

Riddle and Riddle Discourse in Lusoga Language and Culture: A Performance-Centred Approach

Abstract

This study focuses on riddling as an important form in oral literature. It interrogates the assumption that the riddle is a minor short fixed form thereby paying particular attention to its form and style of performance. It also argues that audiences, events, texts and contexts are major parts of riddling, something that has not been strongly argued for and demonstrated in most scholarship on riddles.

The study uses the Performance Centred Approach (PCA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that allow for a variety of interpretations thus widening and deepening our appreciation of the riddle as a verbal art form and the cultures from which the riddle emerges. These theoretical frames allow for analysis of riddles as acts of power and as social events.

Two years of field research work was carried out between 2008 and 2009 in Namutumba, Iganga and Kamuli districts of Busoga in Eastern Uganda particularly using the emic perspective.

The study emphasises the aesthetic texture in the performance of the riddle. It finds that riddling is an important form of social and artistic communication among the Basoga, invigorating their power of observation, appreciative equity, inter-generational socialisation, and interactive skills. The riddle fundamentally emerges from the interconnectedness between audiences, contexts and events whence its authorship is vested.

The research further highlighted the importance of the nature of riddle performance and categorically identifies seven moves in the performances of riddles as antecedent, precedent, unravelling, crowning, declamation, affirmation and agreement. Additionally, fourteen performance patterns and sixteen thematic domains were outlined to show that riddling is a well thought-out form of art with a beginning, middle and end.

The study concludes that riddles in Lusoga are by no means a minor short fixed form of Literature and riddling is a dynamic, creative communicative process.