



Colloquial Language in Mqapheli Mngadi's Editorial Cartoons: A Socio-stylistic Critique

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Abstract

This paper considers colloquial language in Mqapheli Mngadi's cartoons. It has been discovered that Mngadi uses colloquialism in his cartoons and the aim of this paper is to uncover to what merit, effect, and extent he does this. Since there is generally an observed gap on scholarship when it comes to cartoons in the indigenous African languages of South Africa, it is believed that this paper will contribute to scientific knowledge. The study is done through the lens of socio-stylistics. On the other hand, textual analysis, as a qualitative research technique, is adopted as the study's research paradigm since cartoons are primary sources. From the analysis of data (cartoons), it was demonstrated how Mngadi uses different categories of colloquial words, and these include: word-based derived colloquial words, colloquial loan words, tsotsitaal, shortened names, and nicknames. It will also be demonstrated how each of these colloquial words are used stylistically to complement the informal nature of cartoons.

Keywords: *Colloquial Language; Mqapheli Mngadi; Editorial Cartoons; Socio-stylistic Critique*

Introduction

Language plays a very important role in cartoons. It is through this medium of communication that cartoonists can convey their ideas to the audience. The understanding of the audience generally informs the cartoonists language usage/choice of words. Cartoons are characterised by colloquial language because of their informal nature, and Mngadi's cartoons are of no exception. Words are a powerful tool that writers use to express themselves clearly (Malinga, 2000: 48). The way in which they express themselves through words reveals their uniqueness and something about their style. This paper intends to investigate the use of colloquial words in Mngadi's cartoons and the stylistic significance these words have on the analysed cartoons. It is for this reason that the study is done through the socio-stylistic perspective.

This paper is motivated by the identified gap on the genre of cartoons in the indigenous African languages of South Africa. So far, there seems to be less studies that have been conducted on this genre. Dlamini's (2019) master's dissertation titled *Some Linguistic Features in Mqapheli Mngadi's Cartoons* is the first notable contribution in such a topic. Other contributions, which are from this study, include

Mtumane & Dlamini (2021) who analyse different types of sentences and their effect in Mngadi's cartoons, and Dlamini (2022) who considers the tenor of discourse as a linguistic feature in Mngadi's cartoons. Here, the scholar discusses Mngadi's satiric and humorous nature as a cartoonist.

It is evident from the highlighted studies above that, even though there is some scholarship on Mngadi's cartoons, there is no study that has been made on the cartoonist's colloquial language in his cartoons. This paper is thus a contribution to scientific knowledge in this sense as it will add to the existing literature. Qualitative research method is adopted since data is collected, organised, and interpreted from Mngadi's selected editorial cartoons.

Method

The study adopts the qualitative research method. Central to this method is the idea that meaning is a social construct that is a result of people's interaction with the world (Merriam, 2002: 3). This is in contrary to quantitative research method which assumes that reality is single and fixed hence its quantitative measurement. Qualitative research places interest to words rather than quantification in the analysis of data (Hammersley, 2013: 1). Kitto *et al.* (2008: 243) summarise the essence of qualitative research by stating:

Most commonly, qualitative research is concerned with the systematic collection, ordering, description and interpretation of textual data generated from talk, observation or documentation. Qualitative research methods include the techniques of interviewing, observation, and document analysis. Its goal is to explore the behaviour, processes of interaction, and the meanings, values and experiences of purposefully sampled individuals and groups in their "natural" context.

The above scholarly insight highlights that qualitative research utilises different techniques to collect, order, describe and interpret data. While some of the techniques, such as talk or observation focus on interpreting data empirically, techniques such as documentation are centred on interpreting data based on content analysis. The study at hand adopts the latter technique since data is analysed from doing content analysis on the selected editorial cartoons.

Socio-stylistics

The concept 'socio-stylistics' is made up of two words; the word 'socio' (derived from the adjective social) and the word 'stylistics'. While the adjective social is used to refer to the society and people's lives (*Macmillan English Dictionary*, 2002: 1358), stylistics focuses on the manipulation of language for artistic effects. It is an approach that focuses on the use of language in literary texts (Dlamini, 2019: 17). With this understanding, the concept of socio-stylistics can be explained, in a nutshell, as the examination of language in social groups and its significance. This can be in literary texts or in other discourses. If it is literary discourse, the focus becomes on the analysis of language in relation to society and how this has impact on style. Kadhim *et al.* (2022) argue that there is a link between sociolinguistics and style since the two can depend on each other.

Ashipu (2010: 114) explains that the concept of socio-stylistics, a sub-branch of linguistic stylistics, is relatively a new concept. Remarking on this concept, he states:

Socio-stylistics may be used as a cover term to refer to the analysis of varieties of language (registers). Socio-stylistics examines critically the language of social groups in various social contexts.

A similar perspective on the concept of socio-stylistics is maintained by Mubarak (2023: 955) who avers:

... socio-stylistics might be defined as a subfield of linguistics that investigates the characteristics of different language varieties in relation to their specific applications in various contexts. It makes an effort to establish principles that are able to account for the particular linguistic decisions that individuals and social groups make in their communication.

The two perspectives above support the notion that socio-stylistics is a sub-branch of linguistics. The approach investigates language in relation to its societal contextual use. These societal contexts can also be depicted in literary genres such as cartoons. Language varieties can also be studied in cartoons since cartoons are made up of dialogue, which serves as a channel of communication between characters. In this study, colloquial language, which is a language variation, is examined from Mngadi's cartoons. This is also an attempt to investigate its significance in the cartoons.

The analysis of colloquial language in Mngadi's cartoons

Cuddon (1991: 156) defines colloquialism as everyday speech or writing that can be expressed through a word, phrase, or expression. Hill and Watson (2000: 50) state that this expression is informal and is not exactly like slang. Baldick (2001: 44) consolidates from the views of the two scholars above and states that colloquialism is: "The use of informal expressions appropriate to everyday speech rather than to the formal writing, and differing in pronunciation, vocabulary, or grammar". The insights of the three scholars above highlight the nature of colloquialism. It is an informal language that is used in everyday life and in informal contexts. Mngadi's cartoons consist of colloquial words and this section is dedicated to analysing this. The use of colloquial language in Mngadi's cartoons is considered from these following categories: word-based derived colloquial words, colloquial loan words, tsotsitaal, shortened names, and nicknames.

Word-based derived colloquial words

Word-based derived colloquial words refer to colloquial words that are derived from formal words such as nouns for instance. In other words, these are origin words that are modified to be colloquial words. The first examples of such words are analysed from Cartoon 1 below:

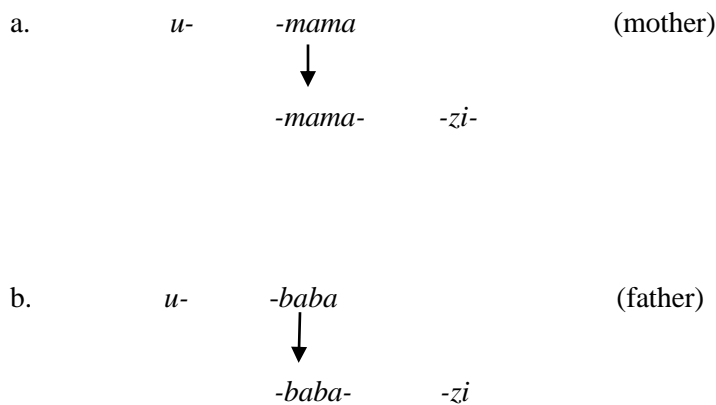


Figure 1 – Cartoon 1

(Mngadi, 2014)

The cartoon above presents a conversation between Bhoza and his wife. They are discussing about Generations, which is a local television show that is televised during weekdays on SABC 1. Historically, Generations is one of the well-known and most watched television shows in South Africa. Bhoza's wife makes mention of 'Ngamla' in her speech. Ngamla's real name is Menzi Ngubane. He was once one of the prominent characters in Generations and a fans' favourite. Ngubane has featured in several prestigious television shows and movies in the past, such as *Ubambo Lwami*, *Yizo Yizo*, *Soul City*, *How to Steal 2 Million*, *Ashes to Ashes*, to name a few. One of the television shows, he has featured in is *Isibaya*.

In the cartoon above, as they are conversing, Bhoza calls his wife 'mamazi' and his wife calls him 'babazi'. The two names are examples of colloquial words as they are informal words. 'Mamazi' is derived from 'umama' (mother) and 'babazi' from 'ubaba' (father). The suffix *-zi* is added to form these new words. The two words are derived in this manner:



The illustrations above indicate how the colloquial loan words 'mamazi' and 'babazi' are formed from original nouns. The word 'mamazi' for instance, is derived from the isiZulu noun 'umama' (mother) as indicated above. The pre-prefix *u-* is omitted because isiZulu names are used without pre-prefixes in sentences when a person is called. The syllable *-zi-* is used to make this word colloquial. This suffix does not have any linguistic significance except the role it plays in making the word 'mamazi' to be colloquial. This is the same case with the colloquial word 'babazi'. This word is derived from the original isiZulu noun 'ubaba'. The prefix *u-* is omitted while *-zi-* is suffixed.

It was explained above that colloquial words are everyday words used in informal contexts. This is evident in figure 1 above. Bhoza and his wife are engaged in an informal conversation at home and relaxed, hence they call each other 'mamazi' and 'babazi'. The use of these colloquial words demonstrates that the two characters have a good and healthy marriage. They are comfortable around each other; hence they call each other with such names. It would be rare, if not impossible, for a couple that is not in good terms to call one another 'babazi' and 'mamazi'. In the context of Bhoza and his wife, they use these names to express their affection for one another.

Colloquial loan words

The use of colloquialism is also demonstrated through loan words in Mngadi's cartoon. In a general sense, loan words are borrowed words. They are words that are originally from other languages but modified and used in a certain language (Li-na, 2016: 209). They are borrowed from a particular language and used in another (Brown & Miller, 2013: 271, *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 2013: 908). This may be a result of word shortage in a language or because of new lexical sets formed by people. The concept of 'colloquial loan words' is used to denote the idea of loan words that have a colloquial nature.

Mngadi uses colloquial loan words in his cartoons. The example below demonstrates this:



Figure 2 – Cartoon 2

(Mngadi, 2014)

In the above cartoon, Mjibha makes plans on how he is going to get to his desired destination. His words are made up of several colloquial words. The word ‘*sengidenke*’, in the statement “*eintlek, sengidenke kahle*” (Actually, I have thought carefully), is an example of a colloquial word as it is generally used informally by isiZulu speakers. It is made of the isiZulu syllables *sengi-* (I have already-) and the Afrikaans derived part *-denke* (dink-think). By using this word, Mjibha thus informally expresses the idea that he has thought carefully. The word ‘*eintlek*’, on the other hand, is from Afrikaans word ‘*eintlik*’, meaning ‘actually’. It is used as a colloquial word in this instance.

Mngadi uses these colloquial words to give his readers an idea about the setting (place) of this cartoon. It is rare for isiZulu speaking people in the rural areas to speak like this. It is usually isiZulu speaking people from urban areas who generally speak in this manner. This is usually because they reside in multi-ethnic environments.

Tsotsitaal

Tsotsitaal is one of the informal language expressions evident in South Africa. It is usually relative and context specific, as it is developed distinctively in different environments. Alluding to this, Molamu (1995: 139) remarks:

Tsotsitaal is essentially a language made up of elements of Afrikaans and other languages spoken in South Africa. As a pidgin, it developed rapidly as a means of verbal communication between people of different ethnic and racial backgrounds in the urban milieu.

Even though Tsotsitaal is purely a sociolinguistic entity, this aspect tends to also be evident in different literary genres, with cartoons as one of the examples. The use of Tsotsitaal is also evident in Mngadi’s cartoons. The first example, in figure 2 above, is examined from Mjibha’s speech when he uses the word ‘*ngizosaha*’. This word literally means ‘I will saw’ but as a colloquial word, it means ‘I will ask for’. By saying: “*Ngizosaha i-lift ngeyi-12 noma ngeyi-15 kulamabhari aseKZN*” (I will saw a lift on the 12th or the 15th from those stupid KZN fellows), Mjibha is saying he will ask for a lift from the stupid KZN fellows on the 12th or 15th. The last example of a colloquial word in Mjibha’s speech is

'*kulamabhari*'. The word '*ibhari*' is generally used in isiZulu to label someone who is regarded as stupid. In the cartoon, Mjibha uses this word to label the people, whom he calls as 'fellows from KZN', as fools. His language portrays him as someone who likes to use other people and rely on them for benefits. His words also suggest that he is self-centred and regards himself better than other people, even those he seeks help from. It is irrational for one to label the people he wants help from as 'fools'.

It is important to take note that words such as '*ukudenka*' (to think) and '*ukusaha*' (to ask for), highlighted above, can also be regarded as slang or tsotsitaal (tsotsi language). Even though this is the case, they can also be regarded as isiZulu colloquial words because they are informal expressions. It is the same case with words such as '*ukugabha*' (to abandon) and '*ukuncanda*' (to take), for instance. They are both tsotsitaal and slang words and, since they are informal expressions, they can be classified as isiZulu colloquial words. After struggling to draw a distinction between slang and tsotsitaal, Ngwenya (1995: 28) confirms this by remarking: "There could be no serious and persuasive discussion of tsotsitaal without necessarily referring to slang, as they both, we believe, belong to the same category – that of colloquial varieties".

Shortened names

Mngadi's cartoons also consist of shortened people's names, which are also examples of colloquial words. Shortened names are generally used informally in everyday language. They are used by people who are friendly to each other, especially peers. The following examples of shortened names are common and are generally used informally in isiZulu:

Sibusiso > *Sbu*

Sizwe > *Zwe*

Siyabonga > *Siya*

Dumisani > *Dumi*

Bongekile > *Bongi*

Mlungisi > *Mlu*

Mduduzi > *Mdu*

Sibongile > *Sbo*

Nqobile > *Nqobi*

Ayabonga > *Aya*

Samukelilise > *Samu*

Sphesihle > *Sphe/sihle*

An example of shortened names is evident in Cartoon 3 below. Zuma’s words to Mugabe are considered:



Figure 3 – Cartoon 3

(Mngadi, 2015)

The cartoon above presents a conversation between Robert Mugabe and Jacob Zuma. Robert Mugabe, at the time, was the president of Zimbabwe and Jacob Zuma that of South Africa. Both of them are no longer presidents of their respective countries. In the cartoon, Mugabe is asking Zuma about the rumours of xenophobia. Responding to Mugabe’s question, Zuma calls him ‘Rob’ which is the shortened version of Robert. This demonstrates how relaxed and comfortable he is around Mugabe. Zuma’s use of this shortened version may also suggest that he has good relations with Mugabe. This is seen even from his facial expression. He is portrayed smiling as he addresses Mugabe in Figure 3. It is for this reason that colloquialism is associated with joy and calmness. Whenever it is used, individuals are usually in a good and healthy relationship.

Another example of the use of shortened names is observed from Cartoon 4:



Figure 4 – Cartoon 4

(Mngadi, 2015)

The cartoon above depicts a scenario where there seems to be a penis transplant having taken place. The doctor seems to be testing the success of the operation by touching the erected penis. The patient in the cartoon addresses the doctor as ‘doc’. The complete form of this shortened name is doctor. One cannot use this shortened version in formal contexts. It is used informally just like the shortened people’s names above. The patient uses this shortened name as he is in a relaxed mood, seeing the doctor to be tickling him.

Nicknames

Mngadi also uses nicknames to personalise some characters in his cartoons. *MacMillan English Dictionary* (2002: 956) explains a nickname as an informal name that one receives from friends, family, colleagues, teammates, and so on. They are names that are given to people based on appearance, personality traits, or actions (Mtumane, 2005: 39). The definitions highlight that nicknames are part of informal language, and, because of that, they can be regarded as an element of colloquialism.

Cartoon 5 below serves as the first example to analyse in demonstrating Mngadi’s use of nicknames in his cartoons:



Figure 5 – Cartoon 5

(Mngadi, 2014)

The cartoon above depicts a man who is nicknamed ‘Mjibha’ (alluded to earlier in this section) who is getting off a delivery truck. The word ‘Mjibha’ is a common isiZulu name generally used to refer to Johannesburg. It is stated above that nicknames can be given based on someone’s actions. Mjibha is called by this nickname because of his habit of going to Johannesburg (Gauteng) very often. In Figure 2, discussed earlier, he is seen planning for a trip from KwaZulu-Natal to Johannesburg. The following cartoon also supports this as it shows him boasting that he finally made it to Johannesburg without the help of what he calls ‘stupid fellows from KZN’:



Figure 6 – Cartoon 6

(Mngadi, 2012)

Another example of a nickname is examined from the following cartoon:



Figure 7 – Cartoon 7

(Mngadi, 2014)

The character in the above cartoon is nicknamed ‘Masaka’. The name ‘Masaka’ is the plural of the singular ‘*isaka*’, meaning a sack. It is not clear in the cartoon why he is called by this name but, in isiZulu colloquial ‘*isaka*’, is used to refer to someone who is not good at playing soccer. This may suggest that Masaka is not good at playing soccer although a fan of Orlando Pirates, as suggested by the flag of this club next to him. The nickname might also have been given to signify Masaka’s appearance. Fat people are generally regarded as shapeless just like a sack. Moreover, sacks are designed to carry heavy objects. They become heavy to carry with those objects inside. The nickname Masaka may thus also signify that he has lots of weight.

Another example illustrating Mngadi’s use of nicknames is examined from the following cartoon:



Figure 8 – Cartoon 8

(Mngadi, 2015)

The cartoon above illustrates two nicknames: the boy dragging the older woman is labelled ‘Ben 10’ and the woman trying to flee from the boy is labelled ‘Sugar-mama’. These are modern nicknames given to boys and women because of their physical appearances and actions or habits. The nickname Ben 10 emanates from television cartoons where the main character is a very young boy called Ben 10. People are thus given the name Ben 10 to indicate that they are young. The nickname Sugar-mama, on the other hand, is given to an old woman who has money. ‘Sugar’ symbolises money and ‘mama’ an older woman. Hence, the name means an old woman that has money. These names are often used to refer to an old woman (Sugar-Mama) who is in a love relationship with a young man (Ben 10).

In the cartoon above, the old woman seems tired of the relationship she has with the young boy, while the latter still wants to be continuing with the relationship, hence the old lady is depicted running

away and the young boy pulling her back. The presence of an unmade bed in the background suggests that this pair might have been engaging in sexual activity, which the woman is tired of while the boy still wants to continue. The scenario suggests that elderly women, who are involved in this kind of relationship, may soon get tired of the activity, while young men might still be having the strength and stamina to continue.

The practice of old women and young men engaging in sexual relationships is one of the practices that has developed to a large extent in most communities. Many people condemn it as it clashes with the values and norms of the African society. Culture, within the African society, perceives such acts as immoral and blame is usually placed on women in such cases as much is expected from them. They are regarded as old people who are supposed to lead by example. By engaging in sexual relationships with younger men, their sanity is questioned and condemned.

Young men, on the other hand, seem to enjoy these kinds of relationships as they do not only benefit sexually, but financially also. One can argue that these young men are motivated by financial benefits more than anything else, to engage in such relationships. If there were no financial benefits, some would probably not be involved with older women. The sanity of these young men is questionable and condemned as well. It is generally regarded as immoral for people to engage in sexual relationships for financial benefits, according to the norms of the African society.

The last example to be considered, illustrating Mngadi's use of nicknames, is observed from the cartoon below:



Figure 9 – Cartoon 9

(Mngadi, 2018)

The female character in the cartoon above is labelled as 'Slay queen'. This is a nickname generally given to women who like to dress in expensive clothes, have expensive hairdos, spend a lot of money on expensive items, and so forth. One of the meanings of the word 'slay' is killing someone brutally. In the context of the name 'Slay queen', slaying is associated with overpowering or being on a prestigious level. The nickname 'Slay queen' is thus used to describe a woman who overpowers people through the way she presents herself. This signifies the idea that she presents herself in a glamorous way that people cannot avoid noticing. Her portrayed expensive look and high standard of living make her distinct and above others.

The cartoon above highlights some of the effects of being a slay queen. Most of these women focus on spending too much on expensive items and end up with nothing. This idea is demonstrated in Figure 9 above. The female character, who is Slay queen, is asking to receive some item on credit and this is after she has previously spent a lot of money on expensive alcohol.

The examples above demonstrate the evidence of colloquial words in Mngadi's cartoons. One of the elements of cartoons is informality and Mngadi's employment of colloquialism is to ensure the success of this in his cartoons, as Cuddon (1991: 156) affirms: "The colloquial style is plain and relaxed". This contributes to making the cartoons exciting to read.

Conclusion

Since informality is one of the requirements of cartoons, the employment of colloquialism ensures that the requirement is met as the cartoons were discovered to consist of a variety of colloquial words. These include word-based colloquial words, colloquial loan words, tsotsitaal, shortened names, and nicknames. The use of these varieties played an important role in highlighting the setting and social context of the analysed cartoons. Their use was also instrumental in making the cartoons to be relatable and interesting to read.

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