URBAN YOUTH FOLKLORE GENRES: A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENT AND CONTEXT OF MCHONGOANO

By

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for award of a degree in any other University.

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This thesis has been submitted for award with our approval as University Supervisors.

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DEDICATION

For you, my son Joseph Kimongo.
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OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Mchongoano:** The word *Mchongoano* is derived from the Swahili word *Chongoa* that in turn is derived from the word *Chonga*. *Chonga* means to sharpen and so does the word *Chongoa* in Kamusi ya Kiswahili Sanifu (2004:46).

In *Sheng*, the word *chongoa* is derived as an opposite of the word *chonga* suggesting blunting rather than sharpening which is suggested in the original word. This could be a semantic shift linguistically but more probably a literary subversion.

The Bahati area of Eastland’s *Sheng* uses the word *Mtenguano* for *Mchongoano*. *Mtenguano* is derived from the Gikuyu word *gutengura*, which means impolite address hence the idea of insult. *Mchongoano*, therefore, refers to verbal duels performed by urban youth.
ABSTRACT

This study presents a literary analysis of the content and context of *mchongoano* as an urban youth genre. It analysed *Mchongoano* within its context of performance and its impact on Kenyan urban youth. The study engaged two theoretical models namely: Sociological and Stylistics theories. The study considered the performance of *Mchongoano* as relating to behaviour and experiences thus reflecting social realities. Sociological theory was used to analyse these social realities in the society as captured in the verbal duels. Stylistics theory was used to unravel the linguistic and stylistic patterns in *Mchongoano*. *Mchongoano* involves the manipulation and codification of language to pass the intended message. The study espoused fieldwork as a primary means of data collection for analysis and interpretation and it engaged participant observation, interviews and focus group discussions. Secondary data was obtained through reading secondary materials in libraries, online, published and unpublished works relating to our study. Data collected was categorized, divided into chapters and analysed using thematic content analysis method. Findings from this study reveal that the performance of *Mchongoano* is based on various social issues like material opulence, religion, crime, fear, insecurity and individual traits among others. The study also revealed that *Mchongoano* duels engage various styles such as irony, satire, symbolism, sarcasm and semantic variations. Therefore, the study concludes that *Mchongoano*, as an emergent urban folklore, deserves literary and critical attention since the urban youth do not engage in *Mchongoano* for mere entertainment but for social, intellectual and emotional satisfaction.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Recent trends in the study of folklore have changed tremendously with scholars focusing on emerging forms of expression such as popular culture and music. A shift from traditional folklore has been witnessed with scholars such as Wa Mungai embarking on the study of the urban folklore in his study of the *Matatu* sub-culture. Others like Wa Mutonya have taken the lead to study contemporary popular music as emerging folklore spaces in the society today. Their studies underline urban areas as possible sites for emerging forms of folklore.

Wa Gachanja in “The Gikuyu Folk story: Its Structure and Aesthetics” studied the classification and analysis of the structure of the Agikuyu folktales. He notes that much of African oral literature has not been subjected to analysis in spite of an overwhelming amount of published collections of folkloric material. He, thus, emphasizes the need to shift focus from the mere collection and documentation of oral literature to a literary analysis of this material. This call has been picked up by scholars such Alembi in “The Construction of the Abanyole Perception on Death through Oral Funeral Poetry”, Kabaji in “The Maragoli Folktale: Its Meaning and Aesthetics”, and Wainaina in “The Worlds of Kikuyu Mythology: A Structural Approach” among others who have done intensive studies in the folklore of their respective ethnic communities.

While emphasizing the centrality of oral literature in African societies, Kipury in her preface to *Oral Literature of the Maasai*, encourages African scholars to undertake studies of folklore and record lore materials in their own languages. She posits that in
doing so, the lore that has been ignored for a long time will be expanded. She further argues that oral literature is one of the most vibrant aspects of Africa’s cultural heritage. It is an art based on the cultural practices and aesthetics of a people, and so other than giving people a sense of belonging and direction in society, it also responds to the peoples’ perceptions of their society and the world around them. Her sentiments helped this study to focus on the functional aspect of *Mchongoano*.

However, Kipury’s emphasis is on the folklore of one ethnic African community, and she argues that if scholars do not move with speed to record these materials, they will soon disappear. This is a rallying call that many Kenyan scholars have taken but have given little critical attention to the emerging forms of folklore like *Mchongoano*, which is an urban youth folklore genre.

While studying the emerging forms of expression in urban areas, Githinji in his essa “*Mchongoano* Verbal Duels: Risky Discourse and Socio-cultural Commentary” observes that “*mchongoano* is a ritualised genre or verbal duel popular with the Kenyan youth where one antagonist insults another or members of his/her family”(89). He further notes that:

*Mchongoano* is contested from three main spheres; firstly, it is…….predominant amongst pre-adolescents, specifically primary school children who are too young and uninformed to be taken seriously. Secondly, it has no respect for taboo topics that are frowned upon by mainstream society, and thirdly, it is channeled through *Sheng* - a linguistic hybrid that excites a lot of emotions from the elite, educationists, parents and language prescriptionists among others. These contentions notwithstanding, *mchongoano* is a multifaceted youth satire that
employs the indirect strategy to comment on the serious issues. However, social commentaries are obscured by its surface humour, which is sometimes interlaced with aggressive insults, essentially inhibiting serious analysis (90). In this study Githinji observes that *Mchongoano* serves as a commentary on serious issues that affect society. He further notes that it is a multifaceted youth satire, which employs an indirect strategy in articulating issues affecting society. Most importantly, he argues that the social commentaries are obscured by the surface humour, which at times is interlaced with insults hence inhibiting its study. This observation was informative to our study though he shifts to examine the similarities between Kenyan and the American Negro jokes employing a linguistic approach to the study. His study, despite having a linguistic approach provides a base for this study. This study examines the content and context of *Mchongoano* from a literary perspective and provides a compressive literary appreciation of it as urban youth folklore.

This study was motivated by the fact that as societies continue to develop new spaces and forms of expression emerge. The urban area is such a space that has emerged with time as a place where different forms of expression are practised by urban dwellers as they seek to communicate to each other. One such group is the youth who have developed the use of *Mchongoano* as a form of communication. *Mchongoano* as a form of expression is based on the manipulation of language in a particular way by urban youth in an attempt to communicate to each other while excluding non-participants in that process of communication. *Mchongoano* as a literary genre in an emerging urban space calls for serious literary scholarship and this study gears towards adding up to the already existing literary knowledge.
1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

For some time now urban Kenyan youth have been engaged in Mchongoano fetes. The urban youth use Mchongoano as a form of communication though it is also used in the rural areas. Besides the youth, it is exhibited on television, FM radio stations and even online. This study sought to capture Mchongoano in its context and critically analyse it for its content and style of performance. The study’s quest is to arrive at deeper meanings of Mchongoano by undertaking a stylistic analysis of the linguistic choices, content and context of Mchongoano utterances among Kenyan urban youth.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study endeavoured to:

1. Trace the literary antecedents of Mchongoano as an urban youth genre
2. Critically analyse Mchongoano’s content in various contexts and its influence on Kenyan urban youth.
3. Explore any semantic variations and their influence on the meaning of Mchongoano.
4. Investigate the aesthetic functions of Mchongoano.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study answered the following questions:

1. What are the literary antecedents of Mchongoano?
2. How does Mchongoano’s content and context influence the Kenya Urban youth?
3. How does the semantic variation influence the *Mchongoano* performance?
4. What is the aesthetic function of *Mchongoano*?

1.5 RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

This study was founded on the following assumptions:

1. *Mchongoano* has literary antecedents

2. The content and context of performance of *Mchongoano* has an influence on the Kenyan urban youth’s behaviour.

3. The use of semantic variation in *Mchongoano* contributes to its meaning and relevance.

4. *Mchongoano* has an aesthetic value to the performers.

1.6 JUSTIFICATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Okpewho in *African Oral Literature* observes that:

...unlike the monoethnic culture that we find in the rural community, the culture of most big towns and cities in Africa is generally polyethnic and multilingual, entailing the use of a European language. This situation has an implication for both researchers and subjects. Many children who grow up and go to school in the cities are unable to speak in indigenous languages of their parents with adequate fluency, and it would be unfortunate—indeed wrong—to discourage them from doing field work in the city in a language which they communicate effectively with people...
they might wish to study (362).

Okpewho’s observation on urban language anticipates the use of Sheng and Mchongoano among urban youth in Kenya today. Many of the youths in the urban areas are able to duel fluently in Mchongoano using Sheng as though it is their first language. Therefore, Mchongoano has become a means through which they express themselves as well as their worldview. However, little study has been conducted on Mchongoano. This study, therefore, attempts to fill this gap by conducting a literary analysis of the content and context of Mchongoano as used by the youth in urban areas today. This study is then justified on the increased need for research on urban folklore as a representative of the changing faces of Kenya in folklore studies.

1.7. SCOPE AND DELIMITATION

There are various aspects in Mchongoano that an interested scholar might study. However, this study focuses on tracing the literary antecedents and presenting a literary analysis of the content and context of Mchongoano. The research was limited to Nairobi as one of the urban areas in Kenya. In Nairobi, the study was conducted in Eastern Nairobi specifically in Kamukunji District because it is mainly one of the bedrocks of Mchongoano. The study focuses on the content and context of Mchongoano. The scope gives us the opportunity to conduct an in depth study of the verbal art with regard to style, language and linguistic choices and the context in which they occur to derive meaning.
1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.8.1 Introduction

This section reviews literature related to our topic and in this, we look at works by scholars who have carried out studies or have commented on our topic. This enables us to ground our study as well as elucidate on the gap. We examine the available literature on jokes from the outside world then narrow down to the Kenyan context.

1.8.2 Varieties of Humour

Buijzen and Valkenburg have identified 41 humour techniques (89). Their analysis has risen to 7 categories of humour: slapstick, clownish humour, surprise, misunderstanding, irony, satire, and parody. For example, the average Kenyan child is exposed to the slap stick humour of *Tom and Jerry*, which is one of the influences on the content of *Mchongoano*. The findings aided in categorizing *Mchongoano* that we collected during field work.

Willis in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* provides a critical discussion of the problems of classification of humour with reference to the schema of Sigmund Freud regarding the techniques of joking (76-7). By admitting that there are difficulties in classifying humour, Willis goes ahead to provide us with a possible criterion of categorization. Their observation aids in fitting *Mchongoano* within the class of humour.
1.8.3 Marginalisation of Humour

As reviewed by Karl-Josef in *Laughter: a Theological Reflection*:

For Plato, laughter is a mixture of anxiety and pleasure, a Schadenfreude. Ethically, therefore, laughter is to be avoided and "persons of worth, even if only mortal men, must not be represented as overcome by laughter, and still less must such a representation of the gods be allowed". For Aristotle, laughter cannot be condemned because it is a natural characteristic of human beings; but, it should only be used to refresh and relax, as well as to confound opponents (349).

This study sought to evaluate to what extent *mchongoano* as a form of communication is accepted by members of the urban community. As Karl-Josef observes, modern marginalisation of humour might be understood as a reaction against views held in the medieval and renaissance periods. The nature of the marginalisation of humour is well-made with respect to cognitive linguistics. In concentrating on conceptual and cross-cognitive aspects of language use, cognitive linguists have given centre stage to phenomena like metaphor, metonymy and conceptual integration, which more traditional paradigms of linguistic inquiry have relegated to the periphery of cognitive processing. It is hoped that an inquiry of humour, in turn similar dividends as the study of metaphor. This study examines the marginalization of *Mchongoano*. 
1.8.4 Spheres of Humour

Humour manifests itself in politics as it is a well-recognised part of the political process. This presupposition is exemplified for instance by works of political cartoonists in New Zealand's House of Representatives. In an article in the *Australian Marxist Review* entitled *Humour is Serious Business*, there appears this statement “It is a generally admitted truth that humour is a serious business” (33). The preceding statement underscores the need to study *mchongoano* as a serious literary field.

In *Force and Folly that Ridicule is Indeed a Weapon*, Speier studied clandestine jokes, publications, and even dreams that can be considered as a form of resistance to modern totalitarian regimes. He observes that "jokes help the victims of repression and persecution to bear their suffering and to vent their aggression against their tormentors and through whispered words and clandestine similes discover friends” (182). Scholars such as Dundes in *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel* have noted that jokes may be looked upon as part of a people’s defense mechanism against prejudice, discrimination and repression (456). These observations help to crystallise this study by assigning a functional aspect to jokes.

1.8.5 Artistic Realisation of Humour

Bono cites humour as the most evident example of how the brain works as a thinking tool - with learning occurring when a jump in perception occurs (103). The result is a new idea or insight. The process of creative (generating from nothing) thinking is therefore exemplified in humour. When an alternative perception is not seen, it is the process of bridging this gap and understanding the alternate paths, and their interplay, in which the humour is generated. This study examines this phenomenon in *mchongoano*.
1.8.6 Mchongoano

Githinji in "Mchongoano Verbal Duels: Risky Discourse and Sociocultural Commentary" observes that "mchongoano is a ritualised genre or verbal duel popular with the Kenyan youth where one antagonist insults another or members of his/her family" (89). In this study Githinji admits that mchongoano serves as a commentary on serious issues that affect society and that it's a multifaceted youth satire that employs an indirect strategy in articulating issues affecting society. Most importantly, he also admits that the social commentaries are obscured by the surface humour, which is at times interlaced with the insults hence inhibiting its study.

1.8.7 Cultural Antecedents and Influences of Mchongoano

Otieno in his article "Mchongoano: The Urban Semiotic Practice and Social Evaluation in a Neo-cultural Environment" discusses the relationship between the ‘angera’ among the Luo, ‘mumanio’ among the Kamba, ‘ogochecherania’ among the Gusii and ‘utani’ among the Kiswahili and mchongoano (104). The above observation identifies humour as being part and parcel of ethnic communities thus its possible entry into the urban community.

Bell in Styling the Other to Define the Self: A Study in New Zealand Identity Making points to the same cultural influence when he observes that the Africans have influenced the American culture creating a hybrid of the African American culture that has become the worlds dominant popular culture as evidenced in the entertainment industry like in sports, music and cinemas (524). This cultural contact has resulted in the proliferation of African American jokes into the Kenya discourse. This study explores
how this contact has informed the performance of mchongoano.

1.8.8 The Medium of Mchongoano

In Kenya, though regarded as jokes, mchongoano is closely associated with Sheng. Mwihaki in “Viewing Sheng as a Social Dialect: A Linguistic Approach” traces the origin and development of Sheng in Nairobi’s Eastland area and its eventual spread to other estates and major towns in Kenya where it is used for interaction among the youth (57). Today’s Sheng is not just used in everyday social interaction but its role has grown to the extent that it features in mass communication contexts, commercial advertisements and public information on matters that target or challenge the youth. The study explores the various cultural influences that are depicted in the performance of mchongoano.

This study presumes that mchongoano follows the same pattern of origin and development as did Sheng. It is also possible that mchongoano is an offshoot of Sheng since its functions in the society are similar. Therefore, we endeavour to establish whether mchongoano originated and developed the same way as Sheng in this study.

Ogechi in “The Base Language Question in Ekegusii, Kiswahili, English and Sheng codeswitching in Kenya” observes that code switching is a common phenomenon among the youth in Kenya (138). He argues that the youth engage in code switching in an attempt to conceal certain realities in the process of communicating to themselves and from other members of the society. This code switching enables them to use languages such as Sheng, slang and even Mchongoano in their interactive communication processes. His study is informative to this study since it sheds more light on the circumstances under which the youth code switch. Since we sought to examine the contexts within which Mchongoano is used among the youth, this study comes in handy.
Mwai in *Songs for the Bride: A Literary Analysis of Unyago Nuptial Oral Poetry* discusses the concept of ridicule as used in nuptial ceremonies “*Kejeli* is a concept rather than a term. Kiswahili words that are used to define it include: *Kusimanaga, Kusumbulia* or *kusema maneno ya dharau*. It encompasses such English literary terms as satire, sarcasm, and mockery” (50). We examine how this relates to *mchongoano* in this study.

In their observation, Nandwa and Bukenya in *Oral Literature for Schools* refer to the urban youth who perform *mchongoano* in:

> The average person’s exposure to oral literature (sic), however suffers from a number of serious shortcomings. First, it is rather irregular and unsystematic. The listener may be exposed to only one type and style of performance, which may not be the best. Also, the rate at which the items are available can be erratic...Secondly, and closely related to the first problem, change of environment often means that people are uprooted from their traditions, sometimes very young... They will either remain culturally rootless all their lives or they will depend entirely on the borrowing and aping of foreign cultures... (4).

This situation captures the type of context in which *mchongoano*. The argument favours the growth and development of urban folklore as opposed to the rural one. The urban youth have formed a common identity not based on their ethnic background but on the urban space and the urban culture that is actually rootless in terms of ethnic bearing. The youths have embarked in *mchongoano* as their form of expression. Hence this study purposed to study *mchongoano* as emergent urban youth folklore.
This study engages Sociological theory and Stylistic theory to facilitate a critical investigation into the content and context of Mchongoano. The study borrows from the tenets of the Stylistics theory to unravel our concerns in terms of style, language, and content. Stylistics is augmented by sociological theory in literature to further help create the link between the message and the members of the society. The two theories are applied in an integrated approach and in effect determine the nature of this research. However, sociological theory is composed of various perspectives. For the purpose of this study we engage the symbolic interactionism perspective.

Symbolic interactionism, or interactionism, is one of the major theoretical perspectives in sociology. This perspective has a long intellectual history, beginning with the German sociologist and economist, Max Weber and the American philosopher, George H. Mead, both of whom emphasizes on the subjective meaning of human behaviour, the social process, and pragmatism. Herbert Blumer in *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* is regarded as the one responsible for coining the term, "symbolic interactionism," as well as for formulating the most prominent version of the theory (4).

Interactionists focus on the subjective aspects of social life, rather than on objective, macro-structural aspects of social systems. One reason for this focus is that interactionists base their theoretical perspective on their image of humans, rather than on their image of society. For interactionists, humans are pragmatic actors who continually must adjust their behaviour to the actions of other actors. We can adjust to these actions only because we are able to interpret them, that is, to denote them symbolically and treat
the actions and those who perform them as symbolic objects. This process of adjustment is aided by the human ability to imaginatively rehearse alternative lines of action before acting. The process is further aided by the ability by human beings to think about and to react to their own actions and even consider themselves as symbolic objects. Thus, the interactionist theorist sees humans as active, creative participants who construct their social world, not as passive, conforming objects of socialisation. In this study the performers of *mchongoano* are regarded as artists engaged in a creative entity.

For the interactionist, society consists of organised and patterned interactions among individuals. Thus, research by interactionists focuses on easily observable face-to-face interactions rather than on macro-level structural relationships involving social institutions (Blumer 40). Furthermore, the focus on interaction and on the meaning of events to the participants in those events (the definition of the situation) shifts the attention of interactionists away from stable norms and values toward more changeable, continually readjusting social processes. Interactionists posit that negotiation among members of society creates temporary, socially constructed relations which remain in constant flux, despite relative stability in the basic framework governing those relations.

These emphases on symbols, negotiated reality, and the social construction of society lead to an interest in the roles people play. Goffman, a prominent social theorist in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* discusses roles dramaturgically, using an analogy to the theatre, with human social behaviour seen as more or less well scripted and with humans as role-taking actors (70). Role-taking is a key mechanism of interaction, for it permits us to take the other's perspective, to see what our actions might mean to the other actors with whom we interact. At other times, interactionists emphasize
the improvisational quality of roles, with human social behaviour seen as poorly scripted and with humans as role-making improvisers. Role-making, too, is a key mechanism of interaction, for all situations and roles are inherently ambiguous, thus requiring us to create those situations and roles to some extent before we can act.

Wellek and Warren in *Theory of Literature* demonstrate that literature has a sociological function in relaying the social issues assailing humanity: “...large questions raised by literary studies are, at least ultimately or by implication social questions of tradition and invention, norms and genres, symbols and myths” (95). This is critical to this study since we seek to link the essence and potency of *mchongoano* in the Kenyan youth as well as the society. In the process, this study shows that in engaging in *mchongoano*, the Kenyan youth have been able to transgress the established norms and traditions in the society.

Burke in “Literature as Equipment for Living” argues that pieces of literature should be approached through their statements on society (113). He focuses on the importance of literature in the society. He observes that Literature is a social commentary in the society. Similarly *mchongoano* as a work of art is viewed as having certain roles to fulfill in the society. This study examines *mchongoano* as a means through which the youth express themselves in the society and focuses on the content and context of *mchongoano* to show how society is codified.

In *Art and Social Theory*, Harrington argues that pieces of art can serve as "normative sources of social understanding in their own right" (207). Harrington posits that there are several methods of looking at art from a sociological perspective and considering the sociological element that underlie art. This is essential because art is
inevitably full of references and commentaries on the present day society. This study not only looks at *mchongoano* as a social piece but also focuses on the context and content of it as a way in which society is presented.

The use of this theory is thus justified in that the study essentially examines the socio-historical issues, the social contexts and content of *mchongoano*. It is useful in conceptualising *mchongoano* within various social contexts and examining its implications thereof.

Stylistics is another theory employed in this study. Stylistics as a theory is based on the study of style used in literary and verbal language and their effects on the audience. Thus stylistics attempts to establish principles capable of explaining the particular choices made by individual and social groups in their use of language, such as socialization, the production or reception of meaning, literary criticism and in critical discourses.

However, Toolan’s approach to stylistics in *Language in Literature: An Introduction to Stylistics* greatly influences and shapes the ideas of this study. His approach is important in the sense that it incorporates the ideas of earlier stylistic critics such as Welleck and Warren, Leech and Short and Emmanuel Ngara. It is thus the most cogent approach, which looks at stylistics in literature as means with which the understanding of a text is enhanced.

Furthermore, Ngara’s ideas on stylistics as expounded in *Stylistics and the African Novel* are also important in this study. Ngara defines literary style as the manner in which a writer expresses emotions and tensions inherent in him and reaches self-satisfaction in form and words (11). Ngara views a work of art as characterized by plot, theme, character
and ideas developed through the utilization of language. His arguments on how creative writers utilize language in advancing their ideas to their readership is important for this study since Mchongoano involves the creative manipulation of language by the Kenyan youth while advancing their concealed ideas to their fellow youths. On the other hand, Mugubi establishes several aspects of style in prose and poetry and traces the origin of stylistics from rhetoric to its modern day exploitation in literary analysis (11). Among aspects he determines is the link between form and content in literary works. This is very important to our study since we seek to examine the context and content. In this study, we also seek to bring out how certain aspects of form enhance the meaning of mchongoano.

In analyzing mchongoano, we observe that both the linguistic choices and the context in which the utterances are rendered will be crucial aspects. Thus stylistics is employed in this study to cater for both form and content (Leech and Short 13), since our study is primarily focused on the content and context of mchongoano as a verbal art. We sought to interrogate the utterances in terms of language and style and the nature of issues that they embed. In the study, particular attention is paid to the manner in which language is codified to address various issues in the society or to pass essential messages to the intended recipients as well as the impact of mchongoano on the communicative patterns of the youth and how it has shaped their thought towards society.

Chapman in Linguistics and Literature: An Introduction to Literary Stylistics argues that stylistics views art as an author’s way of appreciating his own environment (15). In that process, an author could employ language in a way that he either applauds or criticizes what happens in the society. Mchongoano as a verbal art engages language in a way that the intended message is expressed to the recipients in such a way that it excludes
other listeners. This implies that the speaker is cautious in his use of language so that the message does not cause any fuss to the other listeners. However, beneath his cautious use of language underlies various manipulations of linguistic choices to articulate and pass the message across in the simplest way possible. This is thus the subject of this study.

Stephen in *English Literature: A Student Guide* observes that the interpretation of style can be in relation to the author, or to the sociological, historical and biographical features (91). This study contends that *mchongoano* is motivated by the society as well as the individual’s creativity and position in society. This implies that in an attempt to unravel the various linguistic choices in *mchongoano*, this study focused on the context within which the utterances are made. In doing so, we were in a position to demonstrate why particular linguistic items are in given utterances and not in another.

1.10 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.10.1 Introduction

This section covers the following: research design, study area, target population, sample selection, research instruments used, procedure for data collection and data analysis.

1.10.2 Research Design

This study was based on descriptive research design. This is so because descriptive research involves a description of affairs, as they exist. The researcher reports the findings. Kerlinger (1969) points out that descriptive studies are not only restricted to fact-findings, but may often result in the formulation of important principles of
knowledge and a solution to significant problems. Descriptive design involves analysis and interpretation of data.

The design therefore was effective for the study as it describes deviance in primary schools and seeks to find out its causes and solutions. The advantage of this design is that more extensive and elaborate information was collected, thus facilitating a more realistic data analysis as well as efficient use of the researcher’s resources.

The research design was governed by two main purposes: to describe the context where mchongoano is rendered as presented during the performance of mchongoano and also through interviews. And secondly, to analyse and interpret the images, language and the various experiences in mchongoano as a basis of arriving at the embedded meaning(s) in them.

1.10.3 LOCATION OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted in Nairobi County, Eastern Nairobi, Kamukunji District. The district has both public and private primary schools. The area has been purposively sampled because of its rich history in terms of settlement patterns, ethnic diversity and middle and low class urban dwellers; it forms one of the bedrocks of mchongoano. Besides, it is easily accessible making it convenient for the researcher in terms of time and money.

1.10.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE

Purposive sampling was used to pick the district for the study considering the wide area that comprises Nairobi County. Schools from the chosen district were stratified according to the following categories: Public and Private Schools. Simple random
sampling was applied to pick schools from each category. This was done considering the fact that *mchongoano* is a phenomenon that cuts across primary school goers. The sample size comprised the following: 4 primary schools, 2 public ones and 2 private ones.

Teachers interviewed were randomly sampled using the following criteria: two from upper primary and two from lower primary with each sex represented equally giving us a total of 8 teachers. The teachers gave us a picture on the impact of *mchongoano* on the overall performance of the pupils especially in the languages. The researcher also interviewed men and women between the ages of 20 and 35 since they were in the prime of their youth thus were conversant with the subject of this study and because the sample population was easily accessible in the Eastlands area.

Snowball sampling is a method used to obtain research and knowledge, from extended associations, through previous acquaintances. This technique uses recommendations to find people with the specific range of skills that has been determined as being useful. In this study snowballing became handy in selecting respondents outside the school setting. Interviewed pupils and teachers were requested by the researcher to offer names of potential respondents with knowledge of *mchongoano*. Contact was made and after an interview the respondents were also requested to suggest a potential informant. The process went on until no perceived new knowledge was gained.

1.10.5 DATA COLLECTION

Secondary data was obtained by way of library research involving the reading of secondary texts. Texts and scholarly works related to the area of study were consulted. Relevant materials focusing on language, style, and social concerns was also consulted.
Besides, internet research was done to complement information that was gathered from other sources. The primary data for this study was obtained through fieldwork. This was achieved through participant observation and carrying out interviews. Observation included gestures, facial expressions, different postures, and movement.

1.10.6 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Data was collected using interviews and containing structured questionnaires for both students and teachers. Structured questionnaires were divided into sections with regard to the target sub groups: pupils, teachers, and the youth. Data was collected by holding personal interviews with the various stakeholders.

Each of the interview schedules was numbered to represent each group. Each group had one session at a time. The participant observation method was employed in order for the researcher to have an insider’s experience. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to the respondents and the need for confidentiality before the actual interview. Arrangements were made to meet each respondent at a time convenient to them but within a specified period. The researcher talked to each respondent to create a rapport so as to gain the person’s confidence.

1.10.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The primary and secondary data collected were examined and analysed in line with the objectives of this study. The notes taken during indepth field interviews, focus discussions held and the transcribed information were examined against the objectives of this study. The assembling of all information that was gathered from the field was crucial
in analysis and interpretation. Therefore, through content analysis, comprehensive synthesis of the notes taken was done to come up with a coherent final dissertation.

For easier analysis and interpretation, this study was divided into three chapters and each address particular issues arising from the data collected with chapter four presenting the summary of the findings.

1.10.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

A letter of introduction was obtained from Graduate School, Kenyatta University. Then the researcher sought permission from Ministry of Education and schools’ administration. Discussions were held with both the teachers and the pupils to explain the purpose of the study and the need for them to cooperate by answering the questions as faithfully as they could. To be consulted also was the area administration. Issues of respondents’ confidentiality were observed. No penalties/consequences were imposed on the 20% of respondents that failed or refused to participate in the study.
CHAPTER TWO

ONTOLOGICAL ANTECEDENTS OF MCHONGOANO

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we seek to establish the ontological antecedents of mchongoano. We endeavour to situate mchongoano humour within the larger spectrum of humour studies. Literature on humour is vast, and draws on a number of disciplines. Scholars in psychology, sociology, anthropology, women studies, communications and management have investigated aspects of humour and joking, and linguists have approached humour from several diverse angles. This discussion is, by necessity, a limited review of the huge amount of research available on humour and it is tailored towards placing mchongoano in the grid of humour studies. It touches briefly on aspects of humour research which provide background information relevant to this thesis. We limit our focus to literature which is directly relevant to providing the ontological antecedents of mchongoano. In this regard, we outline the available research which will enable us establish the types of mchongoano humour, the qualities and functions of mchongoano humour, ethnic mchongoano as well as children and mchongoano.

2.2 Types of Humour in Mchongoano

In this section, we seek to establish a classification of mchongoano humour. However, in order for us to be able to do so, there is need to examine and rationalize available classifications of humour. Thus, we briefly review some of the taxonomies for classifying types of humour proposed by various humour researchers in order to create ground for the classification of mchongoano humour.
Monro in *Argument of Laughter* (34) provides an outline of what he regards to be the traditional classes of humour as follows:

a. Any breach of the usual order of events.
b. Any forbidden breach of the usual order of events.
c. Indecency
d. Importing into one situation what belongs in another
e. Anything masquerading as something it's not.
f. Wordplay
g. Nonsense
h. Small misfortunes
i. Want of knowledge or skill
j. Veiled insults

Monro's classification above seems to be more or less a list of things that people find funny in their daily activities. Despite the fact that categories such as "wordplay" and "veiled insults" would be considered as forms of humour, what Monro identifies as classes of humour could easily be seen as topics that humour exploits rather than the actual forms.

Zijderveld in "The Sociology of Humour and Laughter: An Outstanding Debt" describes humour as the exploitation of institutionalised meanings and breaks down the types of humour into exploitation of language (puns, spoonerisms), logic (wit, elephant jokes) emotions (black humour) or the activities of everyday life (parody, understatement). Though a compact kind of classification, Zijderveld makes little effort
to delink humour from other forms of verbal exchanges. Thus, he develops classification of humour that he includes both the types of humour and the verbal exchanges as opposed to that which is suitable for only humour.

On his part, Feigelson in "Mixing Mirth and Management" while working on humour among employees in a factory develops his taxonomy of humour is as follows:

1. Puns
2. Goofing off (slapstick)
3. Jokes (anecdotes)
   - Humorous self ridicule
   - Bawdy jokes (sexual or racial basis)
   - Industry jokes
4. Teasing
   - Teasing to get things done
   - Bantering - the great leveler

Feigelson’s taxonomy has its own shortcomings since categories such as occupational jokes are context specific hence cannot occur outside the specified content.

Although relevant to humour categorization, puns would easily fall into a broader category of wordplay, as described by Norrick N. in the third chapter of *Conversational Joking: Humor in Everyday Talk*. Wordplay can include not only puns but also types of humour such as spoonerisms, allusion, hyperbole and metaphor. Further, Feigelson has put jokes and anecdotes together as one category, although many researchers choose to
keep these distinct. Telling a joke is different from telling an anecdote. An anecdote will be more personalised whereas telling a joke is more of a performance.

Finally, Morreall in *Taking Laughter Seriously* provides a comprehensive taxonomy of humour, based on the concept of incongruity. Most of his categories could be slotted into Monro’s, Zijderveld’s or Feigelson’s taxonomy as discussed above with the exception of mimicry. For purposes of our analysis, we outline a simple classification of *mchongoano* humour, which though draws on the literature discussed above is modified to suit our data.

We categorize *mchongoano* humour as follows:

2.2.1 Fantasy

Fantasy is the construction of humorous, imaginary scenarios or events. This is usually a collaborative activity, in which the participants jointly construct possible or impossible series of humorous events and scenarios. This is perhaps best clarified by exemplification thus:

*T.V. yenu ina joto mpaka mwanahabari anasweat*

Your TV is so hot that even the announcer sweats. (*App. A₁*)

*Nyinyi ni wadosi mpaka mnapeleka kuku kwa tuition*

You are so rich that you send your hens for tuition. (*App. A₂*)

The important point is that all examples of fantasy will involve the construction of imaginary circumstances or happenings.
2.2.2 Insult

An insult is a remark that puts someone down or ascribes a negative characteristic to them. There are two distinct types of *mchongoano* humour which come under this heading. One is jocular abuse in which the speaker jokingly insults a member of the audience. The other is when an absent individual is insulted. The insult here is likely to be genuine, and the humour stems from the unexpectedness of the statement, which in most circumstances would be unacceptable. Examples of *mchongoano* in this category include:

- *Umeparara ukijikuna unatoa unga*
  
  Your skin is so rough that when you scratch you produce flour. (*App. A₃*)

- *Nyinyi ni waugly hadi babako anasema marry one get two free*
  
  You are so ugly that your father says marry one get two free (*App. A₄*)

2.2.3 Irony

This category includes examples of both irony and sarcasm. Haverkate in “A speech act analysis of irony” considers irony to generally mean “saying the opposite of what you mean, or saying something different from what you mean” (77). There are problems with both of these definitions as Roy in *Irony in Conversation* and as Tannen in *Conversational Style: Analyzing talk amongst Friends* point out “to arrive at a satisfying definition of irony would require a major study in itself” (131). However, in this classification, we take a more flexible and compromised definition between the two positions. In this regard, if the speaker does not intend the words of his or her utterance to be taken literally, and in saying them, he/she is implying the opposite or something with a markedly different meaning, then it is classed as irony. Knowledge of the speaker and the
context will be important in identifying irony. When listening to a speaker, it is necessary to rely on the surrounding context, paralinguistic clues and the reaction of the audience. Some examples of insults will also be irony, but they will not be placed in this category. This category is intended solely for verbal irony and will not include ironic situations. Examples of *mchongoano* which falls into this category include:

*Kuna insecurity mpaka ukipiga mtu geta anapewa receipt*

There is so much insecurity that if you are mugged you are issued with a receipt. (*App. A₅*)

*Wewe ni mweusi ukiona shetani anasema “I have never seen a devil like that”*

You are so black that should you see Satan he says “I have never seen a devil like that” (*App. A₆*)

### 2.2.4 Jokes

We use the term jokes to refer specifically to canned jokes. These refer to a cluster of *mchongoano* humour whose basic form has been memorized. This category of *mchongoano* humour will have a punch line or some point at which an incongruity is resolved (*Riskin 1985*). Examples include:

*Wee ni mmono mpaka ukianguka chini watu wanajishindia mafuta ya kupika* (*App. A₇*)

You are so fat that should you fall down people would fetch cooking oil

*Una kichwa ndogo ukifikiria unafaint* (*App. A₈*)

Your head is so small should you think you would faint.
2.2.5 Observation

*Mchongoano* humour in this category consists of quips or comments about the environment, the events occurring at the time, or about the previous person’s words. In this sense it is “observational” in that the speaker is making an observation about something funny or making a witty observation on the basis of what has been said or the surrounding environment.

*Nasikia una masikio kubwa mpaka siku ya kuzaliwa yaliinuliwa kaa world cup.*

I hear that you have such big ears in that they were lifted up like a world cup the day you were born. (*App. A₉*)

2.2.6 Self Deprecation

Self deprecation category of *mchongoano* humour is an insult directed at oneself and usually serves as a defence strategy. In this category, the speaker would pose some kind of *mchongoano* loaded with insult to his peers as mechanisms of self-defence against addressed subject. Examples include:

*Nyinyi ni wadosi mpaka munaweka underwear kwa furiji.*

*You are so posh that you put underwear in the fridge* (*App.A₁₀*)

The above six categories constitute what we consider to be the forms of *mchongoano* humour in this thesis.
2.3 Qualities of Humour in *Mchongoano*

In this section, we seek to identify the roles of *Mchongoano* humour in the society by making abstractions from the available humour studies. Researchers have abstracted these functions into categories that include, but are not limited to: the biological, the psychological, and the cross-cultural.

First, at its most basic level, a sense of humour is a capacity that one possesses biologically and as such, it has been found that humans and animals have a sense of humour as observes Fry in "The Biology of Humor". Consequently, Fry defines humour generally as a "genetic, biologic characteristic of the human race" (112) that continued to develop in complexity as one gets older and learns more through her/his life. Though every human being possesses this characteristic, it varies in degree. For example, we perceive some people as more humorous than others. We also perceive some people as less humorous than others. Additionally, humour has meaning. When an individual finds a situation humorous, s/he has given it meaning. The person creates and gives the humorous situation significance in some sense of her/his life. The person finds some sort of relationship between her/himself and the situation humorous. The relationship may vary in degree, but the person has given some kind of meaning to the situation. On this basis, we do realize that *Mchongoano* as humour is abstracted from situations that the speakers deem humorous and in a sense makes meaning to both the speaker and intended audience. For instance, naivety of any kind is derided in *Mchongoano* such as:

*First time yako kuingia kwa matt ulitoa viatu ukasalimia kila mtu*

(App.A11)
Your first time to board a *matatu* you removed your shoes and greeted everyone.

Second, *Mchongoano* humour is psychological. Veatch in *A Theory of Humor* argues that “humor is an inherently mysterious and interesting phenomenon which pervades human life” (161). Because of humour’s elusive uncertainty, it plays on people’s minds. For example, we may interpret some individuals’ content and the talk as humorous and funny or hurtful, depending on a speaker’s perceived intent. We can use *Mchongoano* humour to feel superior to another person. Furthermore, we can use *Mchongoano* humour in a current moment to feel superior as compared to a previous moment (Freud 23). That is, *Mchongoano* humour can change the dynamics of situational experiences. *Mchongoano* humor can come at the expense of someone else or at the expense of a group. In turn, the person(s) on the receiving end or other individuals affected may take *Mchongoano* as offensive. Also, *Mchongoano* humour may impact individuals in other parts or all parts of their everyday lives (e.g., creative/leisure time, family, play, religion, work). Everyday occurrences create a larger psychological meaning for incidents of *mchongoano* humour. For example:

*Nyinyi ni wadosi mkihama munaweka vitu kwa flash disk.*

You are so posh that when you move to a new place, you carry all your house items in a flash disk (*App. A*₁₂)

This text brings out the perception of the urban poor regarding material wealth. A flash disk is an external storage device that stores large volumes of data. Data stored in a flash
disk can be moved from one computer or place to another with relative ease. The psychological impact of this *mchongoano* text is when the rich people move to a new place, they do not have relocation problems since they can carry all their household belongs with ease as a flash does regardless of bulkiness.

Third, humour is a phenomenon present in all cultures, including organizations as Lynch observes in “Humorous Communication: Finding a Place of Humour in Communication Research” and Ojha in “Humor: A Distinctive Way of Speaking that can create cultural identity.” Researchers have yet to discover a culture that lacks humour as McGhee *Humor: its Origin and Development* (19). All cultures laugh and smile at humorous incidents. Nonetheless, cultural preferences affect specific content and the perception of what is humorous. Cultures have their own sets of norms, rules, and values that determine the acceptable contents, styles, and targets of humor. Hence, there is no such thing as a universal joke or humorous incident; its specific content varies according to social situations and cultural influences (Nevo, Nevo, & Yin 148). *Mchongoano* like other forms is a phenomenon that has found its way into the Kenyan urban youth culture. It is widely spread in many urban centres in Kenya although it is making inroads into the rural areas as well as. In this regard, we cannot ignore mchongoano humour in our societies today. For example:

“*Mamako ni Mkristo hadi namba yake ya simu ni John3:16*” (*App. A*$_{13}$)

Your mum is so Christian that her phone number is “John 3:16”
2.4 Ethnic based *Mchongoano*

It is our contention that in the examination of *Mchongoano* humour, the question of ethnicity can either be ruled out or ignored, especially now that the country is ethnically polarised. In this section, we focus our attention on *Mchongoano* that takes an ethnic stance in our quest to show that even the youth, who largely engage in *Mchongoano*, do engage in ethnic *Mchongoano* humour or the variables that determine their differential responses to it. Studies like Allan Dundes in “A study of ethnic slurs: the Jew and the Polack in the United States” show that ethnic riddles and jokes have been in oral circulation for a long time although the group ridiculed may change depending on contextual factors.

While focusing on the issue of ethnic *Mchongoano*, one cannot fail to consider these three closely related concepts: ethnic group, ethnic identity and ethnicity, and also the notion of stereotype, since it is perceived to be the actual trigger of ethnic *Mchongoano*. However, because perspectives differ as do the disciplinary inputs of the researchers involved, there is no single definition of ethnic group, ethnic identity or ethnicity that is acceptable to all. As such, this study does not engage in discussions that relate to these terms. Of interest to this discussion is the term group, especially the sociological group. On the one hand, it is understood that human groups vary in size, composition and nature. In some cases, the term group may overlap with that of society or nation. On the other hand, complex societies consist of several groups. For this reason therefore, no matter how concepts of ethnic groups and ethnicity are defined at an analytical level, they cannot possibly cover all empirical categories. In fact, whether
ethnic groups really exist or whether they are only analytical categories for explaining group dynamics are issues that have been and still are much debated by scholars.

However, for purposes of this discussion, we adopt the definition of an ethnic group from the *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* as advanced by Apte L.M since we consider it to be objective in nature. Thus, he defines ethnic group as “a distinct category of the population in a large society whose culture is usually different from its own. The members of such a group are, or feel themselves, or are thought to be, bound together by common ties of race and nationality or culture”(112). Consequently, Apte considers ethnicity as a term referring to the existence of groups, real or imagined, characterized by some or all of the following attributes: ascribed status, shared cultural traits and values, some degree of internal cohesion and interaction, and self awareness (111-112).

Other than the attributes of an ethnic group identified by Apte above, Isajiw in “Definitions of Ethnicity” notes that the most frequently mentioned attributes of ethnic groups are: common national or geographic origin or common ancestors; a common culture or customs, religion, race or physical characteristics; and language, in that particular order. On the other hand, there are some attributes that are less frequently mentioned such as consciousness of kind, common values or ethos, separate institutions, and minority and majority status. Geertz in *Old Societies and New States* has his own view concerning the basic attributes that link members of an ethnic group. He identifies race, language, blood ties, custom, region and religion, which, according to him are primordial ties (109-114).
A close examination of the above ethnic attributes reveals that common ancestry
and geographical location generally but not always lead, through the socialization
process, to the acquisition of a common culture. The common culture includes language,
religion, customs and behavioural patterns, social institutions, and ideologies and values,
thus, constituting the socio-cultural dimension of ethnic groups. Individuals share with
others members of their ethnic group a conscious identity that is based on traits they
perceive to be characteristic of the group. Although this may be a subjective reality, it
still counts as the ethnic identity of that group. This dimension is relevant to ethnic
*Mchongoano* humour analysis because individuals and groups have to believe in the
existence of ethnic groups characterized by such attributes as language, religion, and
culture for ethnic *Mchongoano* to occur.

The ethnic identity notion is closely connected to the concept of stereotype.
Walter Lippmann studied stereotypes as early as 1922 in *Public Opinion*, Part III.
Consequently, he defines them as mental pictures formulated by people to describe the
world beyond their reach. He argues that stereotypes, at least partially, are culturally
determined. He makes it very clear that their contents are factually incorrect; that they are
the products of a faulty reasoning process, and that they tend to persist even in the face of
knowledge and education. However, over time, scholarship in stereotypes has tried to
examine whether or not stereotypes exist without prejudice.

Despite the fact that stereotypes may, and occasionally do contain a kernel of
truth (Brown 172), they have little or nothing to do with objective reality. Allan Dundes
in “A Study of Ethnic Slurs: the Jew and the Polack in the United States” emphasizes the
association of stereotype-social reality as opposed to stereotype-objective reality (188).
Therefore, as far as ethnic *Mchongoano* is concerned, stereotypes are crucial. As they are widely accepted by members of individual cultures, they constitute a shared set of assumptions necessary for ethnic *Mchongoano*. This implies that in order for ethnic *Mchongoano* to have the desired effect, it relies on the readily available and popular conceptualizations of the target group. Stereotypes fulfill this requirement perfectly.

Needless to say that ethnic mchongoano is an integral part of expressive culture. Apte observes that “ethnic humour reflects a group’s perception and evaluation of other group’s personality traits, customs, behaviour patterns, and social institutions by the standards of in-group culture, with its positive or negative attitudes toward others” (121). Hence, ethnic *Mchongoano* directly or indirectly exhibits the stereotyper’s mental images and deeply-rooted beliefs, attitudes, and strong emotions toward people made the butt of in such humour.

The common form of ethnic *Mchongoano* is that which is based on existing ethnic stereotypes and jokes. For instance, on the one hand, there is a common stereotype that the Agikuyu people are thieves. Thus, other communities in Kenya tend to relate perceived Agikuyu financial success to unjustified means such as theft. On other hand, The Luo people are regarded as arrogant and proud and as having conspicuous consumption behaviours like buying luxury and expensive items at the expense of basic necessities. Therefore, based on these stereotypes among the Agikuyu and the Luo, the youth have created ethnic *Mchongoano* such as:
A: Luo stereotyping:

Speaker 1: wasee, wasee ¹,

Crowd: yes

Speaker 1: wasee, wasee,

Crowd: yes

Speaker 1: Mwajua nini? Imagine Mjaluo anaweza kulala njaa ili a save
anumue TV flat screen! (App. A₁₄)

Crowd: breaks into laughter

B: Agikuyu stereotyping:

Speaker 2: wasee, wasee ¹,

Crowd: yes

Speaker 2: wasee, wasee ¹,

Crowd: yes

Speaker 2: Mwajua nini? Imagine Mkikuyu hupenda pesa sana,
akivamiwa na wezi, heri afe kuliko kuwapa hao wezi wenye wamemvamia
ili wamuue! (App. A₁₅)

Crowd: breaks into laughter

The above two examples depict ethnic Mchongoano emanating from the common
stereotypes and jokes leveled against different communities in Kenya.

Wa Mungai in “Tusker Project Fame: Ethnic States, Popular Flows,” while
exploring the social meaning of ethnicity through an examination of ethnic stereotyping,
argues that stereotypes are forged and circulated within popular sites of cultural
encounter and are one of the principal means through which the objectives of ethnic projects are executed (338). He further observes that the predominance of stereotypes within everyday social discourse in Kenya makes ethnic ‘othering’ normative. This observation implies that ethnic based stereotypes are as a result of the long ethnic tensions in Kenya and that urban youth have been drawn into these tensions as is portrayed in their *Mchongoano*.

Although most research in the field of ethnic homour seeks to identify the stereotypic traits that are assigned to various ethnic groups, some traits have been found to evoke universal negative reactions, and these tend to be assigned to any group that is to be ridiculed and mocked. For instance, as Apte observes, traits such as stupidity, dirtiness, brute force, temper and excessive sexuality are generally viewed negatively (127) and can be linked to any target group. Consequently, he argues that: “the imputation of universally disapproved traits to any group to be ridiculed amuses the people who narrate and enjoy such humour and expresses their feeling of superiority” (127).

On his part, Davies in *Ethnic Humor around the World* notes that the members of a joke-telling and joke sharing group enjoy a “sudden burst of glory” (12-13) as the stupidity of the others is unveiled and their own superiority is briefly confirmed. Nevertheless, Davies stresses the fact that “we should not mistake the glee of the winners in this successful piece of playful aggression for real hostility” (ibid). Davies’ observation foregrounds the common techniques engaged extensively in ethnic humour, namely: hyperbole, satire and distortion, which we shall discuss in our next chapter. In this regard, it is clear that ethnic *Mchongoano* relies heavily on the portrayal of individual
ethnic groups, actions, personality traits and physical features which rarely mirror objective reality.

Besides, ethnic prejudice and negative attitudes seem to universally play an important part in ethnic *Mchongoano*. This observation concurs with studies such as Dundes, and Apte on the underlying features of ethnic humour. Consequently, much of the ethnic *Mchongoano* is based on prevalent associations of traits with different ethnic groups irrespective of whether or not such associations are actually true. In some cases, ethnic *Mchongoano* goes as far as frequently labeling and portraying a member of a particular ethnic group as typical of the entire ethnic community. For instance:

A: Luo stereotyping:

Speaker 3: *wasee, wasee*,

Crowd: yes

Speaker 3: *wasee, wasee*

Crowd: yes

**Speaker 3**: *Mwajua nini? Imagine baba ya huyu huringa na gari lake vile Wajaluo wote hudo* *(App. A16)*

Crowd: breaks into laughter

This kind of *Mchongoano* makes inferences to a common stereotype that all Luos are proud. Thus, one Mjaluo’s pride is considered a reflection of the entire community although there might be some who are not actually proud. This process implies both exaggeration and distortion but also overgeneralization.
In ethnic *Mchongoano*, intra-cultural variation and individuality are ignored. This is so because much of ethnic *Mchongoano* is based on ethnic stereotypes, which in general tend to be overgeneralized conceptualizations of ethnic communities. Again, since ethnic *Mchongoano* is predominantly based on stereotypes which have developed without much contact and interaction, it is likely to be quite inaccurate, hence bearing little resemblance to objective reality. Even in the case where members of the same ethnic community engage in *Mchongoano* which is based on negative stereotypes of themselves, it does not translate to mean that they have accepted the negative stereotypes leveled against them and of the *Mchongoano* that accrues from them as a portrayal of objective reality pertaining to their ethnic community’s behaviour and mannerisms.

We conclude this section on Ethnic *Mchongoano* by underlining the functions of ethnic *Mchongoano* by reviewing some of the instances in which it is used, propagated and enjoyed. Ethnic *Mchongoano* reinforces existent stereotypes, relieves suppressed aggression and preserves the ego identity of minority group members (Simmons 63). In this way, ethnic *Mchongoano* rationalizes and justifies the discriminatory treatment on the part of a dominant ethnic community. It reveals inter-ethnic conflicts when it emphasizes disparagement of ethnic groups as Stephenson observes: “to strengthen the morale of those who use it and to undermine the morale of those at whom it is aimed” (569).

Ethnic *Mchongoano* can also be considered to reinforce a group’s social position by relegating another’s to an inferior level. Campbell and Levine in “A Proposal for Cooperative Cross-Cultural Research on Ethnocentrism” believe that “stereotyped imagery is an unconscious rationalization for the hostility” (85) toward out groups, such
hostility being a manifestation of ethnocentrism. On his part, Apte observes “prejudice reinforces ethnocentrism, just as negation of the culture values of other people nurtures self-esteem and feelings of superiority” (142).

Further, the function of ethnic *Mchongoano* in the society today resonates well with studies carried out by Allan Dundes in “A Study of Ethnic Slurs: the Jew and the Polack in the United States” and Apte in *Humour and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach* on the role of ethnic humour. The scholars argue that ethnic humour serves to satisfy the forever human need to vent aggression; the very way *Mchongoano* does. Such a view is deeply-rooted in the Freudian psycho-functional theory of jokes in *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*. However, Oring in *Engaging Humor* strongly objects to this view on the basis that it fails to take into account the diverse nature of ethnic humour. On the other hand, there is the opinion that it serves merely to amuse. Middleton in “Negro and White Reactions to Racial Humour” supports the view that ethnic humour is meant to amuse by arguing that “even if a person does not accept the validity of a stereotype, he may be willing to suspend his disbelief temporarily in order to enjoy the humour of the joke” (80). Whether ethnic *Mchongoano* is used to amuse or for other reasons, it is still viewed as the most suitable medium as Stephenson in “Conflict and Control Function of Humour” underscores “may conceal malice and allow expression of aggression without the consequence of other overt behaviour” (569).

We do concur with Oring’s position concerning ethnic humour in the sense that we cannot but agree that its nature is diverse. However, we also support the idea that ethnic humour as does *Mchongoano* comes from a people’s constant need to reinforce
their ‘superior status’ within small ethnic subgroups as well as in more complex ethnic groups.

2.5 Children and Mchongoano Humour

Bergen in “Humor, Play and children development” shows how much children enjoy laughing from an early age. On his part, Vejleskov in “A distinction between “small humor” and “great humor” and its relevance to the study of “children’s humor” observes that in the first few months of life, babies respond with smiles, giggles, laughter and even a simple smile or a tickle to unusual noises, funny faces, among other things. In fact, for the first nine months of life, laughter among children is generally stimulated by physical tickling, surprising situations, funny noises or voices, funny faces, or the unexpected. By two years, many children begin to laugh in response to songs, stories, make believe, storytelling, dramatic actions and slapstick routines.

As children continue to grow, a genuine sense of humour begins to develop in the second year when the child can engage in fantasy or make-believe behaviour. The most common humour in the early preschool years among children is connected to ongoing play activities. Much of the laughter is a release of excitement built up through physical activity. This is the time when many children engage in acting and role-play activities that enable them to demonstrate a mastery of physical skills. During role-play, the children generate a spontaneous wave of laughter that spreads through a group of playing children. Thus, running, jumping or screaming are all manifestations of a child’s humour.

The children’s sense of humour improves as they reach preschool age observes Klein in “A Course on Children’s Humor: A Model for Training Practitioners”. At this
time, much of their sense of humour is verbal humour as opposed to activity. The preschool child's verbal humour reflects attempts to create fantasy from reality. This is the time when the children are aware of their surrounding environment and that which goes on around them. Hence, they engage themselves in verbal humour- word play. They show their understanding and control of words, they playfully distort them. This is actually the time when their sense of *Mchongoano* humour develops.

It is our contention that *Mchongoano* humour among children of this age takes many faces. Githinji points out in “Insults and folk humor: Verbal transgression in *Sheng Mchongoano*”, the faces are mockery, heroism, naivety, cynicism, stupidity, cruelty, madness, nastiness, and insults among others. Children can enjoy a joke by the age of five, but actually appreciate humour by the age of seven or eight. Humour is often a by-product of a story rather than an intentional creation.

*Mchongoano* humour manifests itself in children in the following ways:

i. **Word play**

The children engage in *Mchongoano* that is not necessarily derogatory but that which is tailored towards showing their word prowess. Here, they engage themselves in word play as a form of competition. This kind of competition is intended to outshine others-what can be regarded as a showdown contest. Such *Mchongoano* include:

*Shush yako amekonda hadi anapigwa shock na moshi ya ugali*

You r grandma is so thin that she is shocked by smoke from *ugali*

*(App. A17)*
Nyinyi ni wadosi hadi shush yako anavaa skin tight

You are so posh that your grandma wears skin tight

(App. A₁₈)

ii. **Surprise and the Unusual/Unexpected**

This refers to *Mchongoano* which is based on contrasts hence creating humorous situations. In this form of *Mchongoano*, the children rely on something irrational, eccentric or unexpected instead of the rational in their attempts to outshine their opponents. This form of *Mchongoano* is usually based on naughtiness, exchange of roles, physical chaos, difficult and impossible situations in order to pin down the opponent. Thus, children enjoy this form of *Mchongoano* since it involves trickery or outwitting. Examples include:

*Wewe ni mlafi hadi unakula shimo la doughnut*

Your so greedy that you eat the hole in a doughnut

(App. A₁₉)

*Wewe ni mkonde hadi unavaa pete kwa kiuno*

You are so thin that you can wear a ring around your waist. (App. A₂₀)

In the two examples, the first one refers to greed while the second one points at physical appearance.
iii. Exaggeration

Children love exaggeration and so is their *Mchongoano*. They exhibit *Mchongoano* that is based on exaggeration as they seek to show control and form of “intelligence” over their opponents. In doing so, they feel as though they are heroes as their opponents prove an unequal match. Examples of exaggerated *Mchongoano* among children include:

*Budako ana madeni mob mpaka anaitwa Dennis*

Your daddy is so heavily indebted that he is named Dennis

(App. A21)

*Kichwa kubwa hadi ukiingia class unaitwa head boy*

Your head is so big that when you entered classroom

You were named head boy. (App. A22)

Despite the fact that the two *Mchongoano* texts above are drawn from different social contexts, they are related in the sense they are exaggerated attributes of the addressee.

iv. Superiority.

Children love to show their superiority over others. Most of the children feel good when they exert their superiority over their weaker opponents. Gordon in “Revolting rhymes: humour as a subversive activity in children’s literature” observe that the superiority theory “is generally based on the pleasure derived from the misfortune of others that brings a sense of security” (215). This implies that the children take pleasure from being regarded as superior among their peers. One of the many ways in which this superiority is expressed among children is the ability to *Chongoa* others without getting
pinned down hence enabling the superior child to exude confidence over his peers.

Examples of superiority tailored *Mchongoano* include:

*Wewe mfupi mpaka mkicheza mbirikicho unajificha nyuma ya sindano*

You are so short that when you play hide and seek you hide behind a needle

(App. A_{23})

*Una tumbo kubwa ukitaka kutema mate unasongesha side*

Your tummy is so huge that when you spit you have to shove it aside (App. A_{24})

From the above forms of *Mchongoano* among children, it is clear that humour is a key ingredient in children’s day to day conversations. Besides, their verbal duels are not only restricted to fellow children but also include adults and those who are in power. It is natural then that children in their playful manner take a swipe at adults, especially adult behaviour that disgusts them. Thus, while using *Mchongoano* humour, the children are able to express their mockery on adult behaviors that they consider unpalatable.

Therefore, children have come up with forms of *Mchongoano* that put the authority of the adults on the spot. These include:

*Babako ni mlafi mpaka akimaliza sigara anaramba vidole*

Your daddy is so greedy that after smoking he has to lick his fingers (App. A_{25})
June Factor in *Children's Folklore in Australia* states “... children’s mockery challenges the core of authority by reversing it so easily. There is a sense in which irreverent role-playing undermines the hierarchical structures on which much status and power depend” (176). Factor’s observation points at some role-play activities that children engage in and in the process seem to implicitly question the authority of the adults. This is evident in playground rhymes and chants where no authority figure escapes without being captured. Such authority figures include teachers, parents, family, police, and even the politicians. Through the use of *Mchongoano*, children afford an opportunity to attack adults and their mannerisms. This kind of *Mchongoano* could be regarded as defiant *Mchongoano*. For instance:

*Nâsikia wewe ni mrefu mpaka Kibaki anauliza “Je, kwani sikuoni?”* I

It is said your father is so tall that Kibaki says “Je, kwani sikuoni?”

(App. A27)

*Mâtiti za mama yako ni mzee mpaka unaambiwa “shake well before use”*

Your mother’s breasts are so old that you are instructed” shake well before use” (App. A28)
This kind of attack is not only seen in Children’s *mchongoano* but also permeates all types of children’s interactions – spoken rhymes, rituals and routines, insults, games, autograph albums etc. Further, Factor makes the point that this form of humour is as “integral to childhood as milk teeth and unlined skin” (191). Children, especially boys, enjoy this defiant *mchongoano* as they do fantasy and adventure. They love this kind of defiant *mchongoano* and the more it gets under an adult’s skin, the better and the more enjoyable it becomes.

Ogechi in “The Base Language Question in Ekegusii, Kiswahili, English and Sheng Codeswitching in Kenya” notes that children make a deliberate decision to separate themselves linguistically from adults, inventing codes, passwords, nicknames, word plays, puns, and jokes etc which are *not meant* to be accessible to adults. The same can be seen in the nature of *Mchongoano* that they exhibit. Adults will shy away from *Mchongoano* words like *Mnut, Mslim, Mshamba, Mbig* etc which are common among children in the process of *Kuchongoana*. However, as Factor emphasizes, adults should not worry about what the children do while playing since humans need to play and be flexible – it is a normal part of our development before ‘integration’.

### 2.5.1 The Value of *Mchongoano* Humour among Children

Willoughby in his article “Humour tells the Truth in Children’s Books” observes that humour in children has value on various levels (58). In this section, we examine the role of *Mchongoano* humour to the children. We are trying to answer the question: does *Mchongoano* like any other form of humour have value to children? In our examination of the role of *Mchongoano* humour in children, we draw parallels between the roles of
other forms of humour and those of *Mchongoano*. We have broken down the role of *Mchongoano* in Children into:

i. **Emotional Benefits of *Mchongoano***

Research shows that humour is one of the most effective ways of managing one’s emotions. This implies that humour plays an important role in sustaining a more positive, upbeat mood and attitude on the tough days as well as on the good days. A great deal of attention has been given in the past decade or so to emotional intelligence. The ability to manage one’s own emotional state has been examined by the major researchers/experts humour as a key component of emotional intelligence. For instance, when you see young children playing, you generally see them laughing. This laughter is a reflection of the joy and happiness that humour and play provide, but we now know that laughter can also help generate a joyous and happy state where there was none before.

Thus, nurturing the children’s sense of humour helps them to gain a measure of emotional control of their daily mood. By engaging in *Mchongoano*, children have plenty of laughter as they counter each other despite the fact that amidst the laughter, there might be slight provocations. Children learn to manage their emotions as they engage in the verbal exchanges hence becoming better people. Therefore, as Gordon observes, humour brings emotional warmth and understanding (205).

Good humour skills during childhood help build a solid sense of self-esteem. Since humour and shared laughter help the child receive a lot of positive feedback from other kids (and adults), this gradually builds a strong sense of good feeling about oneself. *Mchongoano*, especially the superiority forms, provides the urban children with the
opportunity to share with others and in the process develop that strong sense of self esteem.

Perhaps the most important long-range emotional benefit of humour resulting from the development of good humour skills during childhood is the coping skill known to be associated with humour. There is a large body of research documenting humour’s power in helping adults and adolescents to cope with life stress. Kids who engage in *Mchongoano* build this skill early on and are able to benefit from this coping advantage throughout their life.

**ii. Social benefits of Mchongoano**

Brown in *The Artist at Work: the Importance of Humour* observes that humour is one of the basic components of interpersonal competence among both children and adults. From this point of view, humour is widely viewed as a key social skill that will serve a child well in the work world and in interpersonal relationships generally. It is argued that children who initiate humour more often than their peers have been found to show more social participation in activities. They also tend to be judged by their peers as being more sociable. This is also true of those children who engage in *Mchongaono*. These children are sociable, able to interact freely in any kind of social environment and are better placed at putting others at ease. Again, kids who initiate *Mchongoano* humour more often have also been found to be liked by other children since they might not want to cross their line hence tend to me more popular and have more friends as many of them seek to have their companionship to avoid burst-ups.
Humour can be a way of escaping from serious reality and in the process doing something liberating. Humour distances pain. Laughter can relieve tension, stress and aggression. In this regard, *Mchongoano* as a form of humour provides urban children with ample opportunities to release their stress and hence gives comfort to distressed children.

iii. **Intellectual benefits of Mchongoano**

June Factor points out that just as children play with marbles, balls and dolls, they also play with ideas – what she calls: “linguistic playfulness” (170). This implies that the development of a sense of humour in a child parallels the intellectual and emotional development of the child. Since Mchongoano humour is a form of intellectual play, and language is our main vehicle for thought, it comes as no surprise that children love to play with words as they Chongoa each other. Therefore, this will help them improve their intellectual skills as they creatively come up with different forms of Mchongoanos.

Humor also boosts children’s creative thinking capacity. Research showed decades ago that there is a close relationship between the kind of thinking involved in humour and other forms of creative thinking. Children who spend more time finding new and incongruous ways of making sense out of words develop a generalized skill of thinking in innovative ways in connection with other questions or problems. Thus, Mchongoano gives the Kenyan children an opportunity to show and exploit their creativity as they seek to outshine each other during the process of *Kuchongoano*. 
2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we sought to establish the ontological antecedents of *Mchongoano*. In this regard, we have been able to show the ontological antecedents through examining available research on humour and *Mchongoano*. We went further to establish the types of *Mchongoano* humour, the qualities and functions of *Mchongoano* humour, ethnic *Mchongoano* as well as children and *Mchongoano*. It is in line with this analysis that we conclude that as children indulge in humour as part of their play time, they are merely striving to fulfill a social and emotional need which will remain a part of them as they grow up. That urban youth can create their own brand of humour to depict their realities, as is the case in *Mchongoano* is a significant part of their education.
CHAPTER THREE
STYLE AND SEMANTIC VARIATION IN MCHONGOANO TEXTS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to analyse the use of language and style in Mchongoano texts and how the two contribute to the overall meaning. It is our contention that language and style play a critical role in expressing meanings of works of art. This implies that for a literary critic to arrive at any meaningful interpretation of any work of art, (s)he must pay particular attention to the language and style of such work of art. Mchongoano as is viewed as work of art. The objective of this chapter is to examine and analyse some of the selected Mchongoano texts to depict how style has been utilized in expressing not only the intended meaning but also the implied meaning(s).

Mchongoano texts, though presented in the form of humorous jokes, articulate performers’ concerns and shared experiences. While expressing these shared experiences, the texts employ figurative language. Hence, style becomes the performers’ communicative tool with which to foreground their concerns. In order to proceed with the analysis of style and language in the selected Mchongoano texts, this chapter employs a thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is a schema for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. This implies that thematic analysis involves creating ‘bundles’ of instances of behaviour that can be described as ‘alike’ in some way. In thematic analysis the task of the researcher is to identify a limited number of themes which adequately reflect their textual data. The next step in a thematic analysis is to combine and catalogue
related patterns into sub-themes. Taylor and Bogdan point out that the themes are defined as units derived from patterns such as: “conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs” (131). The themes are identified as Leininger observes by: “bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone” (60).

Thus, in this chapter, the themes that emerge from the performers’ texts are categorized and grouped together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience. As Leininger posits the “coherence of ideas rests with the analyst who has rigorously studied how different ideas or components fit together in a meaningful way when linked together” (60). Leininger’s postulation concurs with Constan, who reiterates this point and states that the “interpretative approach should be considered as a distinct point of origination” (258). The thematic categorization of *Mchongoano* texts that this chapter adopts only applies to this chapter and is used for purposes of analysis. After grouping the selected *Mchongoano* texts into certain themes, we proceed to analyse the styles employed as we justify why we chose the themes.

It is worth noting that one hundred and twenty *Mchongoano* texts were selected for analysis. However, as this chapter will show, the texts have been clustered together on the basis of recurrent themes. For example, *Mchongoano* texts dwelling on mugging and crime have been categorized under fear and insecurity while those dealing with large families, congested and dilapidated houses and filth come under poverty.
3.2 The Analysis of Style: Literary Underpinnings

The analysis of language and style in works of art has been the concern of many literary scholars. Most of these scholars such as Jeremy Hawthorn, Leech and Short and Henry Indangasi argue that the analysis of style in any work of art should be done systematically and with utmost care since style is regarded as the artist’s communicative tool with which to foreground the his/her concerns in the work of art.

Jeremy Hawthorn, while foregrounding the importance of language and style in literary interpretations in *Unlocking the Text*, argues:

> Literary works are the only works which consist largely of language-if one interprets ‘literary work’ in such a way as to include such things as oral poetry and some of the performing arts. It is not surprising therefore that the artists have sought to use language in the construction of theories about literature (51).

This observation points to the idea that language, whether in proverbs, narratives, verbal arts or in any other form of art plays a pivotal role in unraveling the meaning(s) of such work. Thus, language is viewed as one of the prime aspects in any work of art that is subject to literary interpretation. Consequently, the language of any work of art is intertwined with style and hence this chapter simultaneously examines the two in the categorized texts in order to show how they contribute to the overall meaning. In doing so, we will be able to show how Mchongoano texts act as social commentaries.
Emmanuel Ngara in *Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel* laments that students of Literature in Africa and elsewhere have concentrated on narration of themes and characters of works of art at the expense of the aesthetic aspects of Literature. He therefore argues that there should be a more balanced view towards the analysis of form and content. He argues that a work of art must be analysed and evaluated in terms of aesthetically sound set parameters without disregarding the political, social and moral issues raised in Literature. He argues:

Our focus on the linguistic format will lead us to a greater understanding of content… We put emphasis on the aesthetic and formal dimensions of fiction only to discover how social, ideological and moral iddues are discussed and given substance in an 'artistic way' in genuine works of art (8)

In the above observation, Ngara points out that an artist's choice of linguistic and stylistic features gives a work of art a vital aesthetic quality thus arming it with a compelling power so that his audience dives into the work of art in the introduction and emerges only at the end of the concluding sentence. Thus, style retains its vitality in as far as it remains a faithful servant, or a vehicle to ferry the idea of the artist.

On his part, Henry Indangasi in *Stylistics* decries the culture of privileging content over form. Consequently, he talks of a situation where a work of art is “…far too often seen as a bundle of messages or themes” (5). He argues that form and content should be viewed on an equal plane. His argument illuminates the importance of style in the role of communication of a writer’s message. This implies that a writer is able to reach his
readers through the choice of his style. This observation concurs with Olembo in *The Music of Poetry: Poems from Africa, the Caribbean and Elsewhere*, who underline the idea of style in poetry. She observes that style plays a critical role in the understanding of poetry. However, in as much as our study is on verbal duels, both Indangasi’s and Olembo’s assertions are very significant to this chapter. This is due to the fact that they shed more light on how style is utilized not only in poetry but in any work of art. Thus, the two critics shape our understanding on the mechanization of style in a work of art and how style can be manipulated both for aesthetic purposes and to convey meaning in any work of art.

Leech and Short in *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* recognize that linguistic analysis is more important in the study of poetry than prose. They posit that:

The poet, more obviously than the prose writer, does interesting things with language. And if one wanted to find a definition of poetry that went deeper than the run-of-the-mill dictionary definition, it might be that whereas in poetry, aesthetic effect cannot be separated from the creative manipulation of the linguistic code, in prose it tends to reside more in other factors (2).

Leech and Short demonstrate how poetry is rich in terms of its aesthetic effects due to the use of language. Poets manipulate language in the poetry in order to be able to achieve maximum communication. They as well as make most use of the available language to
attain a heightened form of communication. Consequently, the two critics proceed to argue that in doing so, the poet does “interesting things” with language. With this in mind, we proceed to examine the use of style in *Mchongoano* texts in this chapter. It is our contention that the manner in which language is employed in the texts enables the performers to pass the message(s) to each other with relative ease and in the simplest way possible.

Mugubi’s work in “Stylistics and Literary Techniques” is imperative to our study as it clearly expounds on a number of areas that concern this chapter. It provides an in-depth analysis of the term style as well as the relationship between form and content. It also further explicates stylistic techniques based on the broad linguistic branches of semantics, syntax, lexis, morphology and graphology. His study plays a pivotal role in shaping our ideas in the analysis of style in this chapter. We proceed to analyse the selected verbal duels collected based on the postulations advanced by the critics above on the basis of the approach we singled out for this chapter.

3.3 Crime, Fear and Insecurity

The deteriorating security situation in Kenya has not escaped the eye of the performers of the verbal duels. The slums in most urban areas are characterized by insecurity and high rates of crime. Hence, many of the verbal duels decry the rampant crime in the slums. For example:

*Kwenu kuna insecurity mpaka mtu akipigwa ngeta anapewa receipt.*

(App. A29)
There is too much insecurity in your area that when a person is mugged he is issued with a receipt.

The above text epitomizes the institutionalized crime in Nairobi’s Eastlands slums. The term *ngeta* refers to a type of mugging where the mugger uses a stick sharpened on the one side to wring the neck of the victim leading to suffocation. In suffocating the targeted victim, the mugger is able to rob the victim with ease. This practice is common in the slums where mugging is common especially in the night and early hours of the morning.

In the same vein, the verbal duel below depicts how mugging is not only a common social problem in the slum areas but also a kind of business as well:

*Wewe ni fala ukipigwa ngeta unaitisha change.* (App. A$_{30}$)

You are so daft that should you be mugged you demand for change.

This duel depicts that mugging is a common phenomenon in the slums just like the way one could to a shop pay for an item and ask for change.

Interestingly, the two performers use situational irony to depict the rampant mugging incidents in the slums. Hyperbolically, the mugged person instead of running for his or her dear life and/or calling for help waits to be issued with a receipt or change after being mugged. The issuance of receipts or change is normally to show a purchase of items in a legitimate business. However, its use in crime and not in business is hyperbolic.
However, it is important to note that in the slum areas, mugging is practised as a business. Mugging has become as source of employment of the unemployed in the slum areas and an easy cash-cow for the slum bourgeoisies who hire unemployed youths to do the mugging business for them. Hence, this reveals that in some areas of Eastlands, one would do with mugging as a business. Therefore, mugging has been transformed from crime to a source of employment for the many employed youth in the urban areas.

The verbal duel above can as well be seen as satirizing the government’s failure to combat crime especially in the slum areas. The government has kept on issuing stern warnings on combating crimes but it has for a long time failed to crack down and bring to book the criminals in the urban slums. Further, the duel ridicules the government’s policies especially on issues of insecurity, job creation and urban planning. The failure of the government to initiate job creation opportunities has made the unemployed youth in the slums to turn to mugging as a source of a livelihood.

The insecurity situation in the slums is further foregrounded in this verbal text:

*Babako ni mwoga analala akiwa amekunja ngumi. (App. A3)*

Your father is such a coward that he sleeps with his fist clenched.

Fathers are believed to be the sole providers of security in the family. In fact, patriarchy in most African societies clearly stipulates that men are the sole providers of the family in terms of food, shelter, clothing and security needs. Thus, the men are socialized within this patriarchal paradigm; hence they accept these patriarchal responsibilities without question.
However, the above *Mchongoano* text demonstrates the utter fear in which slum dwellers live. The father, as the protector of the home, is terrified by the possibility of crime and has to be ready to defend himself even when in sleep. Sleep is meant for relaxation but ironically it causes stress in this case. Night fall in the slums ushers in fear. Families are helpless against criminals. Therefore, fathers have been forced to be on guard throughout the night not knowing when the enemy will strike. Ironically, those who are supposed to provide security for the family are also engulfed in fear despite the fact that they cannot say it openly. Perhaps it is this fear that makes fathers sleep with their fists clenched!

The irony that depicts the patriarch’s fear in failure to provide adequate security for the family is further amplified in this text:

*Nasikia babako ni mwoga yeye hupika ugali na panga.* (App. A32)

Your father is so cowardly that he uses a *panga* to cook *ugali*.

The patriarchal structures socialize men and women to perform their respective roles. These roles were clearly demarcated by these social structures hence roles like cooking were a preserve for women. Ironically, the man in this family has taken up the responsibility of what mothers should do. Hence, the father has taken up cooking - a mother’s role. The irony is further extended to the kind of item that the father is using to cook *ugali* - a Panga instead of a ladle. The exaggerated threat here is that of the survival of the family lest they are robbed of their meal. The food has to be protected as well lest it is stolen. The father has to use a *panga* as a weapon to protect the family and as a
mwiko (ladle) for preparing ugali. This juxtaposition of weapons and utensils, two very different items in terms of usage, is typical of the style of Mchongoano. It brings out the contradictions besetting the poor slum dwellers.

In their attempts to secure themselves from rampant crime, the slum dwellers have resorted to keeping dogs. Since time immemorial, dogs have been useful companions to man since they are not only used during hunting but also for security purposes. Dogs are believed to be excellent in terms of security no wonder even the police use them. Ironically, at the slums, the efforts of dogs against crime are at best subverted as the following example shows:

*Naisikia doggy zeni ni oga mpaka zikiona mwizi zinasena “wewe watchie nisaidie”. (App. A₃₃)*

It is said that your dogs are so cowardly that should a thief come they call out “help me guards”.

This shows that the level of crime in the slums is so high that even the dogs are helpless.

It is ironical that somebody should maintain a useless guard dog amidst the poverty of the slums is a ridiculous exercise. One might as well risk the thieves since it will be a lesser burden than feeding a useless watchdog. This also amplifies the hopeless plight of the poor living in the slums.

The slum dwellers live in perpetual fear of their lives. Insecurity, crime and fear characterize their lives leaving the children with no option than to dramatize their helpless situation and that of the other slum dwellers in the Mchongoano texts. However,
it is noteworthy that the children do not stop at only exchanging the verbal duels but also ridicule the failure of the government to provide security for the general citizenry.

3.4 Opulence versus Poverty

Materialism is a concept that is widely associated with Karl Max and class stratification in the society. Materialism simply refers to the importance placed on material possessions. Material possession is the measure of wealth in modern society. People believed to possess great material wealth are described as rich. Material possession is central to many people’s lives in the society and therefore they focus a good deal of their energy on acquiring possessions. Actually, in contemporary Kenyan society, material possessions have become a measure of social acceptance.

The children have not been left out in this tussle for materialism in the society. Poverty is ridiculed in the society as the following Mechongoano text reveals:

Nyinyi ni maskini mwizi akikuja kwenu anaiba duster. (App. A34)

You are so poor that a thief can only steal a mopping duster in your house.

The text demonstrates why it is a double tragedy for people in the slums to be poor. In this text, the duster being referred to is a worn out cloth used to mop the floor which no thief would be interested in stealing. This text points to the situation of the poor in the slums. It amplifies the abject poverty situation faced by the many slum dwellers. Because of their deprived situation, many of the slum dwellers are constantly beaten by the thieves since they have nothing for them to steal.
Besides, most of these slum dwellers are used as shields for the thieves when they are being chased by the police. In most cases, when the thieves are being chased by the police, they run to the slums to hide. In the process of running to hide, the slum dwellers are caught up in the melee and more often than not, some of them are shot dead. The police then report that they have gunned down some of the serial criminals in the country. The irony is that the right thieves are never killed.

In depicting the poverty situation in the slums, the children show variations in the construction of their verbal duels which are accompanied by dramatizing. The two examples supplied below demonstrate this:

*Nyinyi ni maskini chapati ikikatika mnaenda kushonesha* (App. A₃₅)

You are too poor that should your ‘chapati’ get torn, it has to be patched.

*Umesota mpaka ukiingiza mikono kwa mifuko inalia echo* (App. A₃₆)

You are too broke that should you put your hands in your pockets they echo.

In the two examples above, a semantic variation is clearly shown while describing various instances of poverty. The first example is founded on food stuffs while the second is based on clothing. It is quite ridiculous that chapatti, a flat bread, instead of being eaten is taken to a tailor for repair. The example hyperbolically amplifies what the poor in the slums do. Whenever their clothes get torn, they are taken to the tailor for patching. Most of their clothes are so patched that the phenomenon has caught the eyes of other children. Patching is a common characteristic for the poor. At the same time, the
second example shows how slum dwellers are faced with abject poverty. The pockets are perpetually empty until they have been reduced to echoes.

The images of abject poverty identified in the *Mchongoano* texts above are contrasted with materialism. Material opulence is a common characteristic of the neighbourhoods in the slums. Most Kenyan slums are surrounded by posh estates. This sharp contrast between slums and posh estates has found its way into the verbal duels among the children. For instance:

*Nyinyi ni wadosi mpaka mna ng 'ombe za mtumba na goro* (App. A37)

You are so posh to the extent that you have second hand and new cattle.

This reveals the characteristics of business in the urban areas; especially in Nairobi where business is characterised by either second hand or new items. However, the text is ironical as well as satirical. It is ironical in the sense that it reveals that although there are wealth people near the slums, they also buy second hand items which are thought to be a preserve for the poor. Satirically, the verbal duel attacks the rich in that the performer wonders why they buy second hand items.

The images of material opulence are further foregrounded in the two texts below:

*Nyinyi ni wadosi mpaka mnavalisha kuku zenu baika mayai isianguke.*

(App. A38)

You are too posh that your hens put on biker pants so that eggs will not fall down

*Nyinyi ni wadosi mpaka kuku yenu hutaga mayai boil.* (App. A39)
You are too posh that your hens lay boiled eggs.

Slum children use images of domestic animals and birds in their verbal duels perhaps because they do not own them. By talking about them, it gives them a sense of ownership as well. However, the two texts reveal images of extreme wealth contrasted with those of abject poverty that we had analysed above.

Material affluence is further reflected in references to places where people go to shop. It is believed that those who are pretty rich avoid going shopping in areas that have filth such as Gikomba, where the poor do their shopping. In fact, the rich are believed to avoid such areas like a plague. For the rich, the only way they visit such places is by turning their television sets to watch, thus:

*TV yenu ina channel mingi mpaka iko na ya Gikomba. (App. A40)*

Your TV has so many channels including a Gikomba channel.

This *Mchongoano* shows the inherent irony among the rich. Urban youth seem to question why the rich could vicariously enjoy watching people shopping at Gikomba yet they themselves detest going to there to shop. To the youth, the fact that the rich seem to enjoy watching scenes from Gikomba is ridiculous.

The rich are also identified on the basis of the items that they own such as fridges, microwaves among others. However, the use of such gadgets has been subject to ridicule among the urban youth thus:
Nyinyi ni wadosi mpaka mnaweka panty kwa fridge. (App. A₄₁)

You are so posh you keep panties in the fridge.

In this *Mchongoano*, the fridge suggests affluence whereas underwear suggests ordinariness. However, the role that the fridge plays is subverted in that instead of storing vegetables, it stores underwear. This duel has an ambivalent symbolic meaning in the sense that on the one hand, it reveals the ignorance among the rich people since they acquire items that they do not know their use. On the other hand, it shows that some of the people in the slums who have climbed the social ladder hence have become the target of the resentment of their former pears. This implies that their peers are jealous of them and hence they have developed a superciliousness attitude towards them.

3.5 Black as a symbol of African Identity and Aesthetics

The idea that black is beautiful has its roots in the Black Power Movement in America where the phrase was coined. The phrase is rooted in its historical context in America where a cultural movement aimed to dispel the notion that black people’s natural features such as skin colour, facial features and hair are inherently ugly. The prevailing idea was that black features are less attractive or desirable than white features.

Whereas Elijah Mohamad and Malcom X represented the religious and ideological aspects of the black power movement in America, James Brown, one of the movement’s foremost artistes became better known in the world. James Brown’s song “Say it loud – I’m black and I am Proud” become famous around the world. This was
especially so among the Africans and the African diaspora. It expressed the pride of the African heritage against the domination by the white culture.

The movement has further emphasized various aspects that depict African beauty. Such aspects are manifested in various African artifacts, writings and speech. The African artifacts have generally been exhibited with reference only to cultural context and use. In view of recent studies of African aesthetic principles and related moral and religious values, there has been a need to emphasize the formal aesthetic aspects of the objects and the moral and religious ideas they express.

African aesthetics generally has a moral basis, as indicated by the fact that in many African languages the same word means "beautiful" and "good." It is consistent with the use and meaning of African art that it should be both beautiful and good, because it is intended not only to please the eye but to uphold moral values. The ethical and religious basis of African art may explain why the principal subject is the human figure; African art often appears in ritual contexts that deal with the vital moral and spiritual concerns of the human condition.

The children in their verbal duels have also plunged into the debate of black beauty. They have come up with *Mchongoano* dwelling on the black colour. In the verbal taunts, the black colour is despised implying that a lighter complexion is more desirable. For instance, one of the texts reads:

*Wewe ni mweusi mpaka mosquito ikikuja kukuuma inakuja na tochi. (App. A42)*

You are too black that when a mosquito comes to bite you it comes with a torch.
In this taunt, the debate that surrounds the black colour and race that has been going on since the days of colonialism locally and in the Diaspora is rekindled. The preference of a light skin complexion as opposed to a black complexion plays out clearly in this duel.

The fact that a mosquito cannot see the black fellow when it intends to bite him raises serious epistemological questions on the postulations made about black beauty. The children, in bringing into the fore the age old debate, also want to contribute to the debate regardless of their understanding of their own skin colour. The very idea of a mosquito carrying a torch is ridiculous in itself because mosquitoes prefer darkness in order to bite their targets. Ironically, the target is too dark for the mosquito to see. Thus, the *Mchongoano* is out to disparage black the mosquito would prefer light; hence the contradiction intends to emphazise that the lighter the complexion the better it is.

In this *Mchongoano*, the children seem to borrow a leaf from local commercial advertisements in Kenya. In a recent television commercial that runs on main television stations such as NTV and KTN, a young graduate girl fails to go through an interview due to her skin complexion. However, upon using a skin lightening cream, she secures the job. Such are the images that influence the impression of the urban youth. The youth express their views regarding the same in their verbal duels. Therefore, the urban youth coin verbal duels that demean the black complexion and suggest a liking for a lighter completion. For instance:
Wewe ni mblack ukisimama na makaa customer anasema “nipatie hiyo kubwa!” (App. A43)

You are so black that if you were to stand besides charcoal a customer would request “give me the big one!”

In this taunt, charcoal has been used as a metaphor for the black colour albeit in a disparaging manner. Comparing one to charcoal under certain circumstances would be positive since charcoal to some extent symbolizes energy. But in this context the colour of charcoal is used in a negative sense as a distasteful metaphor. As we have previously argued, underprivileged slum youth perform Mchongoano as a form expressing resent to their plight. He seeks to get out of poverty and if being black will interfere with upward mobility then it is something to be detested. Thus, to them, anything black is evil.

The metaphor of the black colour as a necessary evil is further revealed in two taunts below:

Wewe ni mweusi ukiingia room watu wanalala wakidhani ni usiku. (App. A44)

You are too black that when you enter a room people go to sleep imagining it is night time.

Wewe ni mweusi hadi makaa inakutoroka. (App. A45)

You are too black that charcoal flees from you.

In the two texts above, the colour black is portrayed in the negative sense. Urban youth
also associate blackness to evil. For instance, the youth tend to associate blackness with darkness. The image of darkness was widely used by the whites to discredit Africa and its people. Africa was regarded as a dark continent the very image that the youth are alluding to in their taunts. The image is further extended when they observe that the person is black that even charcoal, which is black, could run away. One runs away from a bad person, so black is bad. It is in this way that the urban youth come out strongly to discredit the black colour as not being beautiful.

3.6 Old Age in Modern Society

Old age is one of the aspects that the urban youth seem to dramatise in their verbal duels. The youth seem to be disrespectful of old age since to them, the frailty of old age is perceived as a real disadvantage in the slums. The old are easy victims for muggers and hence their survival is precarious. Invariably, they may also not be very productive members of society since they are seen as liabilities when it comes to sharing the scarce resources in the slums. In this way, their Mchongoano basically disparages old age and it is anti the old order. The taunt below illustrates this:

Shosho yako ni mzee mpaka anapigwa shock na mataa ya gari. (App. A46)

Your grandma is too old that she is shocked by the beams of a vehicle headlights.

The Mchongoano above not only exaggerates the frailty of the grandma using the image of an animal being mesmerized when caught in the beam of a car’s headlamp at night but
is also derogatory. The imagery in this duel is sarcastic to old age. The sarcasm reveals the inherent hate that the urban youth have towards their grandparents who may be living with them as dependants as part of a vicious cycle of poverty.

The traditional respect for the aged has been eroded in the urban set up. The concept that the offspring should take care of their ageing parents is detested by the urban youth. Some may have been influenced by western materialism and individualism which they may have imbibed through the media and western education. This has made the youth to develop negative attitudes towards their grandparents. This attitude is manifested further in this *Mchongoano*:

\[ Wewe ni mzee mpaka una ndevu chini ya ulimi. (App. A47) \]

You are too old that you have grown beards under your tongue.

In this text, the aged are being caricatured. Has anyone ever heard of a person growing beards under the tongue! Such is the deep seated resentment that urban youth harbour for their poor and helpless grandparents.

The deep seated revulsion of old age is further depicted in the following *Mchongoano* where the attention has shifted from grandparents to aged parents such as the patriarch:

\[ Babako ni mzee mpaka anatuck in shati na mwiko. (App. A47) \]

Your father is so old that he uses a ladle to tuck in his shirt.

In this *mchongoano*, the aged father is portrayed as a helpless person who is violating the
family symbol of sustenance to serve his own selfish interests. By undertaking this violation, the youth blame it on his old age and nothing else. To the urban youth and many others, a ladle is an item that should be respected at all costs because it performs a very important function in the family. The ladle is connected with preparing food for the family and should not be used otherwise. Thus, it is a cruel joke for the father to use the ladle for dressing. This implies that the frailty of the aged is a big disadvantage to other members of the family since the old are unproductive.

The abhorrence of old age among the urban youth is further revealed as follows:

*Wewe ni mzee mpaka meno zako zinamea upside down.* (App. A48)

You are so old that your teeth grow upside down.

*Shosho yako ni mzee mpaka mikono yake ni short-sleeved.* (App. A49)

Your grandma is so old that her arms are short-sleeved.

*Shosho yako ni mzee amebakisha siku moja birth certificate yake ikuwe diploma.* (App. A50)

Your grandma is too old that in a day’s time her birth certificate will upgrade to a diploma.

The three examples of taunts above show that old age, like the black colour is associated with anything negative and unheard of such as teeth growing upside down. For instance, when the youth taunt the other that his grandmother is too old until her birth certificate is a day away from becoming a diploma grade, it not only shows how they detest old age but also it symbolically shows how the hate education too. For urban youth, an advance in age is equated to an advance in academics without going through
the rigours of education through schooling. Ironically, this is simply wishful thinking!

3.7 Religion

In recent religious scholarship like Karen in *The Battle for God* and Gabriel et al in *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World*, some of the fundamental issues and assumptions about religion as a lived practice have come into sharp focus. In this regard, the fundamental issues of religion in relation to the insider and outsider perspectives have been the subject of debate. Thus, “Religion” as a conceptual category has been contested in recent scholarship, both from within theology and in the study of religion. Questions have been put as to how both theologians and scholars of religion relate to ‘religion’, not only as an object of academic discourse, but also as an increasingly important phenomenon of public and social discourse. While this debate on ‘religion’ has been within the confines of scholarly reconceptualizations, the general public has adopted a wait and see attitude to the whole debate.

However, the religious discourse that goes on in the academy has also found its way into *Mchongoano*. This implies that religion has not been spared either in the verbal duels. Religion is a common practice among the people in the slums. Perhaps because of their impoverished conditions, many slum dwellers have turned to religion. They prefer being closer to God at least for their burdens to be lessened by the belief that God will answer their prayers and fulfill their wishes. This brief has found its way into the urban youth’s *Mchongoano* since some of their verbal duels texts allude the Bible, thus:

*Shosho yako ni mzee mpaka alikuwa maid wa Adam na Eve.* (App. A₅₁)
Your grandmother is too old that she was the house help of Adam and Eve.

*Babako ni mzee mpaka alikuwa neighbor ya Abraham* *(App. A52)*

Your father is too old that he was the neighbor of Abraham.

The two *Mchongoano* texts cited above are characterized by religious undertones perhaps a common characteristic of the slum dwellers, who like making references to God whenever they are faced with any difficulty. However, the religious elements in the texts are viewed as sacrilegious in society since they imply longevity of the grandparents like them the history of Adam and Eve, the original ancestors of humankind.

Further, the taunts cited above have ambivalent meanings. On the one hand is the attack on religious fanaticism that is prevalent in the slums especially in Eastlands. The poor in the slum have turned to religion as their only solace to their problems. On the other hand, they express the distaste the urban slum youth have for their grandparents who may be dependants on their parents because of destitution. They compete for the scarce resources with their grand children. It is also interesting that the *Mchongoano* artiste tend to project his feelings on the opponent. What he/she is expressing about the opponent could be applying to himself/herself in terms of attitude.

Further, the verbal duels highlight issues regarding extreme belief in religion in their taunts. The taunts reveal how the poor in the slums have taken religion like a duck to water. It is a common practice for them to invoke the name of God in anything that they do. The same has been perpetuated in all that belongs to them such as dogs as the
following taunt reveals:

_Dogy yenu zimeokoka mpaka wezi wakicome kuiba zinasema 'ibenitu Mungu anawaona'. (App. A53)_

Your dogs are too saved that should thieves come to steal they say “just steal God is seeing you.”

The above reveals slum dwellers inclinations to religion and concurs with Karl Marx’s observation that religion is the opium of the poor. As Githinji observes in “Mchongoano Verbal Duels: Risky Discourse and Social Cultural commentary”, Christians are exhorted to strictly follow Jesus’ teachings but these teachings are portrayed as impractical in some cases. Thus, through _Mchongoano_, urban youth seem to recommend that Christianity should be practical and address that which affects people rather strict adherence to its doctrines.

### 3.8 Individual Traits

Individual character traits among the urban youth in the slums have also been questioned in _Mchongoano_. Certain character traits among the youth are criticized while others are praised. However, much of the _Mchongoano_ dwells on the criticism of individual character traits as perceived weaknesses among the youth. For instance, naivety and ignorance are character traits that are highly detested in _Mchongoano_. Those who are naive are seen as maladjusted within slum life. They are likely to be conned, mugged, or ridiculed. Hence, there are many _Mchongoano_ texts ridiculing the naive.
Anyone who is not streetwise is seen as only fit for rural existence. For a long time urban youth have referred to those from rural areas as *fala ya ushago* which can loosely be translated as a village idiot. Examples of *Mchongoano* ridiculing the naive are as follows:

> *Wewe ni mjinga first time yako kupanda ndege ulisema ushukishwe kwa stage.* (App. A54)

You are too daft that the first time you travelled by air you requested to be dropped at the next terminus.

The *Mchongoano* ridicules those who are supposedly ignorant of the sophistication of air travel. All they are familiar with is road travel involving a bus terminus. However, such ignorance is impossible and that is why it is ridiculous. The same is evident in the following *Mchongoano*:

> *Wewe ni mjinga unacount vidole na calculator.* (App. A55)

You are too daft that you need a calculator to count your fingers.

In this *Mchongoano*, a person using a calculator to count fingers is not only ridiculous but comical. They are many *Mchongoano* that ridicule those who are unfamiliar with technology such as the use of computers and other modern appliances. Of course the message here is that one must strive to come out of such ignorance.

Individual ignorance is not only manifested among the youth but in the adults
also. Adults are also depicted as not being aware of some aspects of social transformation in the society. They ignorance becomes evident when they are confronted with such social realities. This is evident in the following duels:

_Babako ni mjinga siku ya kwanza kununua gari aliitisha paper bag. (App. A₅₆)_

Your father is too daft that when he bought his first car he requested that it be wrapped in a paper bag.

_Babako mjinga alienda kununua ng’ombe akaona ikikojoa akasema sitaki hiyo imetoboka. (App. A₅₇)_

Your father is too daft he was going to buy a cow but when he saw it pee he said, ‘I don’t want that one it is leaking’.

_Wewe ni fala ukipigwa ngeta unaitisha change._ (App. A₅₈)

You are too daft should you be mugged you demand for change.

Other character traits that are ridiculed in _Mchongoano_ are greed and gluttony. Since, as we have established _Mchongoano_ is mainly performed in the slums, traits such as greed would be anathema because sharing is encouraged since the resources are either limited or rarely available. _Mchongoano_ castigating these traits can be illustrated thus:

_Wewe ni mlafi mpaka unakula shimo ya doughnut._ (App. A₅₉)

You are greedy that you would even eat the hole in a doughnut.

_Wewe ni mlafi mpaka unataka kuonja maji ya ugali._ (App. A₆₀)

You are too greedy that you want even to taste the water for cooking
In the first duel, it is practically impossible to eat the hole of a doughnut hence what is being castigated here is extreme greed which is not acceptable among the destitute in the urban slums. Symbolically, the taunted is urged to refrain from such behaviour since it impacts negatively on his/her image.

In the second taunt, it is ridiculous that one may want to taste the bland water for cooking ugali. This is extreme greed since instead of waiting to savor the tasty ugali; one would wish to start with its water. In fact it is most unlikely that somebody would do that. As for the third Mchongoano, it is ironical that one should hide when swallowing saliva yet people do not share saliva. All these are aspects of greed that the youth detest in the society.

Through the taunts, the youth are able to not only express their disgust regarding certain unbecoming behaviours in the society but also educate their peers on acceptable mannerisms. In foregrounding these negative behaviours such as greed, gluttony among others, the urban youth want to show that in spite of the poor conditions that they live in in the slums there should be decorum in their behaviour.
3.9 Ironies of Life

Life is believed to be characterized by fortunes as well as misfortunes. People may succeed today while tomorrow they fail. The verbal duels have also veered into these ironies of daily life. The discourse surrounding daily life and its attendant ironies is manifested in *Mchongoano* thus:

*Una nywele moja kwa kichwa na unadai wewe ni farasi.* *(App. A62)*

You have one piece of hair in your head yet you claim to have the mane of a horse.

*Una nywele moja kwa kichwa na bado unadai cut.* *(App. A63)*

You have only one hair yet you would ask for a stylish haircut.

*Huna meno lakini unapigia nyama choma.* *(App. A64)*

You are toothless but you are demanding for roast meat.

In the three taunts above, the ironies of life come out very clearly. For instance, in the first instance, one has simply a single hair but could claim to be having curls like those of a horse. In the same vein, the second taunt ridicules ne who have a piece of hair yet he wants a stylish hair cut. The three texts are laden with symbols in that they are used not only to ridicule the taunted but to also warn them of their constant yearning for that which they do not have. Thus, the duels symbolically imply that one needs to be satisfied with what they have and should stop the habit of wishing for that which they cannot attain since they have certain limitations such as economic constraints.
3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have extensively explored style in *Mchongoano*. Through thematic analysis, we have shown how despite the fact that *Mchongoano* is regarded as hyperbolic is rich in styles such as satire, sarcasm, irony and symbolism. In this, we have been able to show that *Mchongoano* though regarded as jokes is laden with messages that educate, warn and caution the general public.
CHAPTER FOUR
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Summary of the Major Findings

This study set out to present a literary analysis of the content and context of *mchongoano* as an urban youth folklore genre. The study comprised an analysis of sixty-four *mchongoano* texts selected from one-hundred and twenty texts collected from the field during data collection. The selection of sixty-four *Mchongoano* texts for analyses in this thesis was based on various themes that the texts were identified guided by thematic analysis. This chapter sets out to recap the major findings of the study.

Our focus in this study was twofold: first, trace the literary antecedents of *Mchongoano* as an urban youth genre and in the process analyse various *Mchongoano* texts within their contexts and their influence on Kenyan urban youth. This was clearly the focus of our Chapter Two. In this chapter, we attempted to situate *Mchongoano* humour within the larger spectrum of humour studies. Although Literature on humour is vast, we selectively explored literature on humour that closely relates to *Mchongoano*. It is noteworthy that scholars in psychology, sociology, anthropology, women studies, communications and management have investigated aspects of humour and joking, but their works were carefully evaluated in line with our objectives.

In the same chapter, we explored various types of humour and in the process came up with a classification of *Mchongoano* humour. We also drew parallels between other forms of humour from various parts of the world like American “Negros” Play of the Dozens with *Mchongoano* humour. In this way, we were able to not only establish but
also elucidate the functions of *Mchongoano* humour among urban youth. We identified the emotional, social, and intellectual benefits of the verbal duels.

In the course of our analyses, we were able to explain the qualities of the verbal duels and also demonstrate how the verbal duels reflect the common ethnic stereotypes in Kenya. Again, we were able to show why children engage in *Mchongoano* humour. It emerged that children engage in the duels in the form of word play, to express surprise or the unexpected, and as a way of showing superiority. In this regard, we were able to show the contents within which the duels do occur and that the meaning(s) of the verbal duels changed across contexts.

The second part of this study explored the stylistic and semantic variations and their influence on the meaning(s) of *Mchongoano*. Our Chapter Three focused on this guided by the stylistic theory. Before we proceeded with the analysis of style in the selected duels, we classified them as already mentioned above using thematic content analysis. Shifting from issues such as opulence, poverty, old age, Religion, individual traits, crime, fear and insecurity, we were able to analyse various styles such as irony, satire, symbolism, juxtaposition, sarcasm and semantic variations inherent in the verbal duels.

4.2 Conclusion

This study affirms that *Mchongoano* as an urban youth folklore genre and deserves literary merits and as such ought to be recognized as an emerging folklore genre. This is so because not only does *Mchongoano* have ontological antecedents but also has various functions that it performs among its users like any other genre of
folklore. As we have shown in this study, the urban youth engage in *Mchongoano* humour not as a mere entertainment exercise but as a communicative tool to conceal certain social truths and to fulfill certain social, intellectual and emotional needs. The youth, therefore, engage Mchongoano as a code of communication in the society.

### 4.3 Recommendations for further Research

This study delimited itself to the literary analysis of *Mchongoano* as an urban folklore genre. Particularly, we focused on the ontological antecedents, semantic variations and stylistic features of the verbal duels. We recommend that further studies on *Mchongoano* need to be projected on other perspectives such as the lexical, syntactical and phonological variations.

Further, we recommend that a comparative study of *Mchongoano* needs to be conducted between urban and rural areas to establish similarities and difference in the verbal duels practised in these areas.
Works Cited


Moniek, Buijzen and Patti, Valkenburg. "Developing a Typology of Humor in Audiovisual*.


Appendix A: Mchongoano Texts used in the Study

A₁ TV. yenu ina joto mpaka mwanahabari ana sweat
   Your TV is too hot that even the announcer sweats.

A₂ Nyinyi ni wadosi mpaka mnapeleka kuku kwa tuition.
   You are so rich that you send your hens for tuition

A₃ Umeparara ukijikuna unatoa unga.
   Your skin is so rough that when you scratch you produce flour.

A₄ Nyinyi ni waugly hadi babako anasema “marry one get two free”.
   You so ugly that your fathers says “marry one get two free.

A₅ Kuna insecurity mpaka ukipiga mtu geta anapewa receipt
   There so much insecurity that if you are mugged you are issued
   with a receipt.

A₆ Wewe ni mweusi ukiona shetani anasema “I have never seen a devil like that”
   You are so black that should you see Satan he says “I have never see a devil like
   that”.

A₇ Wee ni mmono mpaka ukianguka chini watu wanajishindia mafuta ya kupika.
   You are so fat that should you fall down people will fetch cooking fat.

A₈ Una kichwa ndogo ukifikiria unafaint.
   Your head is so small should you think you would faint.

A₉ Nasikia una masikio kubwa mpaka siku ya kuzaliwa yaliinuliwa kaa world cup.
   I hear that you have such big ears in that they were lifted up like a world cup
   the day you were born.

A₁₀ Nyinyi ni wadosi mpaka munaweka underwear kwa furiji.
You are so posh that you put underwear in the fridge

A11 First time yako kuingia kwa matt ulitoa viatu ukasalimia kila mtu"

Your first time to board a matatu you removed your shoes and greeted everyone.

A12 Nyinyi ni wadosi mkihama munaweke vitu kwa flash disk.

You are so posh when you move to a new place you carry all your house items in a flash disk.

A13 Mamako ni Mkristo hadi namba yake ya simu ni John3:16”

Your mum is so Christian that her phone number is “John 3:16”

A14 Mjaluo anaweza kulala njaa ili save anumue TV flat screen!

A15 Mkikuyu hupenda pesa sana, akivamiwa na wezi, heri afe kuliko kuvapa hao wezi wenye wamemvamia ili wamuu!

A16 Mvajua nini? Imagine baba ya huyu huringa na gari lake vile Wajalu wote hudo

A17 Shush yako amekonda hadi anapigwa shock na moshi ya ugali.

Your grandma is so thin that she is shocked by smoke from “ugali”

A18 Nyinyi ni wadosi hadi shush yako anavaa skin tight.

You are so posh that your grandma wears skin tight.

A19 Wewe ni mlafi hadi unakula shimo la doughnut.

You are so greedy that you eat the hole in a doughnut.

A20 Wewe ni mkonde hadi unavaa pete kwa kiuno.

You are so thin that you can wear a ring around your waist.

A21 Budako ana madeni mob mpaka anaitwa Dennis.

Your dad is so heavily indebted that he is named Dennis.

A22 Kichwa kubwa hadi ukiingia class unaitwa headboy.
Your head is so big that when you entered class room you are named headboy.

A23 Wewe mfupi mpaka mkicheza mbirikicho unajificha nyuma ya sindano.

You are so short that when you play hide and seek you hide behind a needle.

A24 Una tumbo kubwa ukitaka kutema mate unasongesha side.

Your tummy is so huge that when you spit you have to shove it aside.

A25 Babako ni mlafi mpaka akimaliza sigara anaramba vidole.

Your daddy is so greedy that after smoking he has to lick his fingers.

A26 Budako ana tumbo kubwa mpaka imeandikwa danger for girls.

Your daddy has such a big tummy that it is labeled danger for girls.

A27 Nasikia wewe ni mrefu mpaka Kibaki anauliza “Je, kwani sikuoni?”

It is said your father is so tall that Kibaki says “Je kwani sikuoni?”

A28 Matiti za mama yako ni mzee mpaka unaambiwa “shake well before use”

Your mum’s breasts are so old that you are instructed “shake well before use”

A29 Kwenu kuna insecurity mpaka mtu akipigwa ngeta anapewa receipt.

There is so much insecurity in your area that when a person is mugged is issued with a receipt.

A30 Wewe ni fala ukipigwa ngeta unaitisha change.

Your are so daft that should you be mugged you demand for change.

A31 Babako ni mwoga analala akiwa amekunja ngumi.

Your father is such a coward that he sleeps with his fists clenched.

A32 Nasikia babako ni mwoga yeye hupika ugali na panga.

Your father is so cowardly that he uses a panga to cook ugali.

A33 Nasikia doggy zenu ni oga mpaka zikiona mwizi zinasena “wewe watchie nisaidie”.

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It is said that your dogs are so cowardly that should a thief come they call out “help me guards.”

A34 Nyinyi ni maskini mwizi akikuja kwenu anaiba duster.

You are so poor that can only steal a mopping duster in your home.

A35 Nyinyi ni maskini chapati ikikatika mnaenda kushonesha.

You are so poor that should your chapatti get torn it has to be mended.

A36 Umesota mpaka ukiingiza mikono kwa mifuko inalia echo.

You are so broke that should you put your hands in your pockets they echo.

A37 Nyinyi ni wadosi mpaka mna ng’ombe za mtumba na goro

You are so posh to the extent that you have second hand and new cattle.

A38 Nyinyi ni wadosi mpaka mnawalisha kuku zenu baika mayai isianguke.

You are so posh that your hens put on biker pants so that eggs may not fall down.

A39 Nyinyi ni wadosi mpaka kuku yenu hutaga mayai boil.

You are so posh that your hen lays boiled eggs.

A40 TV yenu ina channel mingi mpaka iko na ya Gikomba.

Your Tv has so many channels including a Gikomba channel.

A41 Nyinyi ni wadosi mpaka mnaweka panty kwa fridge.

You are so posh you put panties in your fridge.

A42 Wewe ni mweusi mpaka mosquito ikikuja kukuuma inakuja na tochi.

You are so black that when a mosquito comes to bit you it comes with a torch.

A43 Wewe ni mblack ukisimama na makaa customer anasema “nipatie hiyo kubwa!”

You are so black that when you stand besides charcoal a customer would request ‘give me that big one.’
You are so black that when you enter a room people go to sleep imagining it is night time.

You are so black that charcoal flees from you.

Your grandma is so old that he shocked by the beam of a vehicle headlights.

Your father is so old that he uses a ladle to tuck in his shirt.

You are so old that your teeth grow upside down.

Your grandma is so old that her arms are short-sleeved.

Your grandma is so old that in a day’s time her birth certificate will upgrade to a diploma.

Your grandma is so old that she was the househelp of Adam and Eve.

Your father is so old that the was neighbour to Abraham.

Your dogs are so saved when thieves come to steal they just say “Just steal God is seeing you”
A54 Wewe ni mjinga first time yako kupanda ndege ulisema ushukishwe kwa stage.
You are so daft that the frist time you traveled by air you requested to be dropped at the next terminus.

A55 Wewe ni mjinga unacount vidole na calculator.
You are so daft that you need a calculator to count your fingers.

A56 Babako ni mjinga siku ya kwanza kununua gari aliitisha paper bag
Your father is so daft that when he bought his first car he requested for it to be wrapped in a paperbag.

A57 Babako mjinga alienda kununua ng’ombe akaona ikikojoa akasema “sitaki hiyo imetoboka”.
Your father is so daft he was going to buy a cow but when he saw it pee he said “I don’t want that one, it is licking”.

A58 Wewe ni fala ukipigwa ngeta unaitisha change.
You are so daft should you be mugged you demand for change.

A59 Wewe ni mlafi mpaka unakula shimo ya doughnut.
You are so greedy that you would even eat the hole of doughnut.

A60 Wewe ni mlafi mpaka unataka kwanja maji ya ugali.
You are so greedy that you want even to taste the water for cooking ‘ugali.’

A61 Wewe ni mlafi hadi unameza mate juu ya mabati.
You are so greedy that have to go to the roof to swallow saliva.

A62 Una nywele moja kwa kichwa na unadai wewe ni farasi.
You have one piece of hair on your hand yet claim to have the mane of a horse.

A63 Una nywele moja kwa kichwa na bado unadai cut.
You have only one hair on your head yet you ask for a stylish cut.

Akuhuno lenyo lakin, unapigia nyama choma.

You are toothless yet you are demanding for roast meat.
Appendix B: Statistical Presentation of *Mchongoano* Data

**Background Information**

Responses to the teachers and pupils were analyzed on the basis of their background information. This section focuses on gender, years of experience for the teachers and category and types of schools. It also focuses on the age of pupils and their class.

**Pupils by Gender**

The data for the study was collected from 2 public and 2 private primary school pupils. An item was included in the questionnaire which sought information on the gender of the pupils. Out of the 174 pupils, 117 (67.2%) were male and 57 (32.8%) were female. The study revealed that majority of the pupils was male.

**Pupils by Age**

In the questionnaire, an item was included which sought information on the age of the pupils from all the primary schools studied. Table 1 presents the distribution of pupils by age. Majority of pupils (52.6%) who responded were aged between 9-11 years, followed by (30.1%) aged between 12-14 years, (14.7%) were aged between 6-8 years and only (2.6%) were 15 years old.

**Pupils’ Grades**

The Pupils were asked to state their grade/classes in the questionnaire distributed to them. In response, majority of pupils who responded were from standard three (19.3%), standard four (14.9%) standard five (23.0%), standard six (15.5%) and standard Seven at (16.1%). This implies that this is the group that participate greatly in Mchongoano. Standard one and two might be still
young to do Mchongoano and standard eight may be busy either revising or concentrating on their studies as they await exams.

**Teachers by Gender**

As for class teachers, a total of 20 class teachers responded to the questionnaires. An item was included in the questionnaire that sought information on the gender of class teachers. Out of 20 class teachers, 8 (40%) were males and 12 (60%) were females. The study revealed that majority of the class teachers were female.

**Teachers Teaching Experience**

An item was included in the teachers’ questionnaire which sought information on teachers teaching experience. The study revealed that (50 %) of the teachers had a teaching experience of between 0 – 5 years, followed by (20.0%) who had between 6-10 years, (10.0%) had between 11-15 years and (5.0 %) had over 20 years of experience. The study revealed that majority of the teachers (70.0%) had a teaching experience of less than 10 years.

**Subjects Taught by Teachers**

The researcher asked the teachers to state in the questionnaires the subjects they taught pupils. However, most teachers who responded taught both humanities and sciences.

**Type of School**

An item was included in the pupils’ questionnaire which sought information on the type of school which included private or public schools. The study revealed that (26.4%) of the pupils were in private schools and (73.6%) in public schools. The study revealed that most of the schools were public primary schools.
Category of School

An item was included in the questionnaire for both teachers and pupils which sought information on the category of school. The study revealed that all of the schools were mixed day primary schools.

Questions for the Pupils

The pupils were asked in the questionnaire whether they like a teacher who cracks jokes in class and weather they have respect for such a teacher. In response to this question, 156 (92.9%) of the pupils said yes they liked such a teachers while (7.1%) did not like. In terms of respect, 155 (92.8%) of the pupils said they respected teachers who crack jokes as well.

In this study, 158 (96.4%) of the pupils who responded enjoyed Mchongoano sessions while (5.4%) did not enjoy Mchongoano. The reasons why these pupils enjoy Mchongoano. From the field data, majority (35.2%) of the pupils engaged in Mchongoano just for fun, (16.7%) engaged in it to make them laugh and for enjoyment. Even though the study revealed that majority of pupils liked Mchongoano, (1.9%) of pupils did not like mchongoano at all.

Time of Mchongoano

In the questionnaires, the pupils were asked to state what moment of the day do they prefer Mchongoano. In response to this question the pupils gave different moments of the day.

From the field data, (70.0%) of pupils prefer Mchongoano from afternoon to evening.

Place of Mchongoano
An item was included in the pupils’ questionnaire which sought information on the place where Mchongoano happened frequently. The study finding shows that most Mchongoano take place either at school or mostly at home as stated by (38.0%) and (44.0%) of the respondents respectively.

The Languages preferred during Mchongoano

The pupils were asked in the questionnaire to state the most preferred language or languages used during Mchongoano. The most preferred language used during Mchongoano by Pupils is Kiswahili according to (36.4%) of respondents, followed by Kiswahili mixed with sheng at (23.5%) and sheng at (17.4%).

The pupils gave the reasons why they preferred the languages stated. From the data, the reason by (73.1%) of the pupils to use their preferred languages was because they understood the language better even though (10.4%) said it is because it gives the intended meaning easily and interestingly.

Questions for the Teachers

In the questionnaires, teachers were asked to state whether jokes serve any purpose in classroom and whether jokes threaten teachers authority or whether jokes are used as a self-serving to instructions. In response, (90.0%) of teachers agreed that jokes serve an importance purpose in classroom. On the same note (80.0%) said that they did not use jokes as a threat to a teacher’s authority, but as supplementary way of teaching.
Effects of Jokes in Classroom

The teachers were asked to state the effects of jokes in a classroom setting. The teachers gave the following effects of Jokes:

1. A unifying factor as every student feels that he/she is part and parcel of the class.
2. Make the lessons interesting, for stimulus variation although if not well handled it can demoralize children.
3. Makes pupils happy, motivate them and makes learning enjoyable.
4. Breaks down boredom in classroom hence drawing attention of pupils hence creating interest.
5. Makes pupils to relax even though if not controlled, can lead to classroom time wasting.
6. Makes class lively and breaks monopoly of lectures and this makes pupils to express themselves freely.

Examples of Jokes that has been successfully used during Instructions

The following are some of jokes which have been successfully used by the teachers in class during instructions:

1. Luos have big lips, a natural adaptation to eat fish as Kikuyu narrow mouth to eat Githeri
2. You are so clean and tidy in your house such that flies ask for permission to enter.
3. What do you a call a person who talks when others are not interested?
4. A drunken man was carried when he had a blackout. He was being taken to Hospital and on the way, the driver stopped at a shell petrol station to fill the tank. The drunk
man gained consciousness and did not read well and saw the word SHELL to be HELL he ran out of the vehicle shouting he was not going to hell

5. Mjanja kama Sungura referring to the clever pupil.

6. Sing a pop song to remember a point in class.

7. Donkey jobs referring to hard working pupils.

8. “There is a fool at the end of this ruler” says the teacher, “which one”? Asks the student, “why are you talking when am teaching”? asks the teacher, “why are you talking when am conversing”, asks the student.

Examples of inappropriate use of Jokes by a Teacher in Classroom

The following are examples of inappropriate jokes used by teachers in classrooms:

1. When a pupil answers the question wrongly and the teachers use the joke to ridicule that pupil will embarrass the pupil.

2. When jokes are personal especially to do with real disability of somebody like sura kama kiatu, ngiri (warthog)

3. When the teacher uses jokes like your brain is as black as a charcoal nothing can penetrate

4. When the teachers uses the names of the parents or relatives while joking like mijinga kama mamako/babako.

5. When used to down rate pupils makes them have low self esteem leading to poor performance, withdrawal and lack of interest
Appendix C: Questionnaires

A. Questionnaire for Pupils

1. Introduction

This questionnaire is designed to facilitate the critical investigation *mchongoano* genre among Kenyan urban youth. To enable an informed analysis, it is important that all information requested in the questionnaire should be provided as completely and accurately as possible. **Please do not write your name on the questionnaire to ensure the confidentiality of your responses.** Please omit any questions you do not wish to answer. Please feel free to add comments or clarifications to any of the questions. Thank you for your cooperation.

2. General information

Male [ ]  Female [ ]

School Name

Day or Boarding

Private, public or religious

What gender are you?  Male [ ]  Female [ ]

Age  6-8 [ ]  9-11 [ ]  12-14 [ ]

What grade are you in?
3. Specific Questions

1. Do you like a teacher who cracks jokes? YES [ ] NO [ ]

2. Do you have respect for a teacher who cracks jokes? YES [ ] NO [ ]

3. a) Do you enjoy *mchongoano* sessions? YES [ ] NO [ ]
   b) Why? ____________________________________________________________

   With whom do you enjoy *mchongoano*?___________________________________

4. What moments of the day do you prefer *mchongoano*?

5. Where does *mchongoano* happen more frequently? (more than one answer is possible)
   Specify:______________________________________________________________

6. a) What are your preferred language(s) of *mchongoano*?
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

   b) Any reasons for the choice of the particular language(s) indicated above?
B. Questionnaire/FGD/Interview Guide for Teachers

General information

School Name ____________________________________________________________

Day or Boarding _________________________________________________________

Private, public or religious ______________________________________________

What gender are you? Male [ ] Female [ ]

3. Specific Questions

7. Do you like a pupil who cracks jokes? YES [ ] NO [ ]

8. Do you have respect for pupils who cracks jokes? YES [ ] NO [ ]

9. a) Do you enjoy mchongoano sessions? YES [ ] NO [ ]
   b) Why? ____________________________________________________________
   With whom do you enjoy mchongoano? ________________________________

10. a) What are your preferred language(s) of mchongoano?
    ________________________________________________________________
    ________________________________________________________________
   b) Any reasons for the choice of the particular language(s) indicated above?

11. Explain whether Mchongoano affects the pupils' performance.
CITY EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

2ND FEBRUARY, 2011

The Headteachers
Makadara & Kamukunji District
Nairobi.

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

This is to certify that DAVID MWANGI KIMONGO from Kenyatta University, Literature Department has been granted authority to collect data for his academic research.

You are requested to assist him where necessary.

JECINTA CHARLES
Ag. CHIEF ADVISOR TO SCHOOLS
FOR: DIRECTOR CITY EDUCATION