

A Comparative Study of Siswati Proverbs at Mjokwane and Manzolwandle High Schools: A Thematic Approach

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ABSTRACT The focus of this study is on Siswati proverbs that are compared and analysed according to their themes. Their explicit objectives on thematic exploration, origins, structural classification and functionality are evident. The specific themes that are randomly selected are marriage, parenthood, revenge, threat, unfaithfulness, deception, ingratitude, pride, fortune and friendship. Proverbs are regarded as a major vehicle for transmission of beliefs and values of society. They reflect the past, present and future of the society. It is further noted that they are the significant oral expressions of culture that entail ideals, experiences, philosophy and wisdom of the nation. They reflect various themes, connotative and denotative meanings and figures of speech. Their intention of promoting social harmony and morality in society are ensured in everyday speech in different situations. Their thematic exploration asserts language as a powerful tool that greatly influences on human lives. Both qualitative and quantitative methods complement each other at various situations in this research article.

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs are verbal sayings that can be literary and linguistically studied. Proverbs are the central aspects in the Siswati language. This is evident in the studies of the physical characteristic of the sounds, that is, phonetics. They are explicitly seen in the function attached to the sounds of phonology. Proverbs are studied, as well as the manner in which words are formed and the relationship of words in sentences or word groups and their meanings. Using the linguistic approach the researcher pursues the synchronic dimension of the study of the language, especially the proverbs as they are presently used. The richness of a language is embedded in proverbial expressions of a nation. Cultural values and norms are explicitly evident in proverbs.

Every nation adheres to its own culture. By culture is meant all the man-made symbols, language and material things. Culture includes all physically and socially-created designs of living, which exist at any given time as fundamental guidelines for human behaviour. Proverbs are short and condensed statements intended to comment on situations and containing the beliefs and values of the society. They form an important part of oral tradition in Emaswati culture because they reveal the wisdom and exper-

iences of the nation in a prudent and humorous way.

Proverbs deal with every aspect of life. They occupy a special position in the social life of Emaswati nation from ancient times to date. They play a major role in the development of Siswati language. Proverbs are sayings that enrich the language because they are poetic, metaphoric and rhetoric in nature. They present structural, thematic and stylistic dimensions. They complement other folkloric aspects such as riddles, idioms, praises and folktales. What is observable and astounding on proverbs are their conciseness, definiteness and wittiness. Their oral nature is evident from their phonological, syntactic, lexicological and pragmatic levels.

Finnegan (1970: 389) asserts that in most African cultures imagery plays a major role especially in language discourse. Proverbs are the metaphorical expressions that are vital in a language to reflect figures of speech and imagery.

On the other hand, Mieder (1993: 5) regards proverbs as follows:

short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorization form and which is handed down from generation to generation.

Mthethwa (2014:162) reiterates Mieder's view when she defines proverbs as follows:

Tingemavi ekuhlakanipha nobe elwati
(*They are the words of wisdom or knowledge*)

Dorson (1972:119) holds this view about proverbs:

They are short and witty traditional expressions that arise as part of everyday discourse as well as in the more highly structure situation of education and judicial proceedings.

In the view of the above mentioned definitions, we observe that a proverb is a concise, fixed and witty saying in specific and general use, expressing commonly held thoughts, notions, opinions and views. The researcher summarises the aforementioned definitions and conclude that a proverb is a popular saying, with words of advice or warning. It is not possible to grasp the thematic meanings if the insight on the culture of the people is not known. Proverbs reflect dominant attitudes, values and beliefs of the nation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is used to answer the research questions that would help to achieve the objectives of the study. This study has employed both qualitative and quantitative methods to complement each other. It is based on personal interview and participant observations. Fieldwork research was undertaken to make a new collection of proverbs and observe them in performance in practical social situations. The social setting included formal and non-formal situations. Formal situations comprised conducted interviews, while informal situations involve casual listening to people's conversations noting the use of proverbs.

A sample number of proverbs that are categorized according to their themes are collected from two Inkomazi West Circuit high schools named after senior traditional leaders: Mjokwane and Manzolwandle. Manzolwandle was a senior traditional leader of Nxumalo - Mkhathjwa – Ndwandwe clan, while Mjokwane was of Ngomane – Mshika clan. The theoretical approach in themes is expected to be based on the following objectives:

- ♦ To provide broader knowledge about the exploration of themes in Siswati proverbs and help Emaswati nation to rediscover their culture, identity, fundamental principles of human life, norms, values and morals.
- ♦ To establish fundamental truth about the origins and significance of the proverbs in rekindling the indigenous knowledge systems of the nation and promoting, the culture of the nation.
- ♦ To give a structural classification of proverbs that will depict the various grammatical structures such as morphology, syntax and semantics.
- ♦ To promote the functionality of proverbs in various communities and to the nation at large.

RESULTS

It is noted that each school provided twenty three proverbs of different themes (Table 1). Marriage theme comprises 4 (17.39) and 3 (13.04) respectively, and a total of 7 (15.22%). Parenthood theme consists of 3 (13.04) and 2 (8.69). It is a total of 5 (10.87%). A theme on revenge gives 2 (8.69) and 1 (4.35). The total is 3 (6.52%). A

Table 1: A comparative table of the results

Themes	Manzolwandle		Mjokwane		Total Number of proverbs	Percentage
	Number of proverbs	Percentage	Number of proverbs	Percentage		
1. Marriage	4	17.39	3	13.04	7	15.22
2. Parenthood	3	13.04	2	8.69	5	10.87
3. Revenge	2	8.69	1	4.35	3	6.52
4. Threat	2	8.69	3	13.04	5	10.87
5. Unfaithfulness	2	8.69	2	8.69	4	8.70
6. Deception	4	17.39	3	13.04	7	15.22
7. Ingratitude	2	8.69	2	8.69	4	8.70
8. Pride	2	8.69	3	13.04	5	10.87
9. Fortune	2	8.69	0	0	2	4.35
10. Friendship	2	0	4	17.39	4	8.70
Total number: 10	23		23		46	100.00

theme on threat gives 2 (8.69) and 3 (13.04) respectively. The total is 5 (10.87%). A theme on unfaithfulness gives 2 (8.7) respectively, and a total of 4 (8.70%). Deception theme comprises 4 (17.39) and 3 (13.04) respectively. It gives a total of 7 (15.22%). A theme on ingratitude gives 2 (8.69) respectively, and a total of 4 (8.70). A theme on pride furnishes 2 (8.69) and 3 (13.04) respectively, and a total of 5 (10.87). Fortune as a theme is given 2 (8.69) and 0, and a total of 2 (4.35%). A theme on friendship comprises 0 and 4 (17.4). It is a total of 4 (8.70%).

The themes that are dominating in proverbs are marriage and deception with 15.22 percent each. The themes that came second are parenthood, threat and pride, with the total 10.87 percent each. The themes that came third are unfaithfulness, ingratitude and friendship, with the total of 8.70 percent each. What is generally evident in the results is that proverbs are well-known to the respondents because they orally presented and further categorized them according to their themes.

Proverbs from Mjokwane's Respondents

Marriage

The theme of marriage is presented by the following proverbs:

Uyofika kaMkhatsali, sidvwaba siyokuhaca (You will reach Mkhatsali's home and the skin-skirt will encircle you). This would be used mainly of a defiant unmarried woman, meaning that in marriage she will find people with more negative attitude and unacceptable behaviour. It is the hardship that a female usually come across within marriage, which makes her people hold this as a threat to insolent young girls.

Ihlonipha lapho ingayikuganela khona (A girl respects where she will not marry). Marriage is ultimate goal of many people. A girl grows up with expectations of getting married one day, but where and to whom she will be married to remains unknown. It will only be clear when marriage negotiations are about to commence. It is advised that she displays humanness and respect to all people irrespective of their cultural, genealogical and social background.

Umkhwenyana sigodvo sekuchuzula (The son-in-law is a log from which to chip). There was an understanding that when his people-in-

law were in difficulty, they were free to call upon him for assistance. He is also regarded as their member of the family. He is further expected to help the family without any conditions.

Parenthood

The theme of parenthood is outlined by the following proverbs:

Imbuti ilele etikwelizinyane (The goat is sleeping on the kid). The sleeping of the goat on its kid is a protective action. The saying is used, therefore, when a parent offers protection to a child, or when someone tries to protect another by offering excuses.

Intsandzane lenhle ngumakhofwa ngunina (A decent orphan is the one which is licked by the mother). It is well known that mothers are more tender and sympathetic towards their children. A mother is proficient of making great sacrifices for the wellbeing of her children, whereas a father may not care so much. A variant of this proverb is, *Inkhonyane lenhle ngulekhotfwa ngunina* (A worthy calf is one that is licked by the mother). The role of a mother is significant in any household.

Revenge

The theme of revenge is illustrated by the following proverbs:

Lunya lwabasha luyaphindzana (The harshness of young people is repaid). The field in which young people are likely to come to loggerheads is in love affairs. A young man whose girlfriend is taken away from him by another young man tries to repay the injury even if that does not bring back his lover. He derives satisfaction from the knowledge that he has had his revenge.

The proverb as recorded here in a short form. The full form is *Lunya lwabasha luyaphindzana, kantsi lwetalukwati luyaphindzana ngelugwayi* (The harshness of young people is repaid, that of old women is repaid in the matter of snuff). Having passed the age when they would worry about love, old women had their own field of quarrels. Then one might deliberately refuse snuff, a much loved thing, as a reprisal for the injury sustained from the other. The proverb is both a warning and a justification.

Threat

The theme of threat is portrayed by the following proverbs:

Ubolibamba lingashoni (Hold it [sun] that it does not set). When a child does wrong at home, he usually relies on his feet to carry him away from the wrath of the parents. The old people, however, do not bother to run after the child because they know that darkness will drive him or her child back home. Many children fear darkness. They believe that there is always something horrible, fierce and dangerous in the dark, waiting for an opportunity to pounce them.

Kuyokugcogca kuhlwa (Darkness will gather you). Although this saying is used mainly of children, it may be used with grown-up people, meaning that although they may be thick-headed and stubborn, darkness, hardships and unstable conditions will bring them to their senses. A variant of the saying is; *Kuyokubutsa kuhlwa* (Darkness will collect you) *Utawuphamba ungawotsi* (You will ignite it [fire], but you will not warm yourself at it). During the cold season, it is a common sight to see people set on fire in order to warm themselves. The one who took the trouble to set on fire is expected to be able to warm himself at it, as a reward for his endeavour. This proverb means that one will do the work but will not be compensated for his hard work.

Unfaithfulness

The theme of unfaithfulness is depicted by the following proverbs:

Wabika imbiba wabika libuti (He reports a field-mouse and then a field-rat). One of the pastimes of boys in the field is hunting field-mice which they roast and eat. A boy who reports to have seen a field-mouse, and then tells the others that is a field-rat and not a field-mouse, leaves the others in doubt as to what he has actually seen. This is used to a double-tongued person.

Bayishaya emuva bayishaye embili (They strike it [affair] behind and strike it in front). This is said of people whose word cannot be trusted, who will say one thing now then something quite opposed to that the next moment. They are people who will say this to this person and to another person something very different on the same subject. This describes a liar or two-tongued person.

Deception

The theme of deception is shown by the following proverbs:

Ikhohlisana ihlomile (It [army] betrays each other in arms). Combatants are likely to deceive one another during the battle, because they will run away leaving others behind to die, when they had promised each other to collectively fight any enemy. A variant of this proverb is *Emabutfo akhohlisana ahlomile* (The warriors deceived one another though armed).

Wangimunyisa umbele lofile (He made me suck a dead teat). Obviously, a dead teat will not produce milk. Therefore, the expression is used of one who treats others in a heartless manner or of one guilty of deception.

Wangetfusa ngenyoka lefile (He frightens me with a dead snake). This is said of one who attempts to frighten another by false pretence. A dead snake is harmless.

Ingratitude

The theme of ingratitude is illustrated by the following proverbs:

Umuntfu ubongwa asafile (A person is praised when dead). The usefulness of a person is not usually fully appreciated when he is still alive, and still renders the service which people take for granted. Once he goes the things which he used to do remain undone.

The proverb may be used when people act in an ungrateful manner to their benefactor. It may be used as an expression of encouragement to a person who tries to do well. Therefore, a person should not work expecting immediate praise. He must do what he feels right without in any way expecting praise to come his way.

Umlungisi utitsela sisila (The one who puts things right brings ill-luck upon himself). It is true that quite often one is not always rewarded in the proper way for doing the right thing. People who try to put things right, often finds themselves having fallen out of favour with the people they try to help. The acts of goodness are not always appreciated and often invoke abuse. Ingratitude goes with ill-behaviour and ill-manners.

Pride

The theme of pride is narrated by the following proverbs:

Lematfumbu lamnyama kayifi, kufa lematfumbu amhlophe (The one with black intestines does not die, but the one with white intestines dies). A pig is an omnivorous animal which eat everything. Its intestines therefore are not likely to be white. The pig does not die, however, because of the colour of its intestines. This expression is used of a person who is selective, who wants to pick and choose instead of accepting that which is placed before him. He who is selective will starve and die, but he who is not fastidious will not go hungry. A saying which may be used in the same sense is *Akwatiwa lokwanonisa ingulube* (It is not known what made the pig fat).

Ufaka inyongo nesinye (He wears a gall-sac and a bladder). This is said of a person with exaggerated idea of his own importance. The wearing of gall-sacs by herbalist is an indication of his success. When he adds on the bladder, which is an attempt on his part to mislead the people into believing that he is more important and powerful than he really is.

Utfwele lishoba (He has his tail up). A conceited person is described in this manner. He is likened unto an animal which carries its tail high up instead of in the ordinary way. A variant is *Utfwele umdlonga* (He is carrying the mane). It is a person who is pompous, self-centred and thick-headed.

Friendship

The theme of friendship is portrayed by the following proverbs:

Titfupha tiya emasini (It is the thumbs going for sour milk). One of the staple foods of the indigenous nation was, and still is in certain places, sour milk. Fresh milk is poured into calabashes. As the traditional people did not have modern utensils to pour the milk into, the calabash was used. They used thumbs to guide the milk. That is why the saying describes intimate friends.

Bucubu lobuhle buhamba ngabubili (Good waxbills go in pairs). Waxbills will always be observed to go in pairs. When one sits on the ground, the other waxbill remains on guard. If there is danger threatening, the guard sounds the alarm, and the little birds fly away. This is an advice that two people are able to do things better, because they are of assistance to one another.

Bucubu bufa ngabubili (Waxbills dies in pairs). It is noted that they are always together and there is always likelihood that danger befalls the pair. People who are friends, and are always together, are likely to get involved in the same mishap.

Imvilapho ivuna silondza (The groin pains in sympathy with the sore). This is said because the groin will be painful when one has a sore. This is regarded as an act of sympathy which brands the two as friends.

Proverbs from Manzowandle's Respondents

Marriage

The theme of marriage is outlined by the following proverbs:

Indzaba inendvodzana, uyise akanacala (The fault is with the son, the father is blameless). This expression indicates that the parents are not to blame for the faults of their children.

Umfundisi akamutali umfundisi (A minister does not beget a minister). This is an expression which has come into usage with the Christianisation of the indigenous people. A minister is regarded as a good, honest and well-disciplined man.

Lukhuni lutala umlotsa (Firewood gives birth to ash). When wood is burnt out, the results are ash. Whereas firewood is useful, ash is quite useless. The saying is used when a good person gets a worthless child. Goodness is compared to worthless in this proverb.

Akatalanga wabola ematfumbu (She did not give birth; her bowels became rotten). This is said of a person whose child's behaviour is very unsatisfactory, a child who is much unlike the parents.

Parenthood

The theme of parenthood is related by the following proverbs:

Ingwe ikhotsa emabala ayo lamhlophe nalamnyama (A leopard licks its sports, black and white). A leopard does not discriminate when it licks its sports. Black and white spots will be given similar attention. Similarly, parents should treat their children alike.

Akunyatsi yehlulwa litfole (No buffalo was ever defeated by its calf). The old buffalo manages its young and the human beings should do

so. A parent generally finds a way of managing the child. Elderly people are usually far more experienced than the young ones and thus have a definite advantage to manage them.

Akunyatsi yaphika nelitfole (No buffalo ever competed with its calf). This proverb means that the young are more vigorous and energetic than the old and, therefore capable of achieving much more.

Revenge

The theme of revenge is illustrated by the following proverbs:

Lizinyane lemvubu kalidliwanga yingwenya kwacweba titiba (The calf of a hippopotamus was never eaten by a crocodile and the pools remained clear). Crocodiles and hippopotami live in the water. The crocodile, if it should ever eat the hippopotamus calf, must expect trouble from the parent. The water cannot be clear because of the blood of the calf, and also because of the fight with the parent. Therefore when one does something which hurts extremely, one should expect vengeance to follow.

Mentiwa akakhohlwa kukhohlwa ument (The one offended never forgets, it is the offender who forgets). This is a simple, straightforward expression which means that when a person has been hurt by another, the injury is never forgotten. The remembrance of the injury remains in the mind long after the pain itself has been forgotten. The perpetrator of the injury, who is not the sufferer, quickly forgets because he never realizes how deeply felt the injury has been.

Although there are number of proverbs on revenge in Siswati language, it is known that retaliation, vindictiveness or vengefulness is out rightly discouraged.

Threat

The theme of threat is recorded by the following proverbs:

Komela elutsini njengentsetse (You will get dry on a stick like a grasshopper). Sometimes one may find a grasshopper spitted on a thorn or a sharp stick. A grasshopper thus spitted is in terrible circumstances, as it is denied food and it subjected to slow death by torture. This is used as a threat that a person will starve. It may be used of a person who is wasteful.

Libuke uligcine (Look at it [sun] for the last). These words were commonly heard from the mouths of kings when they sentenced people to death. A person was told to look at the sun for the last time before being killed, as he would not have another opportunity to see it. This is an indication that the situation is very critical.

Unfaithfulness

The theme of unfaithfulness is delineated by the following proverbs:

Imbulu lekhala ngemayiko lamabili (It is the monitor which cries with two voices). The expression describes an unfaithfulness person, just as a monitor may try to change its voice in order to mislead people.

Uhlafuna ngayo yombili imihlatsi (He chews with both jaws right and left). Many people are in the same habit of using only one side of the mouth for chewing. Some use the right, and others use the left. The expression is used of a person who seems to agree with everyone, a person who is vacillating, whose standpoint is never consistent. It is the theme which is based on disloyal actions which are opposite to the following acceptable values: loyal, trustworthy, reliable and truthful.

Deception

The theme of deception is recounted by the following proverbs:

Ungibambe ngeludzaka emehlweni (You hold me with mud on the eyes). This is used when one is indulging in deceit whilst seriously pretending to be telling the truth. A person who hold another on the eyes with muddy hands, expect that person to be temporarily blinded.

Wangitsela ngebulawu emehlweni (He threw the love charm into his eyes). This is used of deception, just as a person will throw the love charm into one's eyes to hide his real intentions.

Ungishaye ngemfe lephindziwe (He struck me with double sweet cane). This is used when one has been outwitted by deception.

Ukhala ngeliso linye (He cries with one eye). When a person cries, both eyes will water. There would be something wrong if only one eye is watered. The expression is used when a person pretends to be sorry when he is not.

Ingratitude

The theme of ingratitude is outlined by the following proverbs:

Umbeki wankhosi akabusi nayo (He who installs a king never rules with him). A person who has been instrumental in helping others is often forgotten and even be harmed by them, when they are in better circumstances.

Ingwe idla umnikati (The leopard devours its master). Some wild animals always remain wild. No amount of taming will make them lose their savage nature. Thus a leopard may turn upon its master and devour turns upon its master, it exhibits gross ingratitude. Furthermore, the expression is a warning against meddling with dangerous things.

Pride

The theme of pride is illustrated by the following proverbs:

Usifumbu ubona chachazela (The hunchback laughs at the one with tremors). People never seem to be aware of their shortcomings, but they are very quick to detect shortcomings of others. They may even go to the extent of making fun of such shortcomings. Thus a hunchback may laugh at a person who trembles.

Timfene tihlekana tiphongo (The baboons laugh at each other's foreheads). It is generally known that baboons have protruding foreheads. A baboon which laughs at the forehead of another baboon is unaware that its own forehead is the same as that of the other one. A variant is *Imfene ayitiboni bukhophoco* (A baboon does not see its own forehead).

Fortune

The theme of fortune is depicted by the following proverbs:

Cilo utishaye endvukwini (The lark has struck itself on the stick). The lark is not an easy bird to hit with a stick. If it hits itself against a stick, that is a fortunate occurrence.

Usekhatsi kwemhlane nembeleko (He is between the back and the baby-carrying skin). African woman had, and many of them still have, to work with their children on their backs. A goat skin was specially prepared for the purpose, and was called *imbeleko*. A child carried in this way appeared to be in comfortable circumstances. The saying is used of a person who is in comfortable circumstances.

Both proverbs are depicting the favourable, providential and advantageous situations about the life of an individual.

DISCUSSION

According to Finnegan (1970: 389-393), proverbs are a rich source of imagery and succinct expression on which more elaborated form can draw upon. She further mentions that the proverb is a classical, perfect and complete sentence in a language. It is a saying which is in a fixed form marked by syntactic and semantic structures. These proverbs are not limited to certain groups of people with certain characteristics.

Mokitimi (1991: 108) regards this as a semantic ambiguity in proverbs. Proverbs usage varies from one individual to another and this contributes to proverbs having more than one meaning. Mathumba (1988: 107) observes that there are several factors which cause a proverb to have more than one meaning and he calls this semantic indefiniteness. Proverbs are used as form of expression among the nation. They are history, norms, values, truth and culture of the nation. Proverbs make the language very rich.

Kasenene (1993: 30) contends that:

Proverbs are short and condensed standardised statement intended to comment on situations and containing the beliefs and the commonly accepted values of the society.

It is further explained that, of all forms of oral tradition, proverbs are the most philosophical and fundamental that they could be regarded as the poetry of the nation.

Mthethwa (2014: 192) expresses that when the researcher analyses the proverbs, the following aspects need to be considered:

- ♦ *Bugabazi (orality).*
- ♦ *Titfombemagama/ imifanekisomcondvo (imagery)*
- ♦ *Lulwimi etageni (language in proverbs) and*
- ♦ *Likhono lekucanjwa kwetaga (the technique of coining proverbs).*

Makhanya (2007:9) stresses the following statement about the proverbs:

Nawutisebentisa emishweni tibonakala ngekutsi tingayivumeli ingucuko.

She emphasizes that the proverbs have a structural form which they adhere to, depending on syntactic, morphological and semantic constructions.

However, the fundamental truth is that proverbs reflect the actions, history, and way of life of people over a time and how their actions impacted positive or negative on their current lives.

They influence the character and behaviour of their future generations. This proverb implies that genes and behaviour are inherited. This proverb is associated with a behaviour that future children will behave like their parents.

CONCLUSION

Proverbs are simple, complex or compound meaningful sentences that are static in form but dynamic when employed at various spatial and temporal situations. African proverbs mirror the past, present and the future. They also demonstrate some universal or cultural truth that is familiar to the hearers or readers.

Proverbs are used to describe human nature and behaviour abounds in the language of the African continent. Sometimes they are used to caution people against certain form of behaviour, at other time proverbs are used as an encouragement. African proverbs are used as means of moral instruction at all levels of society and to educate the importance of respect to everyone.

In the same way, the contemporary African writers are aware of their heritage contained in the communal wisdom of their people. This communal wisdom is realized in their language use in their literary works which are full of imagery and rich, vibrant and profound in the use of figurative language which is bound in the use of proverbs as an important literary device. Proverbs are the most popular art of language. When a language develops, new proverbs will emerge which will be in line with the language usage of the time. Proverbs in the past were used by elderly people in societies to educate children and to instil good morals and character. Proverbs were used by people to correct a certain behaviour which was identified as not of acceptable norms within the society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the thematic exploration of proverbs be extended to those of con-

temporary period of technology and modernization. The structure and functions need emphasis from various theoretical points of view such as structuralism and functionalism. The proverbs are the short, witty and informative expressions that should arise as everyday discourse. They should be continuously regarded as a summary of the experiences of given people. They contain the fundamental truth about life in general and human nature in particular, which people have observed. Various proverbs apply to different situations and are an embodiment of the distilled collective experience of the community in such situations. Proverbs originate from multi-faceted sources. One major situation is where people live and how they live.

Proverbs are meant to guide and teach the society by imparting and transmitting values and beliefs of the nation. They are condensed, standardised philosophical statements that comprise implicit and explicit imagery. Most of them are used to approve socially accepted behaviour, while others are used to disapprove or ridicule the actions of those who deviate from prescribed social norms.

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