saying that this formula warns the audience that the tale that follows is fictitious and must not be

believed to be true.

4.2 Link the narration with the audience

The opening and closing formulae are responsible for a certain attitude between the audience and the narrator. Finnegan (1970:380) describes it as follows:

"Conversely the opening formulae serve to rouse the interest of the audience, sometimes eliciting a formal response from them as well as setting the mood for the start of the narration."

While collecting Tswana folktales this was recognized. The audience talked spontaneously about their daily task but their attention was immediately drawn when hearing the opening formula. When the narrator ends his folktale by the closing formula the connection between narrator and audience ends. They immediately start discussing the folktale and the narration by the narrator.

This point is also stressed by Scheub (1975:15):

"The creator of a ntsomi must thus bring the attention and imagination of the audience into total involvement in the production."

4.3 Defines the limits of the folktale

Finnegan (1970:387) and Scheub (1975:9-13) states the fact that the formulae serve as boundaries for a folktale and the narrative process. This is also the case in Tswana folktales.

4.4 Distinguishing function

It serves as a framework to distinguish different forms of folktales from each other. It also sets folktales apart from normal conversation and from other forms of serious discourse.

No evidence has been found in Tswana that the formulae serve as a framework to create a distinction between the different forms of folktales. It definitely sets folktales apart from other forms of conversation and discourse.

4.5 The opening formulae focus on the characters and action in the folktale

Sutherland and Arbuthnot (1965:153) describe it as follows:

> "The introduction to a folktale does exactly what its name implies. It introduces the reader to the leading characters."

The opening formulae also outline the situation in which the characters find themselves.

Examples:

E kilê ga bô go na le *monna le mosadi, ba agilê motse wa bônê o montlê.*
Once upon a time there were *a man and a woman* (characters) *with a nicely built home* (situation).

Ga twe ekilê ya re e le *Mosetsana a bidiwa Nopolole,* a na le monnaawê.
It is said there was *a little girl called Nopolole* (character) *who had a little sister* (situation).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Folktales are constructed by various parts namely *words, sentences, refrains* and as discussed above also *opening* and *closing formulae.* These elements are necessary to construct folktales and when they are well structured they contribute a great deal to the success of folktales. Especially the opening and closing formulae fulfil a characteristic role in the folktales.

Tsa bê di hêla!
It came to an end!

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