

THE TONGA ART OF *KULIBANDA*: A LITERARY AND LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Framed within the broader context of two not so related theoretical lenses – literary theory and linguistic theory – the paper seeks to characterise Tonga practice of kulibanda as a language-based artistic expression for its sociocultural, literary and linguistic significance among the Tonga people. Couched within Austin’s speech act theory, Levison’s politeness principle and literary theory, this brief assessment attempts to bring into the spotlight unique characteristics of kulibanda, which in ordinary speech would be judged as flouting the maxims of politeness, deference and cultural appropriateness. Having considered the material potency of kulibanda collected from online platforms and occurring in real-life situation, it is insightful to conclude that the artistic clamour, stylistic flexibility and the linguistic sensibilities of kulibanda transform this piece of art beyond its traditional theoretical enclave of oral literature into the structured linguistic materiality for a shared sociocultural knowledge, histories and meaning making enterprise among the Tonga people.

Keywords: *Kulibanda, Politeness Principle, Rematerialisation, Tonga Arts, Onomastics, Kuyabila, Clan Name, Translanguaging, Verbal Art, Excremental Vision, Speech Act Theory, Imagery*

Introduction

In 1980 Chilala, one of the researchers of this article, went to his ancestral village in Chikankata to spend the school holiday. At the village, his favourite playmate was one of his first cousins, Godfrey. One late morning the two of them went to the *mpulasi* or farm (belonging to Godfrey’s family) on the edge of the village. They harvested some maize to roast and boil at the village.

As the sun rose past mid-day, Godfrey said it was time to return to the village. As the two boys walked back to the village carrying the maize Godfrey suddenly broke the silence with shouts of ‘Ndime Bbenkele! Ndime Musonda Nsima!’ (‘I am Bbenkele...I

am Musonda Nsima...'). The shouts were so loud that the people in the village heard them. Being from Lusaka city, Chilala thought it unacceptable for his cousin to disturb the peace; so he grabbed his cousin and told him to stop being unruly. To his surprise and embarrassment, however, Godfrey was undeterred: he raised his voice even louder and the echoes rung through the bush and the village.

When the two boys arrived in the village, Chilala was apprehensive. He expected an angry reaction from the elderly people in the village. To his surprise, no one talked about Godfrey's 'offensive' shouts. Instead Godfrey's mother welcomed them back and served them lunch. It was only years later that Chilala understood what Godfrey did that day: he was simply engaging in *kulibanda*, or self-praise, by calling himself Bbenkele – whatever that meant – and 'musonda nsima' which translates to 'one who is able to divine when the *nsima* [food] is ready.' In essence he was claiming that he had already divined that lunch was ready and it was time to go home and eat. In addition, he was announcing his imminent arrival in the village.

It might also be argued that Godfrey was alerting his mother that he and his cousin would be home soon and that she needed to have the meal ready. While *kulibanda* need not involve shouting as in the case related above, it is important to note that it is generally directed at an audience – although in rare circumstances one might engage in it while alone for the purpose of self-motivation. Whatever the case, the art is accepted among the Tonga as part of their *zilengwa* (customs or cultural practices).

This article concerns itself with *kulibanda*: its place among Tonga verbal arts, its characteristics and function in Tonga society. It is a sociolinguistic phenomenon associated with the Tonga and is performed in the ciTonga language. The sociolinguistics of Tonga extends beyond the traditionally prescribed enclaves of Southern Province to include some rural parts of Central Province, and recent studies have reported significant proliferation of speakers across the linguistic landscapes of Zambia (Jimaima, 2016). For its linguistic classification, Tonga is classified as M64a owing to the fact that the language belongs to group sixty (60) of zone 'M' and it is indicated as the fourth in the group consisting four languages, which include ciLenje, ciSoli, cilla and ciTonga. Additionally, Zambian Tonga is marked as dialect 'a' to show that it is the first dialect of the language Tonga (see Guthrie, 1967).

With regard to dialectical distribution, Tonga has two major geographical dialectical clusters; the Valley Tonga and the Plateau Tonga. The Valley Tonga is spoken in Gwembe, Sinazongwe and Siavonga among other village districts while the Plateau Tonga is spoken in Mazabuka, Monze, Pemba, Choma, Kalomo some parts of Livingstone, Kabwe rural and some parts of Mumbwa District. It is worth noting, however, that a form of Valley Tonga is also spoken in the northern part of Zimbabwe in around the Binga, Hwange, Gokwe and Kariba districts of Zimbabwe (Nkolola-Wakumelo, 2013: 82). Despite the said dialectical variations, *kulibanda* as a cultural artefact permeates the entire confederacy of the Tonga society. However, for the sake of contextualisation, the current study used for its investigation the material of *kulibanda* arising from the Plateau Tonga mainly spoken in Monze District.

It is equally revealing to underscore the sociology of the Tonga community. For, as Kress (2010) guides, a comprehensive appreciation of the meanings of any given cultural output is said to arise from a shared sociocultural knowledge and history of the people. It is, therefore, insightful to give context to the intersectionality of the people, the material culture and the *kulibanda*. The Tonga people of southern Zambia are known for the twin practices of cattle herding and farming, hence, Colson (2006: 4) describes them as ‘subsistence hoe-cultivators with some stock.’ They have been successful in these endeavours largely because cattle rearing and agriculture (maize growing) are an integral part of the Tonga cultural ethos. It is almost impossible to find a Tonga who does not glorify hard work particularly as exhibited through successful agricultural and cattle-rearing endeavours. Hence, generally speaking, poverty is defined in terms of one’s lack of cattle or failure to use land productively. It is this apparent glorification of wealth, particularly, one predicated on cattle rearing, which we suggest gives credence to *kulibanda*.

While it is recognised that there exists a relationship between wealth and the expression of verbal arts among the Tonga (see Michelo, 2016), it is contested here that there are other less known aspects of the Tonga culture. In the field of verbal art, the Tonga boast of a wealth of unique practices including *kuyabila*, *kweema* and *kulibanda*. However, it is common for *kuyabila* and *kweema* artists to engage in *kulibanda* before performing. A number of Tonga scholars have researched into the art of *kuyabila* (Chibbalo, 1986; Michelo, 2016), which is a form of traditional poetry sung to audiences. However, so far, no scholarship has gone into researching on the art of *kulibanda*.

Being mindful of the foregoing, and given the cultural significance of *kulibanda* among the Tonga, the article foregrounds *kulibanda* by analysing a collection of *kulibanda* renditions drawn both from the presenters’ personal experience as Tongas and from other sources such as Tonga social media forums. The paper situates *kulibanda* in the Tonga socio-cultural context and interrogates its role socially and culturally as well as its linguistic and literary significance. The attempt at this analysis is to find common ground among the various expressions of *kulibanda* with a view to identifying features that would be considered characteristic of *kulibanda* both as an art and channel of linguistic expression. Generally, *kulibanda* may be performed by any member of the society and does not require special qualifications and skills, although it is generally practised more by male members of the Tonga society than female ones. One need not be wealthy to engage in *kulibanda*. Be that as it may, for one to produce an impressive act of *kulibanda* they must have the ability to manipulate and appropriate language. For the purposes of categorisation, *kulibanda* is a product of the Tonga oral tradition – in the same way as riddles, *kuyabila*, *kutembaula*, *twaano*, *kweema* and or proverbs. Like the other forms of Tonga folklore, *kulibanda* requires an audience – it is not intended for self-consumption.

Kulibanda: A Conceptual Appraisal

Kulibanda is a form of verbal art in the same category as other forms of folklore such as folktales, myths, riddles and proverbs and other related forms of verbal expression. What distinguishes these forms of aesthetic expression is that, as Bascom (1955: 246)

argues, ‘their medium of expression is the spoken word’ and they are characterised by ‘the creative use of language’ (Chilala, 2018: 206). Although verbal art could include literature expressed in the form of the written word, in this regard, the distinguishing feature is that these artistic expressions are spoken.

Although *kulibanda* uses language or expressions that might be used in ordinary conversation, it is different from ordinary conversation in the sense that, just as in the case of proverbs, riddles, poetry and folktales, the language employed is chosen carefully and purposefully to achieve a specific end. *Kulibanda* has distinctive features because of its style of delivery, which may take the form of choice of vocabulary and idiom, use of figurative language such as imagery and metaphor or simile, formalised openings and closings which as Bascom argues ‘are absent in ordinary conversation’ (1955: 247).

Verbal art is not only intangible and dynamic but also differs from written literature or art in its method of creation and production. While written literature is essentially composed using writing as a method, verbal art such as *kulibanda* is largely characterised by improvisation. In addition, while written literature is composed of an imaginary audience in mind, *kulibanda* as a verbal art depends on the availability of an actual audience to be of any significance, or to even make sense. Audience feedback or reaction might cause the producer of verbal art to adjust the content of their delivery. *Kulibanda* then, just like most other verbal arts, possesses the element of adaptability.

Kulibanda as an audience-dependent form of artistic expression presupposes and entails that the speaker and the audience must share cultural common ground for the product to be understood and appreciated. As the story of Chilala at the village shared above illustrates, he did not appreciate what his cousin was doing because at the material time, he did not know about *kulibanda*. The people in the village, on the other hand, perfectly understood what Godfrey said and its function. In order for the art of *kulibanda* to thrive or even be appreciated by the audience, there must be a shared interpretive frame between the performer and the audience – which often means having a shared culture (see Bauman, 1975; Chilala, 2010; Chilala, 2018).

Generally, *kulibanda* is a form of self-praise, self-introduction, self-assertion or self-motivation performed with a view to drawing attention, admiration, envy or recognition. It is not poetic in nature, though it does have some qualities associated with poetry, such as imagery and other forms of figurative language. The term *kulibanda* has the morphological structure *ku-liband-a*. Derivatives include *ko-liband-a*, *li-band-e* (praise yourself); *waliband-a* (‘he/she has praised himself or herself’, or ‘you have praised yourself’) It could be viewed as a cultural practice that articulates discourses of self-assertiveness and self-awareness in the broader panegyric and encomiastic context of the Tonga milieu. Generally, the sociological context of *kulibanda* shows a proclivity towards men; hence, *kulibanda* is associated more with masculinity than femininity, as is shown in the discussion below. The dominance of a patriarchal symbolism in the Tonga economic and socio-cultural cosmos implicates the active social actors of *kulibanda*, and largely de-centres the female folk from performing this socio-cultural art. That is not to say, however, that women or young ladies may not engage in *kulibanda*.

Kulibanda should not be confused with another form of Tonga expression of praise called *kutembaula*. While the latter is panegyric in nature and function it, however, is a form of praise directed at another person rather than oneself as in the case of *kulibanda*. *Kutembaula* is a form of praise which may take the form of giving a person traditional names. Hence, it is also associated with praising chiefs and other traditional leaders. However, even ordinary individuals may be subjects of praise especially when they are considered special or are achievers.

Kutembaula, it is important to note, may also be directed at a collective, especially a clan. All the ten clans of the Tonga are associated with particular forms of *kutembaula*. For example, the Bacindu clan, whose totem is the lion, can be praised with a variety of titles, among them: ‘*Bana sikankatilwa ulalikankatila mwini...*The offspring of the meat-chopper chops up the meat for himself’ (Mukanzubo Kalinda Institute, 2011: 743). The Badenda clan, also known as Bakkuli, are associated with the elephant. Hence, the praise they received is associated with the elephant and its characteristics. For example, ‘*Bana Syaalyoonda* (singular, *Muna Syaalyoonda*)...the elephant leaves a large footprint crushing anything it steps on;’ ‘*Bana Simamvwa/Muna Simamvwa...*they eat even thorn trees or thorn bushes (*mamvwa*) without suffering harm’ (2011: 744).

However, even animals that might not be very popular are adopted as clan totems, in which case the praise focuses on the positive characteristics of the animal. The Baloongo or monkey clan are associated with the monkey’s trickery and are thus praised as ‘*Bana Nkuna...*’ They may also be praised thus: ‘*Mbana coona bukwazi, balijalila mbabowa...* They sleep with the door open, those who lock it are cowards., Sometimes, the negative attributes are transformed into positive ones, as in the case of the Bantanga clan whose totem is the cow. As the cow is well known for releasing gas, the Bantanga are sometimes praised thus: ‘*Mbana mbala cikwasa kumatako, uutakwasi tali Muntanga...*The members of the clan are known for releasing gas from the anus, the one who does not is not a true Muntanga’ (2011: 746).

The differences between *kulibanda* and *kutembaula* notwithstanding, is quite easy and common to transform clan-praise into self-praise or *kulibanda* on the part of the people belonging to the clan being praised. Thus, for example, a Muntanga might declare thus: ‘*Ndime coona bukwazi, balijalila mbabowa...*I sleep with the door open, those who lock it are cowards...’ Or they might shorten it to ‘*Ndime coona bukwazi...*I sleep with the door open...’ This way one asserts their clan and their being proud of it. It might also be used, in this regard, for self-motivation in the face of a threat.

Social Functions of *Kulibanda*

As has been argued above *kulibanda* is a means of self-praise, hence, its general delivery format includes a reference to self: ‘I am.../We are...’ While *kuyabila* can be used largely as a means of praising another person or thing, *kulibanda* is a form of self-praise. The self-praise may be prompted by a variety of situations or circumstances. For example, when one would like to demonstrate the fact that they are significant in their own way for having made some significant achievements, they are likely to engage in *kulibanda*.

Kulibanda may also be used to praise some aspect of one's character and as a means of self-introduction during social functions such as musical concerts (*nkosadi*), dances or before performing *kuyabila* or *kweema*, or even before making an important pronouncement. It is for this reason that one sees *kulibanda* as a means of self-motivation, especially in the face of challenging situations or external threats. Faced with danger, a person or collection of people may engage in *kulibanda* in order to gather courage and focus.

Kulibanda may also be engaged in as a form of competition, a game of wits, to see who is best at using language in the performance of *kulibanda*. It is used as an indirect way of showing contempt for an opponent and showing that one cannot be intimidated. In other words, it is a means of confronting intimidation or even an attempt to intimidate an opponent, a form of psychological warfare.

Kulibanda is also a form of social entertainment. It is not uncommon for individuals to engage each other in the production of *kulibanda* with each person trying to outdo the other or the others. Even in the case of the hundreds of *kulibanda* renditions produced on the Facebook page for Tonga people, it was apparent that each person who posted intended to produce something more entertaining and more creative than that of the other people who posted.

Worth noting, however, is that *kulibanda* may also play an onomastic role. The performer might give themselves a name in much the same way that *kutembaula*, being panegyric in nature, involves name-giving as a form of praise or appreciation. Thus, for example, in the anecdote involving Chilala and Godfrey, the latter gives himself the name Bbenkele. However, even 'Musonda Nsima' might be transformed into a name or at least, might be used to refer to the person who uses it as part of *kulibanda*, especially when the reference is made repeatedly on different occasions.

The name Bbenkele, in some cases spelt Benkele, is of no clear origin as it has no definite meaning in Tonga. One man who bears the name as a surname said that he was not sure what it meant. 'The explanation I was given was that my grandfather was given this name by his tribal cousins the Lozi. In Lozi, this name's original meaning is bank. It's said that my grandfather was very supportive of many in his community. Anyone seeking assistance local or visitor, far and near, was referred to him. Thus, he was considered to be a kind of bank.'

This explanation is, however, not convincing because the Lozi word for bank is 'li-panga' – an adoptive (bank/-panga) (O'Sullivan, 1993: 18). The more likely explanation is that the word 'benkele' is a derivative of the Lozi version of the Afrikaans word '-wenkel' which means 'store' (O'Sullivan, 1993: 285). The Lozi derivative is 'benkele.' It might, therefore, be argued that the name could have originated as a Lozi nickname and could indeed suggest that the name-bearer was generous because a store in this context is a shop where goods are sold. Further, a store is associated with good things. Therefore, it may be argued that by calling himself Bbenkele in his *kulibanda* delivery, Godfrey was using the image of a shop to suggest sufficiency, or a person who draws people to himself just like a shop draws buyers.

It is not uncommon, in the Tonga onomastic system, for a *kulibanda* name to be transformed into a nickname and, eventually, even a proper name. Both Chilala and Godfrey, for example, were named after a clan ancestor who was known by a variety of names emanating from *kulibanda*. The ancestor would boast, for example, that he was ‘Chinyukula’ (suggesting an image of a man who is powerful enough to shake and uproot big trees), ‘Chipatamu’ (which invokes the picture of a man who is ever alert; even when he dozes off, he wakes up and gets up at the slightest approach of an enemy, ready for battle; from the verb *ku-patamuka*, to rise in a hurry from sleep); ‘Bbalabala-Mulilo’ (sparks of fire); ‘Mvula-kuwa-kubala-kamwi’ (the rain that falls unexpectedly – when the sun is shining brightly and there are no signs of imminent rain). The ancestor is, therefore, sometimes referred to as Chinyukula or Chipatamu or Bbalabala-Mulilo.

Theoretical Appraisal

We draw on both linguistic and literary theories to exploit the art of *kulibanda* for its linguistic and literary potency. From the linguistic perspective, two related theoretical lenses have been consulted: the speech act theory and politeness principle. The importance of this theoretical framing lies in the two theories’ capacity to unravel both the speech context and societal expectations from the speaker owing to the maxims of politeness. In fact, Levison (1983: 226) commenting on the speech act theory writes: ‘literary critics have looked to speech act theory for illumination of textual subtleties or for an understanding of the nature of literary genres,’ and similarly, from the linguistic point of view, the speech act theory provides a platform on which a conclusion can be made because ‘...utterances are only explicable in relation to the activities, or language-games, in which they play a role’ (227).

To this end, predicated on Austin’s (1962) speech act theory, the paper argues that ‘almost any speech act is really the performance of several acts at once, distinguished by different aspects of the speaker’s intention: there is the act of saying something, what one does in saying it, such as requesting or promising, and how one is trying to affect one’s audience’ (Bach, 2014; Bach and Harnish, 1982). However, even more telling is the view that ‘...some ordinary language declarative sentences, contrary to logical positivist assumptions, are not apparently used with any intention of making true or false statements’; rather, sentences ‘do things’ - perform specific functions as intended by the speaker (Levison, 1983: 228). Therefore, rather than restricting sentences to the philosophical dichotomy of truth and falsity, utterances or sentences should be assessed on the basis of what they are used to accomplish in the real world confined to the speech context. Such sentences and utterances have been called performatives (cf. Levison, 1983). Of course, for Austin (1962), performatives are always subject to the felicity conditions reducible to three aspects:

- (a) (i) there must be a conventional procedure having a conventional effect;
(ii) the circumstances and persons must be appropriate, as specified in the procedure;
- (b) the procedure must be executed (i) correctly and (ii) completely;
- (c) often, (i) the persons must have the requisite thoughts, feelings and intentions, as specified in the procedure, and (ii) if consequent conduct is specified, then the relevant parties must do so.

These conditions are a basis for judging whether a given utterance has successfully performed a task, which Austin (1962) refers to as satisfactory uptake. When these conditions are not met, the utterance is said to have misfired (for condition b) while the violation of condition (c) leads to abuses. Put differently, the failure by the speaker to satisfactorily meet the entire conditions give rise to the infelicitous or insincere performance of the action.

Notwithstanding the theoretical paradigm shift by Austin (1962), the argumentations of which are beyond the scope of this article, it would suffice to point out that ultimately, Austin conflated all sentences and utterances under illocutionary acts (see Levison, 1983). This is more apparent in his later work 'How to do things with words.' For the purposes of this paper, we underline the centrality of the performative verbs, which are seen to collocate with the adverb 'hereby'. Here, one notices the role of grammatical properties in identifying performative sentences. However, like Austin (1962), we concede to the fact that 'utterances can be performative without being in the normal form of explicit performatives' even though verbs remain a key feature in identifying these kinds of sentences (Levison, 1983: 233).

As will become apparent in the analysis of the data set on *kulibanda*, we remake the speech act theory as a tool about locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. Thus, as used in this article, the speech act theory undergirds (i) "the utterance of a sentence with determinate sense and reference; (ii) the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence, by virtue of the conventional force associated with it (or with its explicit performance paraphrase); and (iii) the bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence, such effects being special to the circumstances of utterances" (Levison, 1983: 236).

In unravelling the complex intersectionality between the illocutionary force of an utterance and cooperative principle, Leech (1983) turns to the politeness principle as a theoretical footstool on which cooperation between the speaker and the hearer is accomplished. Here, politeness is seen as 'a relationship between two participants whom we may call self and other' (Leech, 1983: 131). It is noted that the relationship between the speaker and hearer lays constraint on the kind of politeness that can be expressed. Equally, important is the cost-benefit dichotomy. If the cost to the hearer (henceforth, h) is high, it is recommended to use indirect politeness often referred to as negative politeness. Conversely, when the benefits are high, one is likely to use the direct politeness commonly referred to as positive politeness. Seen from this perspective, politeness has, as its locus the speaker, and this speaker's behaviour is guided by maxims of politeness. Leech (1983) has provided a catalogue of the maxims of politeness as shown below:

- (a) Tact maxim: (i) minimise cost to others (ii) maximise benefits to others.
- (b) Generosity maxim: (i) minimise benefits to self (ii) maximise cost to self.
- (c) Approbation maxim: minimise dispraise of self (ii) maximise praise of others.
- (d) Modesty maxim: minimise praise of self (ii) maximise dispraise of self.
- (e) Agreement maxim: minimise disagreement between self and others (ii) maximise agreement between self and others.

- (f) Sympathy maxim: minimise antipathy between self and other (ii) maximise sympathy between self and others (Leech, 1983: 132).

It has been acknowledged that these maxims vary from culture to culture: what may be considered polite in one culture may be strange or downright rude in another. For the purposes of this article, we align ourselves along the lines of the maxim of ‘modesty’, which reminds us: ‘Minimise the expression of praise of self; maximise the expression of dispraise of self’; and the maxim of approbation which equally invites speakers to minimise dispraise of other and maximise the praise of others (Leech, 1983). Frankly, the politeness principle as the one described above forbids maximisation of self-praise; rather, it promotes modesty, and modification of (verbal) behaviour for cooperation among social actors.

Since this article is not just concerned about the politeness aspect of *kulibanda* but also the aspect of names, it evokes some principles of onomastics to analyse some aspects of the *kulibanda* deliveries selected for analysis. As onomastics is the study of names and naming systems (Nyambi *et al.*, 2016: ix), this article interrogates the role of names in the production and interpretation of *kulibanda* utterances. What types of names are used and what is their role in the production of *kulibanda*?

The art of *kulibanda*, like other forms of Tonga verbal art such as *kuyabila*, is largely characterised by the use of figurative language, or language that utilises figures of speech (Cuddon, 1991: 343). In this regard, imagery is a key figure of speech. Imagery may be defined as ‘a general term covers the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, states of mind and any sensory or extra-sensory experience’ (1991: 442-3). While some forms of *kulibanda* employ direct language, the best forms are those which apply imagery and which, therefore, pose a challenge to the listener to interpret them appropriately. *Kulibanda* is best appreciated when it is understood. Thus, when one is able to decode the images employed in *kulibanda*, one is able to determine whether the delivery is impressive or not.

Images may be defined as ‘the sensory content’ (Barnet *et al.*, 2004: 715) of a text or verbal delivery. Since images are related to the five senses, there are in fact five types of sensory images (Cuddon, 1991: 443): visual (pertaining to the eye), olfactory (pertaining to smell), tactile (touch), auditory (hearing), gustatory (taste). In addition, there are also abstract images (appealing to the intellect) and kinaesthetic (sense of movement and bodily effort).

Since, as Abrams (1981: 63) argues, figurative language is ‘a deviation from what speakers of a language apprehend as the ordinary, or standard, significance or sequence of words, or order to achieve some special meaning or effect,’ the use of figurative language in *kulibanda* – particularly imagery – adds to the artistry of the practice. The *kulibanda* performance involves a clever and deliberate choice of words and their arrangement with the intention of creating a ‘special meaning or effect.’ The use of figurative language separates the *kulibanda* language from ordinary usage of language and qualifies it as a form of verbal art.

Methodology

Conducting a systematic study of a kind presented here, qualitative methodology avails much as it goes beyond a mere taxonomic representation of the data to an in-depth synthesis of each data set for its own right. This is predicated on the belief that *kulibanda* is both an experiential phenomenon and an anthropological reality of the Tonga people, a part of their *zilengwa*, as indicated earlier. This meant collecting data from the context of lived experiences of the users as they self-nominalised in the act of *kulibanda* on online social media (Facebook, particularly the page called ‘Ba Tonga People Worldwide’). Additionally, introspection was used as the researchers are both native speakers of Tonga and have both the first-hand sociocultural information of and lived experience about *kulibanda*. Thus, using notebooks, one of the Facebook pages of the BaTonga people and personal experience, a catalogue of *kulibanda* was collected as presented in the section below. The names of the individuals who wrote the *kulibanda* texts on Facebook were left out.

Data collection was followed by data sorting and coding orienting towards a number of themes: literary significance, the linguistic reality created, socio-pragmatic effect created by *kulibanda* in the broader context of speech act theory and the politeness on the one hand, and the literary theory on the other.

In what follows, *kulibanda* data is presented and analysed.

***Kulibanda* as an Affront to the Politeness Principle**

In the broader context of semantics-pragmatics, the materialisation of the Tonga self as reflected in *kulibanda* flouts the maxim of modesty. Consider examples (1) and (2) below, both from a Facebook page entitled ‘Ba Tonga People Worldwide’:

1. *Ndime mwanamubotu*: ‘I am the handsome child or the good child.’
2. *Ndime handsome musamu wa basimbi, ndendime hard cover kapapa ka nondo, dima kweenda masiku ngaafwa bantu. Bbabbaabba mucende wa nkwilimba, kunya nkulyoolola*: ‘I am the handsome one, the medicine for ladies. I am hard cover the tortoise’s shell. I am the one that walks through the night, the time during which people die. Bbabbaabba the bull of the dove. To defecate is to stretch oneself.’

In (1) and (2) above, the expressions of *kulibanda* is built on two important considerations: the foregrounding of the personal pronoun ‘ndime’ (I) and a positive self-description couched in the expression ‘mwanamubotu’ and ‘handsome’ respectively. The attendant adjectival clause punctuated with self-decorating phrases reinforces the structural configuration of *kulibanda* as one predominantly ascribing to self-praise in which the hearer is decentred or simply outrightly ignored. Seen from this perspective, few would deny the view that *kulibanda* as rematerialised in example 1 and 2 above goes against the normative expectation of modesty; it foregrounds the maximisation of self-praise predicated on the use of the first person pronoun ‘I’. Further, given the discourse type, and the centring of ‘self’ in the examples considered above, one immediately notices that the politeness principles that undergird politeness, as espoused by Leech (1983) in general

are flouted. Notice the use of descriptive adjectival clauses of self ‘*ndime mwanamubotu*’ (I am the handsome one); implicitly, projecting unto the listener what we term as the ‘uglification of others’ (making others feel ugly).

Drawing on Austin (1962), each instance of *kulibanda* creates a linguistic reality; it brings to life a state of affairs. Notice how example 2 creates new reality of the speaker: ‘*Ndime handsome musamu wa basimbi*’ (I am the handsome one, the medicine for ladies). The declarative expression performs a speech act of ‘being’, the ontology of being captured by the clause ‘I am...’ Notice further from the semantic point of view how the expression in 2 depicts the characteristics of contradiction.

‘I am the one that walks through the night the time during which people die.’

If people die in the night, and he claims to walk in the night, he virtually suggests being superhuman otherwise, he would die just as the rest of the people. This is built on the following simple premise: humans die in the night; he is human; hence, he would die if he walks in the night. However, by flouting the maxim of modesty, the speaker creates for himself a fortified life that does not capitulate to the fate of the common man.

In terms of imagery, it may be argued that example 1 does not utilise any images. However, example 2 does resort to the use of a number of images, namely; (i) I am the handsome one, the medicine for ladies; (ii) I am hard cover the tortoise’s shell; (iii) I am the one that walks through the night, the time during which people die; (iv) Bbabbaabba the bull of the dove; (v) To defecate is to stretch oneself.

The expression, ‘medicine for ladies’ when read with the concept of handsomeness, may sound a little narcissistic. It is worth noting, however, that the term ‘narcissistic’ is etymologically linked to the Greek myth of Narcissus, the handsome young man who was obsessed with his handsomeness. In the case in question, the person engaging in *kulibanda* suggests that his handsomeness is a cure for all ills suffered by ladies, particularly young ladies, as that is what is suggested by the term ‘*basimbi*’ which is plural of ‘*musimbi*’ (girl or young lady). As an image, medicine takes two forms: visual and gustatory. It is visual imagery because the mention of the word medicine makes one visualise a packet of medicine. However, it is also gustatory because most medicines are generally, orally administered. The implication is that the ‘medicine’ tastes sweet.

On the other hand, the image of the tortoise’s shell suggests toughness. One might be able to visualise the shell, but its toughness is determined by touching, hence, the image is tactile. The audience is left to wonder whether the *kulibanda* artist is here suggesting that apart from being medicine for ladies, he is also their protector. The idea of invincibility and indestructibility also underlies the claim of being the night-walker that does not fear the dark night associated with death. The image of walking is kinaesthetic in nature. However, the audience have to visualise the man engaging in *kulibanda* walking confidently through a very dark night where only the brave and tough dare to tread. The dark night is a visual image compounded by its association to death especially because in Africa, malevolent spirits and the spirit of death are believed to be most active in the night. The night-walker is neither threatened nor bothered by the proximity of death because he is as tough as the shell of the tortoise.

An element of irony is, however, introduced through the claim, ‘I am Bbabbaabba the bull of the dove.’ While the bull (*mucende*) is associated with aggression, as is the case in bull fights, as well as with the masculine principle of toughness, the dove is associated with the feminine principle of peace and non-aggression. This is a case of the *kulibanda* artist resorting to expressions intended to intellectually challenge the audience. The use of irony as a device is common in *kulibanda*, the above case being a mere example. Another example, already dealt with above, is that of the expression ‘mvula-kuwa-kubala-kamwi’ (the rain that falls while the sun is blazing hot). Ordinarily, we do not expect the rain to fall when no rain clouds are gathered in the sky. It is, therefore, ironic that rain would fall in such circumstances. Similarly, the name Chipatamu, used in the context of *kulibanda* as presented above, suggests that one is ‘asleep yet awake.’

It is similar to posing a riddle that the audience is expected to unravel. The intellectual challenge continues with the claim that ‘to defecate is to stretch oneself.’ Defecation is a kinaesthetic image as is stretching oneself. However, the image of defecation borders on Swiftian excremental vision as it is also olfactory. The *kulibanda* artist here ‘sanitises’ the process of defecation by suggesting that it is a form of stretching oneself.

On the onomastic front; 1 and 2 do not have much except for the use of the self-given nickname ‘Bbabbaabba.’ This name has no particular meaning – its only significance is its sound qualities and the capacity to confuse the audience. The use of the name has the capacity to set the audience on a wild semantic pursuit, but this is part of the challenge thrown at the audience by the *kulibanda* artist. *Kulibanda* is, therefore, not just about praising oneself but also about flaunting one’s intellectual, creative and linguistic prowess.

Socio-pragmatic Leanings of *Kulibanda*

3 *Ndime G-String kabbudula kasama bakapenta* (‘I am G-String, the underwear worn by prostitutes’).

4 *Ndime dyomba mabelo, mulombwana ubbindamuna ma G-string!* (‘I am the thigh-piercer, the man who turns the G-string inside-out!’).

In examples 3 and 4, notice the socio-pragmatic overtones of the expressions: (i)The apparent use of the pejorative discourse to self-narrate, (ii)The use of euphemism and colloquialism as linguistic markers of encomiastic expression: note the use of “kapenta”, ‘G-string,’ ‘pierce/prick the thighs’, (iii)The socio-pragmatic effect of such self-praise reveals insidiousness on the part of the speaker just as G-String is viewed as an insidious piece of cloth by many social actors within the Tonga context.

With respect to (i), (the apparent use of pejorative discourse to self-narrate), it can be argued that the speaker, particularly in example 3, draws on the maxim of modesty to ‘maximise the dispraise of self’ in order to self-narrate. Notice how the material he elects to describe himself by all point to pejorative discourse. It has to be mentioned here that culturally, a G-string is condescendingly looked upon in the Zambian society; it is generally, associated with prostitution and debauchery. Thus, when the speaker describes himself after the infamous underwear, he denies himself a positive face. That

notwithstanding, by referencing articles that are frowned upon by society, he successfully self-narrates as one who should be associated with the ugly acts of mankind. Similarly, speaker 4 accomplishes his self-narration by alluding to his actions: ‘*ndime ubbindamuna ma G-string*’ (I’m the one who turns the G-string inside-out, or one who rolls it down the wearer’s body). We argue here that this apparent ‘self-uglification’ is transformative. It enables the user to assume a populist role before the hearer due to the very negative undertones encapsulated in the selection of words by which he elects to describe himself. In (ii), we notice the speaker’s stylistic deployment of euphemism and colloquialism as linguistic markers of encomiastic expressions. Note in particular the use of ‘*kapenta*,’ ‘pierce/prick the thighs’ in this *kulibanda* expression. In Zambian colloquial language, a prostitute is referred to as ‘*kapenta*’ (one who paints the lips in a sexually suggestive manner). Similarly, the words ‘pierce’ or ‘prick’ are motivated by the colloquial clamour and lustre of street language. It is often the case that, among the Tonga men, especially middle-aged, the expression ‘*dyomba*’ (dip or pierce, or prick) dominates the discourse as a euphemistic expression for the sexual act. It is, therefore, clear that *kulibanda* is replete with euphemisms and colloquialism for enhanced sociocultural expression, and subtle transaction of meaning between the speaker and the hearer.

Finally, as argued above, the reference to G-string points to the insidious nature of the speaker just as the G-string is thus, regarded among the Tonga people. Despite this description, and the fact that the majority of the rural Tonga would ordinarily frown upon the mention of G-string, the speaker’s reference to a continued act of removing (rolling down G-strings) might hint on the prevalence and acceptability of multiple partners. Thus, it can be pointed out here that *kulibanda* arises from the intersectionality of the observable day-to-day cultural practices, re-materialisation of the material culture in expressions and the rich speech context on the material day of that expression. It is argued in this article that all these three conspire to produce the rich *kulibanda* expressions whose meanings are easily accessible among the Tonga.

In both cases, visual imagery is used by way of reference to the G-string. The audience, upon being fed with the image of the G-string, associate the image with the negativity that characterises it in the moral universe of the audience or society in general. Once again, we see here an attempt, in 3, to turn what is generally considered a negative image into a positive one: the speaker considers himself to be the very thing that might be offensive to the sensibilities of the people. In onomastic terms, the speaker might even use the term G-string as a nickname. However, in 4 the G-string is the subject of the action of the thigh-piercer who is able to turn it inside out, or roll it down, suggesting that the man is a sexual predator or pursues prostitutes for his sexual needs. The act of turning the G-string inside-out is a form of kinaesthetic imagery.

Re-materialisation of Translanguaging in *Kulibanda*

One of the noticeable linguistic features of *kulibanda* in the data reviewed is translanguaging (the act of code mixing) between Tonga and English. Consider examples 5 and 6:
 5 ‘*Ndime bbwiii fresh air uzwa kukafwiti*’ (I am fresh air from the anus).

6 ‘*Ndendime Red Bull kalombwana kazwa mulilo*’ (I am the Red Bull, the young man that emits fire).

Notice the effortless code mixing dominating *kulibanda*. In fact, from examples 1-6 one observes the act of translanguaging in which speakers tap into the semiotic resources in circulation. So far, from the data analysed, speakers have relied on two codes: English and Tonga as semiotic resources for meaning making. In 5 and 6, notice the syntactic fluidity between the Tonga expressed subject ‘*ndime bbwii*’ (the term *bbwii* here being an onomatopoeic representation of the sound produced by the farting process) and the English expressed subject ‘fresh air’ (which presents another case of irony since the product of farting, a case of excremental vision, is considered to be ‘fresh air’). The imagery used is olfactory in nature as passing air produces a foul smell.

While the two languages have been used, in 5 Tonga has been used for nominalisation in which ‘*bbwii*’ is the noun, hence subject while English has been used to signal a noun in the apposition (noun following another noun yet both of which are used to point to the same entity). In ‘6’ however, the ‘Red Bull’ has been used as subject complement, describing the subject, which has been roughly named as ‘It is I’ (the Red Bull). The point we make here is the fluidity in crossing between two unrelated codes without flouting the grammar of the sentence. While on this point, it is informative to mention that despite the deployment of translation, the agreement principle within the phrase (the case of (5) and between the phrases (case of 6) has been upheld. Arguably, translanguaging is a naturally occurring phenomenon, which respects the grammaticality of the construction.

Worth noting, however, is that the speaker uses the term Red Bull, which is an Austrian energy drink with worldwide popularity and widely available in Zambia. The speaker, therefore, makes an allusion to being energetic. He is so energetic that the energy manifests in the form of fire coming out of his body. Both the Red Bull and fire are forms of visual imagery, although the latter also possesses a tactile element as fire burns when one touches it.

7 ‘*Ndime mpengele mbiinzi itabizwi!*’ (I am the stubborn bean)

Analysable as: I (subj) am (verb) the stubborn bean (subject complement).

Despite the generally predictable nature of the syntactic configuration of *kulibanda*, one feature worth noting is the complex or rather extended complementation. Again, this is not surprising as the expression is often meant for self-introduction and self-praise. Additionally, because adjectives are used for description, the complementation is accomplished mainly by the use of adjectival clauses or phrases. See example 2 here below:

‘*Ndime handsome musamu wa basimbi, ndendime hard cover kapapa ka nondo, dima kweenda masiku ngaafwa bantu. Bbabbaaba muchende wa nkwilimba, kunya nkulyoolola.*’

(I am the handsome one the medicine for ladies, I am hard cover the tortoise's shell, I am the one that walks through the night, the time during which people die. Bbabbaabba the bull of the dove, to defecate is to stretch oneself.) Notice the embedded phrases, and repetition of the first personal pronoun in the extended complementation.

In terms of imagery, the invocation of the stubborn bean is another case of appropriating a negative for positive self-projection: a stubborn bean is projected as a good thing. The context is that of a bean being boiled to be eaten but it is so stubborn that it refuses to get cooked. The word 'mpengele' refers to 'what is hard to cook and remains hard to eat in food' (Mukanzubo Institute, 2011: 1114). The picture here is that of a bean which is thrown in the pot with other beans but while the other beans get cooked at the appropriate time, this particular one remains uncooked. It is 'uncookable.' The imagery is gustatory because quite often, the stubborn bean cannot be distinguished by sight and is only detected when an attempt is made to eat it. Thus, the speaker suggests that they are as tough as the stubborn bean; not even the fire at the cooking place can conquer it.

Onomastic Elements of *Kulibanda*

Since *kulibanda* is a form of self-introduction and self-praise, another noticeable feature is that of the use of proper names (anthroponyms) apart from the nicknames:

7 *'Ndemuzyukuli wa Haajanika uutumbya kasuko anikunya muluya.
Mudaala utatondekwi munwe kulemana.'*

(I am the grandchild of Haajanika the one who raises dust and defecates like a mad person. The old man who cannot be pointed out with an accusing finger without the risk of ending up with a shrivelled finger).

A distinguishing feature of example 7 is that it was produced by a female member of the Tonga Facebook group. From the onomastic perspective, it is important to note that Haajanika is not a nickname but a common Tonga surname, suggesting that the speaker could be an actual grandchild of Haajanika. It might be that the speaker is associating herself with the man because of his exploits, or it might also be that Haajanika would refer to himself as the 'dust-raiser' when engaging in *kulibanda*. Thus points us to another distinguishing feature: the speaker does not boast of her qualities but those of the grandfather who apart from being a dust-raiser is also not the type to point an accusing finger at because doing so has the serious consequence of the finger becoming shrivelled. This form of *kulibanda* is similar to what obtains when individuals brag about the qualities or purported qualities of the clan to which they belong. However, it is still self-praise.

8 *'Mebo ndime Namboози Muchembele bina Nsondo, Mwanookwabo
Bina Bbule Munyama. Ndime Muka Syabuzya Takolwi Bowa...
Ndamana nde Muloongo.'*

(I am Namboози the old lady, mother of Nsondo...a sibling to Bbule Munyama. I am the wife to Syabuzya Takolwi Bowa...I am done, I a Muloongo.) As in the preceding case 8

is a product of a lady. Further, the speaker uses actual names: Namboози (a common girl's name), Nsondo (an adaptation of the name Sunday, normally given to children born on a Sunday), Bina Bbule (a teknonym, meaning Mother of Bbule), Munyama (a common surname). Syabuzya Takolwi Bowa is a nickname derived from the proverb 'syabuzya takolwi bowa' which means 'the person who asks does not eat the poisoned mushroom.' In this context, however, it might suggest that the husband is a wise man who guides those who ask for help. Muloongo is a member of the monkey clan whose qualities are discussed above in relation to *kutembaula*.

Conclusion

This study set out to conduct a literary and linguistic analysis of the Tonga cultural practice of *kulibanda*. The study situated the analysis in the category of Tonga verbal art forms and also endeavoured to discuss the socio-cultural role and significance of *kulibanda*. The study postulates that *kulibanda* is a form of self-introduction and self-praise with a predictable syntactic configuration with the process of expression almost always starting with the first person singular 'I' followed by a verb in the first person singular form 'am' and then 'subject complement' or an extended complementation. Importantly, despite the use of translanguaging in some cases, the syntax is always impeccable, as one normally sees an effortless glide between the codes deployed in both intra- and inter-phrasal configurations. Be that as it may, *kulibanda* performances are characterised by a high degree of spontaneity and improvisation. To this extent, *kulibanda* is unpredictable. Thus, while one may predict in general terms 'how' a person engaging in *kulibanda* will deliver their production in structural terms, one cannot predict 'what' the person will say. What a person will say may be determined by prevailing circumstances and the purpose and audience of the act of *kulibanda* at the material time.

In describing *kulibanda* as both linguistic and literary materiality, it may be argued that *kulibanda* is built on a shared sociocultural knowledge and history of the Tonga people. The fact that it forms part of the lived cultural experience, its construction is never limited to Tonga words. Rather, as has been observed, users of *kulibanda* draw on translanguaging for semiotic resourcefulness and extended meaning making potentialities and sensibilities.

It is not, therefore, alien to conclude as Jimaima (2016) did that in the production, consumption and appropriation of meaning, social actors draw on the available resources in circulation, and as Kress (2010) asserts, signs are metaphors arising from a shared sociocultural knowledge and history of the people. Having considered data from Tonga speakers, and having noted the lack of ambiguity in the use of *kulibanda*, as well as the apparent cooperation between speakers (see examples 1 and 2 above), it is uncontested to see *kulibanda* as a product of a complex intersectionality of a rich sociology of the Tonga, languages and individualised orientation. The use of 'G-string' and 'kapenta' among other words augments the extent to which personal acculturation and individualised orientation together with the collective cultural sensibilities of the Tonga people come to bear on the far-reaching production and consumption of *kulibanda*.

The study has also revealed that *kulibanda* is not always centred on the real or imagined qualities of the individual delivering the *kulibanda* performance (as in texts 1 to 6) but may also take the form of associating oneself with a person or group of people associated with some achievements or qualities of note, real or imagined. This is the case especially with text 7 when the speaker associates herself with Haajanika or 8 when the speaker boasts of being a member of the Baloongo (monkey) clan.

The study notes, however, that texts 7 and 8 were produced by women. In a society where patriarchy reigns supreme, and achievement, greatness and bravery are associated more with being male than female, it might not be surprising that *kulibanda* is associated more with the male members of the Tonga society than the female ones. Women are associated more with the feminine principle and modesty especially when among the male folk. Also, the crude language associated with *kulibanda* might be deemed ‘unwomanly.’

Further, the study notes that a number of literary devices are employed in *kulibanda*, including – but not limited to – irony, excremental vision, metaphors, euphemism and allusion. Figurative language is a key element of *kulibanda* and is often evoked with a view to amusing, entertaining or intellectually challenging the audience. In using excremental vision, there is generally a tendency to ‘sanitise’ what is unpleasant by appropriating it for positive use. For example, the claim that defecating is a process of self-stretching as in the case of (2).

According to the findings of the study there is a variety of types of imagery used: visual, gustatory, olfactory, tactile, and kinaesthetic. However, the available evidence suggests that most of the imagery is of the visual type.

In terms of onomastic content, the *kulibanda* texts considered in this study suggest that names are an important aspect of the practice. The name might either be that of another person with whom the speaker is associated, or it might be the name of the speaker. In the latter case, the name could either be the speaker’s actual name or a nickname given either at the spur of the moment or at an earlier time. It is often the case that a praise name first used in the context of *kulibanda* can evolve into a proper name used either as a first name or surname.

Finally, it is important to note that this study is by no means comprehensive because the number of samples studied was quite limited largely due to the fact that this is an article. However, the study provides a solid foundation for more comprehensive studies in future because the findings are of broad applicability to the study of the Tonga verbal art of *kulibanda*.

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