Vuya uhodhe!
Unpacking the Form and Content of Informal Traders’ Advertisements: A Submission from the Railway Siding Market Expedition in Masvingo

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the linguistic repertoire of informal traders at the Railway Siding Market in Masvingo town, Zimbabwe. The researchers armed with notebooks, cell phones and video cameras recorded verbatim the advertisements on several days traversing the entire geography of the expansive market. The researchers did this in order to study the chosen phenomenon \textit{in situ} observing the spirited advertising or the verbal gymnastics in the duel to bring bread and butter on the table. Interviews were also held with a few selected respondents. The paper argues that though the main activity engaged by the traders is a way to eke out a living and some may see their oral endeavours as nothing more than advertising, close scrutiny shows that those verbal efforts should be viewed as part of the rich African orature heritage adopting and adapting to a kaleidoscopic socio-politico-economic terrain. From the analysis of the linguistic data gathered one can witness a plethora of linguistic processes at play including borrowing, extension, narrowing, coinage, anti-language, among many. Also discernible from the code used and the material gathered and analyzed are the values, attitudes and stereotypes of the speech community which are discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Form, Content, Informal traders, Advertisements, Oral Literature.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This research explores the linguistic repertoire of informal traders at the Railway Siding Market in Masvingo town, Zimbabwe. The market is popularly referred to by Masvingo residents as ‘Kuchitima’ which literally means ‘at the train station’. The word ‘kuchitima’ is borrowed from the English ‘steam’ which is the shortened form of ‘steam engine’. The current market is not at the train station but is close to the railway line. The reason why the market is called ‘kuchitima’ is that the traders, who were mainly coming from farming communities along the railway line which connects Gweru town to Masvingo, conducted their business at the railway station. The farmers naturally prefer the railway mode of transport to others because it is much cheaper. The other big advantage for the farmers is that the train, which combines passengers and goods, arrives in Masvingo around mid-morning and departs for Gweru at about five in the evening. This is convenient for the traders who do not need to put up in Masvingo. However this also poses a challenge to the traders who need to quickly sell their wares in order to catch up with the train in the evening. The race against time also has an influence on the language used in order to ensure as quick a sale as possible. In an interview one second hand clothes vendor said that to ensure visibility by would-be customers the three ‘directors’ of this particular stall had to invest in a PA system. With this they took turns to lure customers by performing their impromptu verbal art which they spiced up with popular songs which was so polished that professional DJs would turn green with envy. The said train comes to Masvingo on every other day and this puts pressure on the traders who can therefore not afford to miss the return trip since that will mean staying put in town for two days eating into the meagre profit. Carrying left over goods back home is uneconomical since they would have to pay for the goods again. Initially the market was abuzz only on ‘train days’. This has now changed. Traders from within and without town daily flock to the market which now boasts of a diverse range of goods which include new and second hand clothes, agricultural produce, solar panels, invertors, batteries, wild fruits, radios, cellular phones and accessories, cosmetics and a variety of meals, among many. These newcomers provide the original traders with a market for their goods as well as more competition since some of these at times buy goods cheaply from desperate farmers who need to return to the countryside and then resale these providing stiff competition to the ‘migrant traders’ hence there is a stampede to eke out a living at the market which has been extended by the city council several times to cope with the demand for space.
The Place of Informal Traders’ Adverts in Literature

There is no agreed universal meaning of the term ‘literature’ which is derived from the Latin word ‘littera’ which means letter, thereby emphasizing the written art form (Bressler, 1994). Recent thought has tended to want to extend this by including other forms of verbal expression hence the emergency of terms such as ‘orature’. ‘Poietike’, the Greek word from which the generic term ‘poetry’ is derived means ‘making’ or ‘creation’ and according to Aristotle, the father of literary criticism, ‘Poietike’ or poetry refers to ‘all creative literature…’ (Livingston, 1923: 350). Dr. Samuel Johnson shares similar sentiments when he says that “the essence of poetry [literature]…is invention, such invention as by producing something unexpected, surprises and delights”. Bressler (1994:9) concludes “However one decides to define literature, unquestioningly this art form provides many hours of pleasure for readers through the imaginative creation of secondary worlds via the vehicle of words.”

What is oral literature?

According to Nandwa and Bukenya (1983:1), oral literature refers to:

Those utterances whether spoken, recited or sung, whose composition and performance exhibit to an appreciable degree the artistic characteristics of accurate observation, sound imagination and ingenious expression.

The orality of the vendors’ utterances emanates from the fact that in their natural state, they are composed and performed through the spoken word or by word of mouth, which is what ‘oral’ entails. The artistry comes from the fact that language is used unordinarily and the listener is forced to focus on how the signs are artistically knit to convey the message. In other words language is defamiliarized. What Smith and Dale observed about the Lamba’s artistry in narration is similar to the performance the researchers observed:

It would need a combination of phonograph and kinematograph to reproduce a tale as it is told. . . . . Every muscle of face and body spoke, a swift gesture often supplying the place of a whole sentence. . . . (cited in Finnegan, 2012:5).

Oral literature is actualized in and through its performance. The significance of performance can make an important contribution to the impact of the particular literature form being exhibited. Another fact to note is that in oral literature, there is no ownership, as in copyright, thus no vendor can claim to possess the rights to an advert. For example, second clothes bales are all over the country and so are vendors; so one can hear ‘Hodha bhero’ at different markets in different parts of the country.

This paper seeks to ‘criticize’ vendors’ verbal art. According to Tilak (1996:1), literary criticism is ‘the play of the mind on a work of literature and its function is to examine its excellences and defects, and finally to evaluate its artistic worth.’ The sole task of criticism is to answer three questions: ‘What has the artist tried to express? How has he (sic) tried to express it? Was it worth expressing?’ (Svingarn cited in Tilak, 1996:2). These three questions will guide our discussion and analysis of market cries observed and collected. Like any other work of art, oral literature can best be appreciated by looking at the work itself, the artist or creator of the work, the universe or world the work supposedly represents and the audience or readers’ role in the meaning-making process (Bressler, 1994). Those who confine themselves to the work and work alone purport to be scientific, the likes of Formalists and New Critics who are sceptical about extraneous factors. There are critics such as the biographical and psychoanalytic, who believe that looking at the creator of the art yields important insights into the work. Most of the artists whose work is analysed here, we argue, are mostly those outside ‘mainstream’ society and the content of their art reflects this in the form of ‘anti-language’ discussed later. There are also critics who concentrate on the universal issues or the world and how it is arrange and (mis)managed and how this is discernible in works of art. This group includes such critics as the Marxists, Feminists and Afrocentrists. We should hasten to point out that authors also have their own beliefs on the world and these are enacted in the secondary world of literature which reflects the world the artist lives. The last broad category of critical analysis emphasizes the role of the audience or reader which is the focus of Reader Response critics. Depending on background or interest readers and listeners highlight certain aspects at the expense of others (Bressler, 1994). In this paper an eclectic approach will be employed in an endeavour to give as total an interpretative picture as possible.

**Data Generation**

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research procedures were used to collect and analyze data. This research paradigm looks at how people interpret their experiences, views the researcher as the main data-gathering instrument in the field and is
descriptive as well as inductive. (Merriam, 1988; Creswell, 1994). The qualitative research paradigm is very much dependent on the researcher(s) as the main data-gathering instrument(s); the two researchers and for this reason we had to immerse ourselves in the thick of things at the busy market in order to ‘study real-world situations as they unfold naturally’ (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982: 28) and witness the goings on (or sayings on) in natural settings, the market. Welman et al. (2012:9) share similar sentiments when they say qualitative researchers try to achieve an insider’s view by talking to subjects or observing their behaviours in a sub way; they believe that first hand experiences of the subjects under investigation produces the best data. Qualitative research is emic, that is, seeks the insider’s view as opposed to its quantitative counterpart that is etic, or detached. In this spirit interviews with selected respondents were carried in order to get into the shoes of the traders. The goal of qualitative research is “to portray the complex pattern of what is being studied in sufficient depth of detail so that one who has not experienced it can understand it” (Ary et al.1990:445). The oral expressions from which the linguistic items studied were selected were part of natural or spontaneous expressions we gathered as covert observers (Haralambos et al.2008). Covert observations were conducted because the researchers felt that those observed might behave differently if overt observations were the sole tools of data gathering. The main data gathering technique was participant observation. The researchers were involved in both full participation as well as onlooker or ‘on-hearer’ observation as potential clients. The oral expressions from which the linguistic items studied were selected were part of natural or spontaneous expressions we gathered as covert observers (Haralambos et al.2008). Covert observations were conducted because the researchers felt that those observed might behave differently if overt observations were the sole tool of data gathering. Translations will be made as well as detailed explanations on the denotative and connotative meanings of the collected expressions for the benefit of those who may not be conversant with the languages the vendors would be using. Covert observations have not gone down well with some critics on the question of ethics (Bulmer, 1982 in Haralambos et al.2008) but we felt that since our task was to gather linguistic items without attaching these to their individual users, none would be hurt or prejudiced by our undeclared observation intentions. In addition to the covert, overt data gathering was done. For example we had to seek the approval of respondents when it came to taking of videos and photographs and we also interviewed some traders. Data gathering involved moving with notebooks jotting down the linguistic items of interest when the opportunity to be alone, out of sight of those observed arose. Our experience was quite similar to Pryce’s (1979) cited in Haralambos et al (2008:833) who says:

I had to rely heavily on memory; my method was to write down these observations as soon as possible after hearing or observing them. The rule of thumb I constantly exercised was to record them while they were still fresh
in my mind, generally the same day...

Extensive use was made, where conditions permitted, of audio phone recordings of relevant oral art forms for analysis later. The researchers thought it wise to capture the goings on in such detail because as Finnegan (2012:5) observes:

...the connection between transmission and very existence is a much more intimate one [than in written literature]...without its oral realization and direct rendition by singer or speaker, an unwritten literary piece cannot easily be said to have any continued or independent existence at all...

With the above in mind the authors saw it prudent to provide as much background information as possible because:

in the case of oral literature the bare words cannot be left to speak for themselves for the simple reason that in the actual literary work so much else is necessarily and intimately involved...(Finnegan, 2012:17).

At the disposal of the oral artist are the gesture, posture and voice not just the words.

Some of the expressions gathered and analysed

The humorous

Agnes, mwana wankunku. Mazai pano! (Agnes, a chicken’s child. Eggs for sale here!)

Agnes is a girl or woman’s name but the persona thinks that ‘Agnes’ means ‘eggs’, a malapropismic slip. The utterance is made up of ‘Agnes’ a typical European female name quite common in Zimbabwe, a former British colony. It is also made up of ‘mwana’ (Shona) and ‘wankunku’ (Chewa) and ‘mazai pano’ (Shona). The code mixing and code switching is typical of a multilingual speech community like the Zimbabwean, one where the linguistic data were collected. In ‘Agnes, mwana wankunku’ there is code mixing where Shona (mwana) and Chewa...
(wankunku) are used within a sentence boundary while the change to ‘Mazai pano’ shows code switching. The latter part seems to be included as an explanation of ‘mwana wankunku’.

The joke about ‘eggs’ being referred to as ‘Agnes’ is done at the expense of migrant workers from Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique where Chewa is spoken. Such workers came to the then Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in search of employment and were characterized with very little school education hence the genesis of the malapropism. They were also coming from a different mother tongue background hence the failure to construct a wholly Shona statement. The vendor exploits the well-known joke to good effect in selling his wares. It should be noted that even the formal advertisements by huge corporate very often make use of humour in their adverts.

- Vuya uite zvaunoda mumunda mangu! (Come and do what your heart desires in my field!)

This was said by a vendor who was selling fresh farm produce. In a Zimbabwean rural farming environment generally, from about late October to end of May farmers will be busy on their fields and one can only go into such areas with permission from the owner. Outside the said period (after harvest) these areas are a free- for-all zones. In fact in many rural areas the communal leadership announce the end of the harvest period after which domestic animals will be let loose to mark the period called Mashanga (literally meaning period of husks or crop residue). Before this happens if one’s animals stray into someone’s field one is brought before the traditional court, tried and made to pay compensation for the wronged party. The vendor was definitely alluding to the period when crops are in abundance in the fields. From the fields one gets one’s livelihood. It is not a place where normally one could allow someone to do as one pleases because this will be akin to throwing one’s food security and that of his/her children at the mercy of chance. Interestingly the vendor /farmer were inviting total strangers to come and do what their hearts desired in his field.

- $5 boots mbiri...yekuleft neyekuright! (Shoes $5 for two...one for your left foot and the other for your right!)

On hearing the vendor advertising, a potential client thinks that he/she has struck a huge bargain. Usually people talk about two pairs of shoes, not individual shoes. One realizes later that the vendor was pulling his/her leg and many will find such an incident amusing. However others may feel ‘cheated’ or taken for a ride by the ‘unethical’ business practices of the vendor.

The Poetic

Vuya uhodhe! (Come and place your bulk order!)
Dhora riya rotenga! (The dollar now buys)
Dhora riya rotongai! (The dollar rules the roost)
Hodha bheroi! (Order from the bale!)

‘Vuya uhodhe’ is very popular with vendors. Linguistically this is made up of ‘vuya’(Shona) and ‘uhodhe’ a language item borrowed from English ‘order’ and phonologized into Shona. In the ‘poem’ Shona words include ‘vuya’, ‘riya’, ‘rotena’ and ‘rotonga’ while ‘bhero’ is borrowed from English ‘bale’ in addition to ‘hodha’. The ‘poem’ is characterized with initial repetition (anaphora) as observed in the second and third lines. These lines also have rhyming words ‘rotenga’ and ‘rotonga’ a characteristic together with the repetition cited above which leads to euphony. ‘Dhora riya rotongai!’ is particularly effective as it not only personifies the dollar but also gives it ‘rulership’. Some traders refer to the dollar as maObama in apparent reference to the current United States president, Barrack Obama. The use of the neologism ‘maObama’ to refer to U.S. dollars can be referred to as eponymy, a morphological process where a proper name is used as a base for the formation of new words. The announcement ‘The dollar rules the roost!’ is in obvious reference to the power the dollar wields by virtue of it being the currency of the superpower in the unipolar world. The vendor may have been referring to the fact that the superpower’s tentacles had reached Zimbabwe in spite of the strong anti-Western feelings prevailing in the leadership of the country. The celebratory mood in the utterance may be due to the fact that the traders, like most of the Zimbabwean populace who were coming from a very dry economic patch in their country’s history, were embracing the dollarization of the economy. The vendor is appealing to would-be customers to come and place their bulk orders with him. Quite often the vendors won’t be having ‘warehouses’ of goods. The adverts are often quite exaggerated to create the impression that they are big and serious business people. To the vendors, who are generally coming from a modest educational background, there is no difference between the previous hyperinflation decimated dollar and the ‘new look’ dollar hence the use of the definite article. During the aforementioned economic slide, the Reserve Bank had changed the currency many times in an effort to address the currency problems emanating from a hyperinflationary environment. In that economy, which the Reserve Bank Governor described as a casino economy, the Zimbabwean dollar took many hues in its various futile and cyclic metamorphoses. At one time ordinary Zimbabweans thought that the esteemed office would run out of colour options for its ever-changing notes. In fact it did but went round the problem by, for example using the note colour formerly allocated to an earlier note to print a new one. ‘Dhora riya rotongai’ alludes to the economic drought.
situation Zimbabweans were coming from. It is a celebration of some sort of the multi-currency regime which replaced the world (in)famous and world record breaking inflationary situation. Interestingly Zimbabwe used the ‘dollar’ and the multicurrency regime is dominated by the US$. To the ordinary Zimbabwean the new dollar is ‘the dollar’ which is different from its shadows or poor imitations discussed above hence the euphoric pronouncement:

Dhora riya rotenga! (The dollar now buys!)
Dhora riya rotonga! (The dollar rules the roost!)

The other dimension is that the same US dollar now buys (more) only when one buys from the right traders. From these one gets one’s money’s worth from buying from big wholesale outlets like his. This is evident from ‘hodha bhero’ which means ‘order from the bale.’ This is in reference to the bales of second hand clothes which have flooded Zimbabwean markets popularly known as ‘Mupedzanzhano’ (the place where poverty ends) and second hand clothes as ‘zitye’ meaning old, once used or second hand clothes. The term ‘zitye’, was also applied to mackerel fish which flooded Zimbabwean butcheries from Namibia in the 1990s. To date, the fish is still the cheapest relish that even the poor can afford as they sell for as cheaply as $1 for between five to ten fish. Thus the term ‘zitye’ basically means some cheap ubiquitous item, so ubiquitous that it is termed ‘asina irombe’ (everyone has, so anyone who doesn’t have is a vagabond), implying that only a penniless, homeless, familyless, mindless person can afford not to have such ‘manna from heaven’. These, ‘mazitye’, have arguably filled in a big basic need gap amongst the needy although some have castigated them. For example Hosea Chipanga in his song ‘Zitye’ bemoans, “Her dress once belonged to somebody...Her brassiere once belonged to someone else...”. He basically bemoans the fact that the poor are so dehumanized that they even wear undergarments which once belonged to some unknown dead or alive distant stranger. The use of ‘zitye’ to refer to completely different objects is an example of polysemy where one word is assigned many meanings. The other implied meaning of ‘hodha bhero’ is that this vendor’s goods are so cheap hence affordable that one can afford to buy not only a few items but a whole bale of clothes. The exaggeration is meant to attract the attention of would be customers.

The Cuckoo Type

Some cuckoo birds lay their eggs in the nests of other birds after throwing out their hosts’ eggs. We decided to call this group of utterances the cuckoo type because they thrive on other popular utterances and occurrences for their cause. One such utterance is ‘BACOSSI’ an acronym which means Basic Commodities Supply Side. At the height of the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe, basic commodities were in short supply partly because of the closure of many companies due to lack of foreign currency. As a stop gap measure to ameliorate the plight of the poor, government acquired the commodities and supplied these especially to rural communities ‘for a song’. Skeptics thought that it was vote buying. From then on, ‘BACOSSI’ became part of many Zimbabwean’s linguistic repertoire meaning ‘unbelievably cheap’. Thus when a vendor shouts ‘BACOSSI! BACOSSI!’ the implication is loud and clear to all and sundry: come and take the cheapest goods ever.

Haunted by the Colonial Ghost

“Vuyai tikuchipisirei varungu!” (Come ...and we’ve a special price for you our whitemen).

For some from the formerly colonised ‘whiteness’ is associated with might and capital. This is from the colonially economically lope-sided racial scenario which allotted social stations according to one’s skin pigment. For some of the vendors and ordinary Zimbabweans ‘murungu’ or ‘whiteman or whitewoman’ is not confined to those with white skin but people with money, whether to buy some item or those who are in a position to hire others even for a small chore. One of the researchers protested this description upon which the vendor retorted ‘Our black customers are now the whites: “Handithi takadzinga varungu? Tisu tava varungu vacho!” (‘After expelling the whites... the monied blacks are now the whites’). In spite of the fact that the researcher had shown that he did not see being allocated a new racial group as a compliment, the vendor insisted that whether he liked it or not, that was what the situation was like in his field of work,“Muchinda mubasa rangu ane mari ndiye anonditengera saka ndiye murungu wangu” (Man, in my field of work, anyone with money and buys from me is my whiteman).

The hyperbolic

Vuyai mutore nyimo dzenyu nyoro dzeZaka pano! Unotoda ten pounds hammer kana wotoda! (Come and get your round nuts from Zaka! To crack them you’ll need a ten pound hammer!).

The vendor implores the would-be customer to come and ‘get’, not buy, the nuts an implication that the price is just as good as giving away. The nuts are not ordinary, faceless and anonymous ones but are the famous ‘certified’ ones from Zaka (a place in Masvingo Province renowned for quality round nut production). The trader
knows that some consumers are quite selective and will not partake of anything from anywhere. Besides this he goes on to point out that the nuts are so good that one would need a ‘ten pound’ hammer to crack them— the firmer the nut the better its quality. The utterance is made up of the euphemistic ‘get’, allusion to an actual geographical place to give the nuts a ‘face’ and the hyperbolic need of a hammer to crack the nuts open and the use of two linguistic codes which reflect the speech community. Like many other adverts there is the use of the imperative which is the best way to persuade. There is certainty or sureness in the vendor in as far as the quality of the products he is selling are concerned.

An Appeal to Strong African Familial Ties

This is made clear in one vendor’s marketing strategy, “Nyangwe ndikasara ndava rombe, chitorai imwi vepaHama ne$1 for 2”.(I don’t mind if I remain a penniless wanderer as long as I give my relatives for $1 for 2).

The African family is famous for its gregariousness. In Zimbabwe, especially African people do not talk about a nuclear or extended family—it is the family. One’s father’s brothers are one’s fathers and one’s mother’s sisters are one’s mothers, their children are one’s sisters and brothers not cousins. In a polygamous family the siblings from different mothers are brothers and sisters not half brothers or half sisters. Such is the strength of the relationship bonds in an African set up, blood is not even thicker than water, it is not compared with water. There is no ‘cousining’ or ‘half brothering / sistering’ of each other, but just fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters full stop! When one’s relation, even in the distant past committed a heinous offence such as murder or possessed dangerous personal effects such as goblins, the blood relatives pay for it even with their lives. The statement above therefore, is pregnant with meaning and reflects African axiology and metaphysics and epistemology. The vendor as one coming from this background exploits it to good effect in an effort to lure potential customers. Related to the above statement is: “Hapana ungandibisawo munyama here?” (Is there anyone who can break this jinx? [by buying from me]). African Traditional Religion is in everything African people do: the spirits and God are all-pervading and anthropomorphic; they are heavily involved in the mortals’ lives. When an evil spirit comes in to spoil the party in the form of ill-luck, which is however let to do this by the ancestors or God, mostly as punishment for wrong doing, the jinx has to be broken. In this case the vendor appeals to the African metaphysical to solve his problem, in this case lack of customers.

The Gender Skewed

In an attempt to lure customers one vendor went:

“Vanamai mukasatenga madress akachipa kudai munorohwa neshamhu naMwari! Vana havangafambi vachichovogwa makuvhu nehuku isu vanaMachipisa tiri pano!” (Mothers if you don’t buy these cheap dresses for your daughters, you invite the wrath of God! Children should not move around with their navels being perked at by chickens when we the bargain Kings are here!).

The vendor appeals to the ‘maternal instinct’ in an effort to sway the mothers to buy his wares. His argument is that the dresses he is selling are affordable, the audience are mothers who have daughters they love, the children do not have enough to wear, thus they should buy the dresses, if they don’t, this will attract the wrath of God because God loves children and would not want to see them going naked, their navels being perked at by chickens. The vendor thinks that it is the mothers’ responsibility to buy clothing for the girls and that if they are really caring, they should buy the dresses for their daughters. The last thing one wants is to willingly anger one’s creator, more so through a flimsy offence like not buying inexpensive dresses. Another vendor brought his wares to a minibus, one of the researchers was aboard and attracted the wrath of the passengers when he advertised his wares –pesticides, through the window thus: ‘Chikwapuro pamakozho, nhunzi nemapete. Chero vamwene haumisi!’(The panacea to nagging pests—rats, flies and cockroaches...Even your mother-in-law can’t survive this!)

Interestingly, the debate on the relations between daughters- and mothers –in-law went on until the researcher disembarked.

On another occasion, a vendor who was selling lingerie left the passenger fraternity in another minibus dumbfounded with his loose talk when he urged: ‘Revhavengafambindo nyanga pakudza kudai munorohwa neshamhu naMwari! Vana havangafambi vachichovogwa makuvhu nehuku isu vanaMachipisa tiri pano!” (Rev that man beside you to buy these cheap dresses for your daughters, you invite the wrath of God! Children should not move around with their navels being perked at by chickens when we the bargain Kings are here!).

We believe some of the utterances made by some of the vendors may fall under what Halliday terms anti-language, a term he coined to “describe the distinctive language of an ‘anti-society’: a social group which has an antagonistic or oppositional relationship to the mainstream. Anti-languages are particularly associated with groups whose activities place them outside the law” (Pearce (Ed), 2012:15).

‘PaKadoma’, our research revealed, refers to the raised part just behind the front minibus seats. Interestingly there is a town along the Harare –Bulawayo highway called Kadoma. We gathered that during transport woes during the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe which peaked in 2008 those going to Kadoma would...
The word ‘landlord’ in urban settings means a house owner who lets out a whole house or part of it. Because of
plead to bus crews to carry them after all they were only getting as far as Kadoma and not to the furthest point,
Bulawayo and they were prepared to sit where there were no seats: behind the driver’s seat. In short the
‘PaKadoma suite’ is for those:

i. in a hurry who do not mind the discomfort of sitting or standing bent double
ii. who are travelling short distances in a hurry
iii. who do not have the full fare and who then negotiate with the crew to be taken aboard
iv. whose status exempts them from paying. These include ‘the staff’ (those in the transport business
fraternity) and young children.

The word ‘landlord’ in urban settings means a house owner who lets out a whole house or part of it. Because of
this the ‘landlord’ has extra income and can therefore be big due to income from tenants. When the going gets
tough at the micro- or macro-economic levels the ‘landlord’ can always push this economic burden to the tenants
by raising rentals or even by demanding hard-to-find groceries as in the 2008 hyperinflationary environment in
Zimbabwe. The term ‘landlord’ in the informal sector in Zimbabwe also means a heavily built passenger. Since it
is the ‘law’ to have four passengers on a seat, the minibus touts have to ‘pack’ passengers carefully looking at
how bodily endowed one is. For instance, on this particular seat there were three women ‘landlords’ and a slim
young man. Vendors come from a largely patriarchal community where women are viewed in a negative light.
This particular trader seemed to have a low opinion of women. He seemed to think that women are so
materialistic that they can, at the blink of an eye, change affective allegiances from one man to another. We
get from the cajoling which is suggested by the ‘revving’. The insulting part is that they can do this to get
inexpensive lingerie from total strangers and that all women are dependent economically on men and have to use
to use their femininity as arsenal. In instances where the ‘light’ is positive, it smacks of condescending for example
women as soft emotionally and easily swayed and manipulated as reflected in the utterance quoted below:

Vana mai mukasatenga madress akachipa kudai munorohwa neshamhu naMwari! Vana havangafambi
vachichovogwa makuvhu nehuku isu vanamachipisa tiri pano! (Mothers if you do not buy these cheap dresses for
your daughters you will invite the wrath of God! Children should not move around naked; their navels being
perked by chickens when we the bargain kings are here!).

Stereotypical /Prejudicial/the Crude

On seeing an Apostolic Sect group (presumably a family comprising of husband, three wives, 3 young daughters
in their teens. These are easily recognisable from their white robes, white head scarfs and white bags), an
informal trader shouts: ‘Vana venyu vakakunda kurwizi ndazviona, huyai muvatengere zvivozvavo pano
varambe vakadaro for $1 for 2. (Your daughters have triumphed at the river, I notice. Now come and buy them
the lids at a dollar for two so that they remain chaste). (zvivozvo- literally means ‘lids’ referring to pants. The
vendor was alluding to virginity tests believed to be performed by the said sect during their two week Passover at
Maparanyanga near Masvingo town. The test is said to be performed by elderly women in the sect and they need
water for this hence the reference to the river. Those whose hymen is found intact are the victors. The choice of
the linguistic item ‘lids’ to refer to pants reminds one of the dehumanizing chastity belts used in Europe to lock
women so that they would not engage in sex outside of marriage. In this case the implication is that the girls need
to be ‘preserved’ for the enjoyment of the often elderly and already married man in the sect so that the father will
fetch more in terms of bride price. What shocks the listener is not only the blatant prejudice so loud in this
utterance but also the sexual innuendos –the ‘undressing’ of the blushing young teenage girls but also, and
perhaps worse, the parents’ forced witnessing of their daughters’ private life being displayed for everyone’s
consumption. In the Zimbabwean set up issues to do with children’s sexuality are not the business of the parents.
African societies have structures in place impart knowledge and skills on reproduction issues. For the girl child
this is done by such people as the aunts and grandmothers. The parents are not expected to even be within
earshot of the contents of the sex education lessons by those with the social mandate. However this vendor
chose to throw away all this social etiquette. As discussed earlier some of the language used by some of the
traders can be said to be antilanguage coming from an antisociety; a society that is set up within another society
as a conscious alternative to it. It is a mode of resistance, resistance which may take the form either of passive
symbiosis or active hostility and even destruction (Halliday,1978:164). Most of the informal traders are of modest education or are school dropouts whom society would have
labelled failures. Some may be school leavers who would have failed to find ‘formal’ employment or those who
would have been retrenched by ‘mainstream society’. In short the so-called mainstream society , directly or
indirectly, would have labelled these ‘excess baggage’ which can be offloaded hence the resistance or the ‘cry’ to
be heard through various attention-seeking behaviours. In the late singer Beatar Mangethe’s videos ‘Hello!’ is
featured an informal trader with his two wheeled manually driven home-made vehicle popularly known as ‘scania’
in Zimbabwe which has the following words painted on it: “IT IS BETTER TO PUSH A SCANIA THAN TO
LOOT”. This is a politically loaded statement-scania pushers, according to the author of the message, struggle
Some obvious characteristics of the adverts include

- They are oral and impromptu hence our argument that they should be looked at as oral literature.
- They display artistic innovativeness-language used, as Shklovsky says about literary texts, estranges because it is defamiliarized (Selden and Widdowson, 1998).
- Code-switching which is “the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems.” (Gumperz cited in Romaine, 1994:121) is a common feature of such expression. Such pieces of discourse have items which “are tied together prosodically as well as by semantic and syntactic relations equivalent to those that join passages in a single speech act' (Romaine, 1994:121).
- In the oral art forms gathered there is code mixing. Such is a characteristic of a bilingual speech community. This can be intersentential (between sentences) or intra-sentential which occurs within a single clause or sentence boundary and includes mixing within word boundaries (Paplack cited in Romaine, 1994). Reasons for the switch may be phatic to express friendship, to show that one is comfortable with both languages or simply to show off. The current Zimbabwean linguistic landscape can be referred to as polyglossic (poly-many and glossia-language) with English assuming a superordinate or high status and the other languages assuming subordinate statuses. Polyglossia is a term which is related to diglossia a concept first used by Ferguson to describe “a situation where two, very different varieties of a language co-occur throughout a speech community, each with a distinct range of social functions.” (Crystal, 1992:103). English, the H-variety is regarded as more prestigious and the ability to use it as reflecting a certain degree of sophistication. To demystify the belief that vendors are not well educated, they often partake of the language of the high table. At times the code switching is meant to create humour to poke fun or even lampoon certain behaviours or certain personalities in the society especially prominent people’s mannerisms are copied and often exaggerated.
- Use of an unconventional but economical linguistic system derived from the socio-economic environment. Such a code is meant to attract would be customers-it is meant to ensure visibility of the traders and their wares to the passersby.
- Gender stereotypical expressions in line with the patriarchal speech community from which the traders come is quite common. In other words the ‘verbal art’ identified is from a particular speech community and as such it mirrors that community’s norms and values. It is stereotypical in terms of how certain groups have been or continue to be perceived for example whiteness is associated with might and wealth and Apostolic sects with ‘child abuse’.
- Junod’s 1913 observations on African narrative art also apply to advertisements or verbal art collected and analyzed in this paper in terms of adaptability:

New elements are also introduced; owing to the tendency of Native (sic) story tellers always to apply circumstances of their environment to the narration. This is one of the charms of the Native tales. They are living… (cited in Finnegan, 2012:10).
A PICTURE COMBO FROM THE MARKET

Brooms mounted on pieces of joined planks to ensure 'visibility' from afar
The Spilling Market—vendors who cannot be accommodated inside doing business outside the market

The market, from without and the feeder railway line
The main mode of transport, ‘the scania’

A cosmetics stall in the market
CONCLUSION

This study collected, analyzed and attempted a taxonomy of informal traders’ advertisements. From these one can take a glimpse of the culture and cosmology of the people in which such texts are found. What Pongweni (1983:4-5) notes about names that ‘in analyzing them one is essentially engaged in linguistic investigation’ applies to the adverts gathered.

REFERENCES