

TRICKS, TRICKSTER CHARACTERS AND  
TRICKSTER TALES IN TSWANA FOLKTALES

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## SUMMARY

The aim of this study is to investigate and make a critical survey of tricks, trickster characters and trickster tales in Tswana folktales. In the introductory paragraphs a brief definition of folklore is provided, and it is discovered that trickster tales are a component of folktales.

Various sources have been consulted in the accumulation of data and identification of tricks, trickster characters, and trickster tales. The origin of trickster characters is also investigated. Research was conducted by means of interviews, with various story tellers in Soweto, Hammanskraal and Rustenburg.

This dissertation will identify trickster characters such as 'Tortoise', 'Hare' and 'Jackal'. A variety of characters are used in folktales. In this study, characters which play a leading role and who are involved in trickery, are identified. The relationship between tricksters and duped characters is clarified. Although tricksters are small, they are heroes. They trick muscular characters. Popular trickster characters, in trickster tales, are identified.

The difference between trickster tales and tales with an element of trickery, is investigated and clarified. It seems that trickery is more evident in trickster tales. Furthermore, the functions of trickster tales are studied. The functions of amusement and creativity are analysed.

Various devices applied in the execution of tricks such as transformation, illusion and magic, are stated and lastly, the Propp/Dundes theory is applied in the analysis of morphology of trickster tales in Tswana.

## OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie studie is om ondersoek in te stel na, en om 'n kritiese oorsig te gee van kul en kulkaracters in Tswana-volksverhale. In die inleidende paragrafe word 'n definisie van volkskuns gegee en dit is duidelik dat kulverhale 'n belangrike deel uitmaak van volksverhale.

Verskeie bronne is geraadpleeg in die samestelling van data en identifikasie van kul, kulkaracters en kulverhale. Die oorsprong van kulkaracters is ook ondersoek. Navorsing is gedoen deur middel van onderhoude met verskeie storievertellers in Soweto, Hammanskraal en Rustenburg.

In hierdie skripsie word kulkaracters geïdentifiseer, soos 'Skilpad', 'Hasie' en 'Jakkals'. Verskeie karacters word in die volksverhale gebruik. In hierdie ondersoek word karacters wat 'n leidende rol speel en wat in kullery betrokke is geïdentifiseer. Die verband tussen kullers en die slagoffers word beskryf. Gewilde kulkaracters in Tswana kulverhale word geïdentifiseer.

Die verskil tussen kulverhale en verhale met 'n kulelement word ondersoek en verduidelik. Dit lyk asof kullery meer in kulverhale voorkom. Voorts word die funksie van kulverhale bestudeer. Die funksies van vermaak en kreatiwiteit word bespreek.

Verskeie tegnieke wat benut is in die uitvoering van slenters word genoem, soos vervorming, sinsbedrog en towerkrag. Ten laaste word die teorie van Propp/Dundes toegepas in die analise van kulverhale in Tswana.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Folklore in general

Folklore is an accumulated knowledge of what mankind has learned and experienced through the ages and is as old as humanity itself. It is that part of peoples' culture which has been preserved orally. Graphic records left behind by early peoples include examples of folklore such as rock art, crafts and drawings. Folklore, or the lore of the people, is inclusive; it can be viewed as the beliefs, customs and traditions that people pass down from generation to generation. Furthermore, folklore consists of dances, songs, superstitions, religious celebrations and games. This is confirmed by Leach (1949: 398) who says the following:

In anthropological usage the term folklore has come to include myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, verse, riddles and a variety of other forms of artistic expression whose medium is the spoken word. Thus folklore can be defined as verbal art.

Among the variety of folktales, which are part of folklore, are animal tales, tales which feature human beings, trickster tales, myths and fables. All are classified as folklore irrespective of how they are presented. Trickster tales comprise tricks, trickery and trickster characters. This mini-dissertation intends to analyse tricks, trickster tales and trickster characters.

### 1.2 Aims and scope of study

A number of factors prompted this investigation. Firstly, folklore serves as a pillar which upholds the life view of Batswana people. In addition it constitutes the background around which the cultural life of Batswana rotates, transmitting life principles and values. Since no Tswana scholars have dealt with trickster characters, this dissertation will provide an exploratory study of tricks, trickster characters and trickster tales in Tswana folktales. The difference between trickster tales and tales with an element of trickery will



also be examined. Although extensive collection of folktales has been done very little has been contributed with regard to tricks, trickster characters and trickster tales in Tswana folktales. Various writers have mentioned trickster characters in Sotho: Mofokeng (1954) in The Development of Leading Figures in Animal Tales in Africa focused on dupe and leading characters. His examples have been drawn from various African languages. Makgamatha (1987) analysed characteristics of Northern Sotho folktales extensively and Moephuli (1979) focused on South Sotho Folktales in Structure and Character in Cyclic Folktales of Southern Sotho. It is evident from available literature that tricks, trickster characters and trickster tales require more exploration. That is why this investigation is necessary.

This study will be limited to the use of trickster tales found in Malao (1986), Tlhabi (1988), Lestrade (1948), Rantao (1988), Mogapi (1980) and some oral sources. Examples of stories what will be studied are :

*Mmutla le Tau* (Hare and the Lion),  
*Leeba le Phiri* (Dove and Hyena),  
*Phiri le Phokojwe wa Molotsana* (Hyena and sly Jackal),  
*Botlhale jwa ga Phokojwe* (The cunningness of Jackal),  
 (Malao, 1986).

*Mosadi le Tshwene* (Woman and the Baboon),  
*Phiri le Mmutle* (Hyena and Hare),  
*Tlou le Kwena* (Elephant and Crocodile),  
 (Tlhabi, 1988).

*Mmutla le Nkwe* (Hare and Leopard),  
*Mmutla le Tau* (Hare and Lion),  
*Mmutla le Diphologolo* (Hare and Animals),  
 (Lestrade, 1948).

*Tau le Mmutla* (Lion and Hare),  
(Rantao, 1988).

*Tlholwe le Mmutla* (Red Hare and Hare),  
*Mmutla le Diphologolo tse dingwe* (Hare and other Animals),  
*Koko le Phokojwe* (Hen and Jackal),  
*Tlou le Mmutla* (Elephant and Hare),  
*Legapa la khudu* (Shell of Tortoise),  
*Mmutla le Sediba sa diphologolo* (Hare and Animals' Dam),  
(Mogapi, 1980).

*Kgosi ya Dinonyane* (Chief of Birds),  
*Phokojwe le bana ba Tau* (Hyena and Lion's cubs),  
*Phokojwe le Molemi* (Jackal and Farmer),  
*Kwena le Kgabo* (Crocodile and Monkey),  
*Mmutla le Tlholwe* (Hare and Red Hare),  
(Oral Sources).

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### 1.3 Research Method

The data was gathered by means of interviews with a variety of story-tellers. Story-tellers have different views on trickster characters, tricks and trickster tales. A number of Batswana informants were consulted to clarify certain aspects. The first one interviewed was Mathilda Masilela, my mother, who grew up in the vicinity of Rustenburg in a village called Moruleng. Maria Motebele, a story-teller from Kgomokgomo in Hammanskraal also provided some unwritten folktales. Valuable data was gathered from my late grandmother Dina Serekoane, who used to entertain us with folktales during our childhood. Furthermore, literature such as periodicals, dissertations and books on folklore, with the emphasis on Tswana literature, were consulted.

#### 1.4 Presentation

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter one introduces the topic. It defines folklore and explains the relationship between trickster tales and folklore. It further provides the aims and the scope of study and outlines the research methods applied. Chapter two focuses on trickster characters and their features. It covers the nature of trickster characters and characterisation. It identifies leading characters (heroes) and dupe characters. Popular trickster characters in Tswana are also mentioned in chapter two. Chapter three deals with the definition of trickery and different kinds of tricks. It also provides the functions of trickster tales. Chapter four is centred around plot structure of Tswana trickster tales. The definition of 'plot' is given and the theories applied in the study of the plot are clearly stated. The elements of the plot are discussed with special reference to Tswana trickster tales and various functions of trickster tales are identified. Chapter five is the conclusion.



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## CHAPTER 2

## TRICKSTER CHARACTERS

2.1 Universality and origin

Trickster characters have existed for centuries, and appear in all cultures of the world. Pelton (1980) and Zinta (1983) have studied trickster characters in parts of Africa. Dominant tricksters in the Tswana trickster tales appear to be Jackal, Hare and Tortoise. In other African tribes such as the Yoruba, the tortoise appears to be the prominent trickster character. Anansi, the spider, appears in countless trickster tales of Ashanti tribes and the wily hare appears as a trickster in other regions of West Africa. To confirm that trickster characters appear in almost all cultures of the world and have long been in existence, Pelton (1980) says the following:

Trickster figures appear in all parts of the world in hunting, fishing, pastoral and agricultural societies at every stage of religious development.

From this quotation one can deduce that trickster characters existed even during ancient times. Scholars have often debated the origin of trickster characters, but there is no common conclusion among historians, theologians or anthropologists as to their origin. A trickster character seems to be pictured as both good and evil. Trickster characters even seem to have some divine traits. It is believed that they originated as deities or culture heroes, but it is difficult to accept divinity as the origin of the trickster heroes. These are questions that should be investigated.

Certain writers attribute the origin of trickster characters to Africa. They believe that tricksters were introduced to Western countries during slavery. However, Richard Dorson as quoted by Roberts (p.28) criticizes and challenges the African origin. In the introduction to a compilation of African American folklore, American Negro Tales, Dorson points out that most animal trickster tales are of European origin. He concludes that only few plots and incidents of trickster tales can be distinguished as African.

## 2.2 Features of trickster characters

It seems as if tricksters are characters with an irresistible tendency to trick.. Whenever a trickster desires something, he uses trickery to achieve his aims, irrespective of the outcome.

A trickster character is clearly presented in the story, *Mmutla le Tau* (Hare and Lion) by Malao (1988: 22). The hare suggests that the lion should pretend to be dead in order to obtain meat. The hare calls all the animals to come and see the dead lion. The animals turn up in great numbers. Suddenly the lion charges and kills most of them. When they are working on the lion's hut, the hare pretends to be helping the lion to remove lice from his tail, but he is actually tying the lion's tail to the roof and enjoys the meat alone. In an oral source, the story continues with the hare getting inside the skin of the dead lion. He intimidates the baboons and demands food from them. Although he is eventually discovered, he escapes. He manages to trick the lion and the baboons, therefore he appears as a trickster.

Trickster characters seem to have common characteristics. They always rob and deceive larger or stronger characters. The trickster also uses his cunningness and power of observation to execute tricks. Trickster characters are greedy, wanting only to benefit themselves, normally using deception. They can be characterised as anti-social, amoral and lawless. Features of trickster characters can be outlined as follow:

### 2.2.1 Ambiguity

It seems that ambiguity is a fundamental feature of trickster characters permeating and characterising all their activities. It permits more than one interpretation. Canonici (1985: 4) describes ambiguity as resulting from:

....the physical characteristics of the trickster, such as his undefinable colours, or traits which may look partly human or partly animal. By actions, which

can be ascribed to either his human or his animal nature.

Pelton (1980) holds a similar view:

The trickster may be the deceiver, thief, cannibal, inventor, creator, benefactor, magician, perpetrator of obscene acts.

From the above quotations it is evident that a trickster character is fluid. He represents multiple actants in various situations. A trickster character does not present himself as static. Everytime the trickster changes form, he tricks and confuses his victims even further. Therefore tricksters possess characteristics of universality. They are everything to everyone. It seems as if a trickster character is always presented as a creature with human characteristics, but one who lacks the features that would classify him as a member of society.

The story, *Tau le Mmutla* (Lion and Hare) by Rantao (1988: 36), illustrates ambiguity well. The hare tricks the hyena by pretending to be a lion. He demands food from the hyena, threatening him with death. Later on the hare is discovered and escapes. He arrives at another hyena's lair. He offers himself as a nursemaid. He kills all the hyena's cubs and feeds on them. When the hyena demands to see them, the hare tells him they are all dead. The hyena chases the hare and when he arrives at the river, he transforms himself into a stone. The hyena takes the stone and throws it to the other side of the river, unaware that he is assisting the hare to cross the river. The hare is ambiguous because he is first a lion, and then a stone, when he is actually just a hare.

The trickster tends to display human traits. If he is a human being, he may play the role of a super-human, or a sub-human character.

Guenther (1989: 115) supports this view:

A trickster is at one time human, at another animal, tree or plant...he is cowardly, powerful and courageous; foolish and clever, cunning and readily duped.

Ambiguity is the cornerstone of trickster tales and provides entertainment. Entertainment stems from the interplay of identification and contrast.

Adam Kuper as quoted by Canonici (1985:41) says:

Entertainment springs from the interplay of identification and contrast of characters, which result in ambiguous, intermediate figures who mix up fundamental conceptual oppositions.

### 2.2.2 Egotism

Trickster characters are egotistical. A trickster character uses everything and everyone to benefit himself. He is only concerned with his own welfare. This egotism leads to various tricks, for example, a trickster character may kill to get what he wants. Roger Abrahams as quoted by Canonici (1985: 51) says the following:

Trickster's undertakings are eudacious, rebellious, egotistical and always performed with the idea of giving personal freedom.

The story, *Tlholwe le Mmutla* (Red Hare and Hare) by Mogapi (1980: 19), best illustrates egotism. When the hare sees the Red Hare's whistles, he wants to have them. He tricks the Red Hare and takes the whistles. The story, *Leeba le Phiri* (Dove and Hyena), by Malao (1986: 16), is also a good example of egotism. The hyena is employed by the dove to look after her children. Each day the hyena kills one child. When the dove demands to see her children, he brings the same child more than once. The hyena disappears after the last child is killed. This example illustrates that the hyena uses trickery to benefit himself.

### 2.2.3 Presented as persons

Trickster characters are presented as persons. They have certain human characteristics. Tricksters can talk, think and cook. Finnegan (1970: 346) explains this point as follows:

With few exceptions, these animals are portrayed as thinking and acting like human beings in human setting. This is sometimes brought out by the terminology, like the personal prefix used in Sotho to turn the ordinary form, say lion (tau) into a personal form (Motau - Mr. Lion).

In the story, *Phiri le Phokojwe wa Molotsana* (Hyena and sly Jackal) by Malao (1986: 1), the jackal tricks both the hyena and his girlfriend. He tells the hyena's girlfriend that the hyena is a fool and urinates on the blankets. Immediately the hyena is jilted and the girl falls for the jackal. Another example of personification is illustrated by the story, *Phiri le Mmutle* (Hyena and Hare) by Tlhabi (1988: 15). The hare pretends to be a nurse maid and looks after the hyena's children. The hare kills all the children, cooks them and eats them. When the hyena finds out, the hare escapes and is never caught. The trickster has been personified in both stories. He acts like a human being.

### 2.2.4 Appearance

In Tswana folktales, the trickster is the underdog, who is usually smaller in stature than his victims. He gains much sympathy from listeners, because he is clever and in control of situations despite his size. This is shown in the story, *Kago ya Letamo* (The Building of the Dam), from an oral source. All the animals agree to build the dam. The hare refuses to lend a hand during the construction of the dam. The hare comes at night and drinks water from the dam. Various characters are organised to guard the dam and make sure that the hare does not drink water from the dam anymore. They all fail, and are tricked by the hare despite his size. Another illustration is the story, *Tlholwe le Mmutla* (Red Hare and Hare) by Mogapi (1980: 19), where the hare tricks the red hare and takes his whistles. Later, the hare himself is tricked by the frog who is even smaller than he is. The hare



manages to retrieve the whistles but is again tricked, this time by the dove, who pretends to borrow the whistles and then flees with them.

The above-mentioned feature appears to be dominant in most Tswana trickster tales. The trickster is weak and timid, but he is endowed and blessed with extraordinary intelligence to overcome the muscular characters. Even though a trickster is admirable in most trickster tales, any good that results from his actions is inadvertent.

### 2.3 Characters

Various characters are employed in the trickster tales. The narrator may use animals, human beings, animate or inanimate objects, ogres and birds. These characters are classified according to the roles they play, namely dupes or heroes.

### 2.4 Types of characters

Two main types of characters are distinguished in Tswana trickster tales, namely, the dupes and the leading characters (heroes).

#### 2.4.1 Dupe characters

Characters such as the lion, elephant, leopard, man, zebra and others, are regarded as dupe characters in Tswana folktales. These are characters which are easily tricked. They are always victims of the trickster. The following Tswana example illustrates this statement. In the story, *Mmutla le Tau* (Hare and Lion) by Malao (1986: 22), the hare and the lion are hungry. The hare comes up with a plan to get food. He tells the lion that he, the lion, should pretend to be dead. The lion agrees and all the animals are called to the kraal. While they are looking at the dead lion, the lion charges at them and kills most of them. The hare then suggests that the lion builds a hut because it is about to rain.

While he is busy, the hare ties his tail to the rafters and enjoys the meat alone. The lion has been tricked, clearly showing the lion as a dupe.

Fieldman as quoted by Roberts (1989: 23) expresses this view:

Trickster's favourite foils and dupes are lion, elephant and hyena. The victim is always larger and stronger; inevitably slow and dull-witted, often hard-working and honest.

Although it is not a common dupe, the dove appears to be a dupe character in Tswana trickster tales. In the story, *Leeba le Phiri* (Dove and Hyena) by Malao (1986: 16), the hyena eats the doves' children, while pretending to be their nursemaid. The dove is tricked and she unwittingly takes the blame. The story also teaches the dove not to leave her children with a stranger again.

In the story, *Tlou le Kwena* (Elephant and Crocodile) by Tlhabi (1983: 30), the elephant is tricked by the crocodile. The elephant boasts of his strength and tells the crocodile that he, the crocodile, could never beat him in a test of strength. They decide on a tug-of-war, and the rope is prepared. The crocodile pulls towards the river and the elephant pulls away from the river. When the crocodile realises that the elephant is stronger, he ties the rope to a big rock in the river. The elephant is defeated. This illustrates how the elephant can be a dupe character.

#### 2.4.2 Leading characters

The leading characters in Tswana include the hare, tortoise, baboon, jackal, hyena, monkey and crocodile. These characters can change according to the demands of the situation. They often surprise the reader, by tricking big, strong and muscular animals.

In the story, *Kgosi ya Dinonyane* (Chief of Birds) from an oral source, the birds agree that the one who can fly the highest will be their chief. The bat hides himself under the wings of the vulture. When he realizes that the vulture has flown very high and looks tired, he comes out of hiding and flies higher than all other birds. The bat is a leading character because he tricks the birds.

The story, *Kwena le Kgabo*, (Crocodile and Monkey) also from an oral source, the crocodile and the monkey are in the middle of the river when the crocodile gets hungry and wants to eat the monkey's liver. The monkey tells the crocodile that monkeys always leave their livers on the riverbank when they swim. At the riverbank, the crocodile demands the monkey's liver, but the monkey flees. The monkey uses the crocodile to cross the river by deceiving him. Therefore the monkey can be viewed as a leading character.

## 2.5 Popular trickster characters in Tswana trickster tales

The most popular trickster characters in Tswana trickster tales are:

<i>Mmutla</i>	-	Hare
<i>Phokojwe</i>	-	Jackal
<i>Khudu</i>	-	Tortoise

It seems as if the classification of characters varies according to location and the tribe. A jackal may be a trickster (hero) in one tribe or area and be a dupe in another. Finnegan (1970: 345) says:



The spider, for instance, though often wily, is also, in some areas at least, depicted as stupid, gluttonous, boastful and ineffective, not infrequently outdone by his own wife.

Lotz (1959: 41) holds a similar view:

It is marked that a jackal is more of the main figure in the South, whereas a hare and a spider are maintained in Central Africa and West Africa.

Tortoise is depicted as the only character that can outdo the wily hare. However, most of these tricksters are adaptable. They change in various situations.

### Hare

The hare is the most well known and popular trickster character in Tswana trickster tales. He represents a weak or disadvantaged character in one way or the other. The trickery of the hare is usually accomplished by fraud or deceit. This is clearly depicted in the story, *Mmutla le Tau* (Hare and Lion) by Malao (1986: 22). The hare successfully ties the lion's tail to the pole of the house. The lion has to hang and watch the hare enjoying the fattest pieces of meat alone.

The hare is never tongue-tied and clumsy. He is bright and commands the language in such a way that his victim is easily deceived. This is clearly depicted in the above-mentioned story. He deceives other animals by singing beautifully and telling them that the lion is dead. The song goes like this:

*Diphologolo tsothe*  
*Diphologolo tsothe*  
*Sianelang kwano*  
*Le tle go bona*  
*Meno a medile fatshe.*

(All animals  
 All animals  
 Run to me  
 Come and see  
 Teeth have grown from  
 the ground.)

(Malao, 1986:22)

The animals are happy to be told that their enemy, the lion, is dead. They arrive in great numbers and are suddenly pounced on.

As the trickster, the hare is resourceful, with a trick for every situation. The hare ignores social norms and values and it is not surprising to find him being merciless towards those weaker than himself, or temporarily at his power. This indicates his anti-social tendencies, but this also provides for entertainment.

The hare has the ability to transform himself. This can be defined as a misrepresentation of one thing (someone) to make it look like something (someone) else. The trickster hides his actual identity. Some examples of such transformation are described in the story, *Tau le Mmutla* (Lion and Hare) by Rantao (1988: 39). The hare climbs into the skin of the dead lion and scares the other animals, but later he is discovered by the hyenas, and they chase him. He arrives at another hyena's place and offers to work as a nursemaid. He eats all the hyena's young and out of anger the hyena chases him. When the hare reaches the river, he transforms himself into a stone. The angry and frustrated hyena throws the stone across the river, unaware that he is actually helping the hare to cross the river and escape.

### Jackal

The jackal is another one of the popular trickster characters in Tswana trickster tales. Like the hare, he is deceitful but not as wily as the tortoise. The jackal has an insatiable appetite for food. To achieve his aims the jackal will cheat, steal and even kill. He entices his victims into becoming friends with him and then uses them to further his plans. Furthermore the jackal, as a trickster, does not show respect for the life of his victims. An example is in the story, *Koko le Phokojwe* (Hen and Jackal) by Mogapi (1980: 8). The jackal wants to devour the hen, so he tricks the hen by telling her that the new law says that they must live together in harmony. The jackal encourages the hen to come down from the tree so that he can kill her.

The jackal is greedy, always wanting what belongs to others. In addition he is selfish and does not respect other peoples' possessions. He is usually fascinated by whatever he has never seen or used before. He does not accept the fact that other characters may have something better. This greed and selfishness is shown in the story, *Phiri le Phokojwe wa Molotsana* (Hyena and sly Jackal) by Malao (1986: 1). The jackal and the hyena are friends but the jackal is jealous of the hyena because of his beautiful girlfriend. He tells her that he (hyena) intends to eat her and that he urinates in bed. Then out of fear for the

hyena, the girl leaves the hyena and falls for the jackal. The jackal fulfils his need by taking what belongs to the hyena, by means of deception.

The jackal uses killing as a means of satisfying a need. He kills and eats the children he looks after. He tricks the dove by showing her the same child more than once, as depicted in the story, *Leeba le Phiri* (Dove and Hyena) by Malao (1986:16).

The jackal can also use disguise to trick his victims. He pretends to be dead and the passing farmer puts him on his cart, thus giving him (trickster) a chance to steal the farmer's butter. This disguise is clearly shown in the story, *Phokojwe le Molemi* (Jackal and the Farmer), from an oral source.

The jackal is compulsive. He is instinctive and undifferentiating. He always acts on impulse, irrespective of the outcome. In every situation, a jackal sees a challenge. He always acts quickly giving the impression that he cannot control his feelings. A good illustration of such compulsiveness is shown in the story, *Botlhale jwa ga Phokojwe* (The cunningness of the Jackal) by Malao (1986:9). The jackal pretends to be dead to trick the man taking food to the herdboys. The man sees the dead jackal, take him and puts him in his cart. When he arrives at the farm, he discovers that the food which he had taken for the herdboys, is not there and the jackal has vanished. It is risky for the jackal to trick the man, but he continues with a trick irrespective of the results.

### Tortoise

Apparently, the tortoise is looked down upon by the other characters, because of his physical appearance. Although other characters may be physically stronger than he is, his strategies make up for his disadvantage.

Guma (1967:12) supports the statement:

Basically, then, although despised and ridiculed on account of his external appearance, the tortoise seems to possess basic qualities which enable him to focus attention on essentials. In the face of daily ridicule and prejudice he nevertheless uses these qualities in the service of his fellow-men. Occasionally, however, he has the last laugh.

Despite these negative attributes, the tortoise always seems to succeed in his tricks. The tortoise even tricks the hare, who himself is regarded as a most tactful trickster character in Tswana trickster tales. Tortoise applies substitution to trick the hare. The story, *Khudu le Mmutla* (Tortoise and the Hare) from an oral source, clearly describes such an event. The tortoise challenges the hare in the tug-of-war and defeats him. This success marks the victory for the underdog who seems to prevail by means of wit.

The story, *Kagoya Letamo* (The building of the Dam) from an oral source, also illustrates how the hare is outwitted by the tortoise. The hare refuses to lend a hand during the construction of the dam, but secretly comes at night and drinks water from this dam. Various characters decide to guard the dam, including an owl. They all fail and the know it all trickster, the hare, is finally caught out by the tortoise. Tortoise is therefore admired for his wisdom and cunningness.

## 2.6 Conclusion

It is evident that events in trickster tales revolve around the leading characters, namely tricksters. The trickster gets whatever he needs. He has the ability to manipulate situations to suit himself. It is clear that, although tricksters appear small in stature, they are viewed as heroes. It seems as if the strong characters do not have things their own way in trickster tales. Tricksters always trick their victims by exploiting the characteristics such as weakness and stupidity. A common feature of trickster characters is that they all desire food. Furthermore, the trickster tricks his victims by tempting them with offers of food. This is clear in the stories, *Mmutla le Tau* (Lion and Hare) by Rantao (1988: 36), and *Leeba le Phiri* (Dove and Hyena) by Malao (1986: 16).

One of the distinguishing features of trickster tales, is the use of cunning characters. Such characters antagonise others, resulting in disharmony and conflict. Events revolve around these tricksters, who determine the theme of the story. A trickster deepens and intensifies the conflict as the story unfolds. As a hero, he usually achieves his aim, in which case he is classified as a successful trickster. He may lose, and end up as the victim, but this is rare in Tswana trickster tales.





## CHAPTER 3

## TRICKS, TRICKERY AND THE FUNCTIONS OF TRICKSTER TALES

3.1 Definition of trickery

A trick can be defined as a means to disguise or mask the truth of an action so that it can appear differently, usually with the aim of deceiving others. Zinta (1983:98) has this to say:

The trick is in fact focal point of the plot and the barometer of the audience's receptivity and appreciation of a performer's talent and artistic efforts.

Trickery forms the core of Tswana trickster tales. The trickster uses this device to benefit himself. It may be executed by word of mouth or by actions. Trickery breaks long standing social beliefs, norms and values, and is planned by the trickster. The victim is always physically stronger but his physical power is undermined by his ignorance and stupidity.

3.2 Kinds of tricks

The trickster character uses at least four kinds of tricks which can be summarised as follows:

- Naughty pranks, merely used to disrupt normal situations.
- Clever tricks, involving intelligence and resourcefulness.
- Strategic tricks, involving a response he takes advantage of.
- Magical tricks, especially for extrication (Hewitt, 1986:154).

3.3 Trickster tales and tales with an element of trickery3.3.1 Trickster tales

In trickster tales trickery is the central motif. It is evident from the expository phase right up to the climax. The trickster immediately breaks the contract and is then discovered. Examples of trickster tales are *Mmutla le Tau* (Hare and Lion) by Malao (1986:22) and

*Kwena le Kgabo* (The Crocodile and Monkey) from an oral source. In the aforementioned tale, the hare intends to trick the lion from the very beginning. First, he ties the lion's tail on the rafters and eats the meat alone, after which he gets inside the skin of the dead lion and tricks the baboons. In the same way, in the latter story, the tortoise intends to trick the hare right from the onset.

### 3.3.2 Stories with an element of trickery

Not all stories containing tricks can be considered to be trickster tales. Stories with an element of trickery may employ cannibals or ogres as tricksters. The cannibals present themselves as tricksters, but lack intelligence and devices to display this function successfully. It is true that these characters are cunning, but they are foolish, which makes them unseccessful. Cannibals have unfamiliar physical features, such as a huge body, big head, protruding stomach and long sharp teeth. They have a lust for human flesh. They are partly human and partly animal, and are associated with evil. They are totally rejected by society. Because they are outcasts, one can understand why they are always unseccessful in their trickery. The story of *Tselane* by Malao (1986:40), is an illustration of a story with an element of trickery. The giant is able to get hold of Tselane, but is eventually tricked and becomes a victim.

Human characters are sometimes used in such stories. When they trick other human beings, they become the victims. In the story *Masilo le Masilonyana* (Masilo and Masilonyana) by Mogapi (1980: 76) Masilo tricks his brother Masilonyana, resulting in his death. He is discovered and sentenced to death. Another example is the story, *Senanapo* by Malao (1986:53). The village girls trick Senanapo, push her into the fire and she dies. They are caught and punished.

If however, human tricksters perform their tricks on monsters, they are usually successful. This is illustrated in the story *Tselane* by Malao (1986:40).

### 3.4 Functions of trickster tales

It looks as if trickster stories are told to educate people and make them aware of social norms. They warn people not to break the rules of society. Although the trickster portrays poor social behaviour by failing to adhere to the norms and values of society, society sees his acts as entertainment, rather than as serious offenses. His trickery is admired and his success does not necessarily teach that bad behaviour is justifiable.

#### 3.4.1 Trickery and social norms

In each trickster tale, the story seems to move from a normal situation to an abnormal and chaotic situation. This is prevalent in Tswana trickster tales. At the beginning of the story, the trickster presents himself as a likeable character. As the story develops his behavioural pattern changes. He acts against social norms and expectations. A good illustration is in the story, *Leeba le Phiri* (Dove and Hyena) by Malao (1986: 16). The hyena pretends to be sympathetic to the dove and offers himself as nursemaid. The hyena then kills all the dove's children and feeds on them. He has violated the norm and values of the society, because killing is socially unacceptable.

The trickster engages himself in evil actions, testing the social order. Norms and values are thus re-evaluated and reinforced by his behaviour. Canonici (1988:50) has the following to say in this regard:

Trickster tales present the reverse, the opposite of the acceptable social behaviour. The trickster constantly uses short-cuts or formula which cannot be allowed to succeed. By contrasting this behaviour with the accepted norms, traditional norms and training are enhanced.

In the story, *Mosadi le Tshwene* (Woman and the Baboon) by Tlhabi (1988: 8), best illustrates the correction of wrong behaviour. The baboon pretends to sympathise with the woman who is working so hard. She does not have anyone to look after her baby. So the baboon offers to do so. He takes the baby and pretends to look after him, but while the

woman is hoeing, the baboon disappears with the baby. Other baboons advise the thief that he should take the baby back to his mother. The audience learns a lesson through this wrong behaviour.

### 3.4.2 Entertainment function

The primary function of trickster tales is the amusement of children. During the performance they laugh and laugh, rolling from side to side and falling over one another.

Finnegan (1970: 350) illustrates this as follows:

One of the obvious points in those stories is just sheer entertainment afforded by the description of the amusing antics of various animals and they are often told to an audience of children.

An example of the entertainment value is illustrated in the story, *Phiri le Phokojwe wa Molotsana* (Hyena and sly Jackal) by Malao (1986: 1). The hyena is tricked by the jackal, who takes his girlfriend. The audience is bound to laugh at the stupidity of the girlfriend who is easily flattered, and thus tricked by the jackal. Another example is in the story, *Mmutla le Tlou* (Hare and Elephant) by Mogapi (1980: 14). The hare tells the elephant that he (hare) is stronger. The elephant wants to prove his strength in a tug-of-war. The hare gives the whale his side of the rope to pull, while the elephant pulls on the other side. They pull in opposite directions and because both characters are strong, no one wins the tug-of-war. The hare tricks both the elephant and the whale, because the elephant does not know that it was the whale who pulled the rope and the whale does not know it was the elephant. Both accept that the hare is more powerful. The audience is astounded that such mighty animals can be so easily tricked by the clever and wily hare. They laugh at the foolishness of the elephant.

It is important to note that animals and characters which are familiar to children such as hares, jackals, lions, tortoises and baboons, arouse the interest of the young and amuse

them more than animals which are unfamiliar to them. Also, the presentation of characteristics, and behaviour by the narrator adds more humour.

### 3.4.3 Creative function

Trickster tales assist children in developing their creative skills. The child learns to think, wonder and ask himself questions. He ponders the relation of the story to the reality of life.

The narrator imitates, creates artistic forms and commands the language effectively for example, she may imitate the slow, ponderous elephant, the sly look of the jackal, the slithering of the snake or the gruff voice of the lion. In the process of narration, the child creates his own imaginary world. Imagination assists the audience in visualising and forming a picture of various situations and arouses their emotions.

The narrator must choose her words correctly, to assist her to say what she wants clearly and accurately. During the narration she puts more emphasis on words. This is done to show the seriousness of the event and to emphasise the meaning. She may use various gestures to clarify the meaning. The audience imagines for instance the fast hare and slow tortoise in the race. One can visualise the hare far ahead of the tortoise. Verbs such as *mamalela* (run hard and fast) are used to show the seriousness of the race. Suddenly the hare finds the tortoise already at the first resting place. The tortoise expresses his happiness by smiling at the hare and says '*ke go boleletse mmutla gore nna khudu nka siana go go feta*'. (I told you hare, that I, tortoise, can run faster than you). The audience imagines the smile of the tortoise and the disappointment and surprise on the face of the hare.

In the second race the hare tries his best, as expressed by the sentence, '*mmutla a siana, a siana go feta la ntlha*' (the hare runs and runs faster than before). However, the tired hare finds the tortoise already at the second resting place and loses hope. Finally he says '*khudu o fentse*' (tortoise you have won). One can imagine the frustration and

disappointment which the hare feels. A good narrator narrates so vividly that the audience almost experiences the occurrence. The audience realizes the dishonesty of the tortoise, but enjoys how the tortoise, who is looked down upon by the animals, easily tricks the wily hare.

Imagination is the basis of creativity. The child discovers and learns how characters relate to one another and this broadens his knowledge.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Tricksters are meant, on the one hand, to help the audience perceive reality according to the group's values. Trickster characters help the young to distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad. Dupe characters teach listeners to be aware of the mistakes they make. Their suffering is a deterrent to the young, because they grow up knowing that there is punishment for wrong social behaviour and mishaps. The young become extremely weary of new ideas and do not practice them before careful consideration. The most important element which differentiates trickster tales from stories is humour.



## CHAPTER 4

## PLOT IN TSWANA TRICKSTER TALES

4.1 Definition of plot

Plot can be defined as the textual arrangement of events to convey meaning. The events may not be arranged chronologically but in any order deemed suitable. These events are arranged in a coherent form with emphasis on causality. This arrangement contributes to the theme.

Hewitt (1986: 179) says:

Plot structure is defined as a pattern of events in a temporal sequence seen to recur through a number of narratives.

From the above quotation it appears that a plot basically comprises a group of events arranged by the author. Events in the story are selected purposefully. In stories the author omits/selects certain facts to effect an interesting arrangement of events. A structure like plot, focuses on the total sum of all component parts of the story as a whole.

4.2 Theories adopted4.2.1 Propp's Theory

An outline of Propp's theory as laid down by Msimang (1986: 9) shall be provided. The Russian Folklorist, Vladimir Propp, focuses on the structure of folktales. He concentrates on the syntagmatic organization of folktales and refers to it as the 'morphology of folktales'. Propp analyses the tale according to types of actions and calls these functions. Function is the minimal structural unit of the tale. It is a concept that stands for different actions performed by a variety of characters.

His analysis of folktales identifies 31 functions and he establishes their relationship to one another. These functions are basic components of a folktale. He then proceeds to say that functions must be defined according to their place in the course of narration. Furthermore, he raises the question of sequence, he rejects the notion of a free or accidental sequence and proposes that the sequence is fixed. Functions, therefore are invariable, constant and limited in number (Msimang, 1986:9).

#### 4.2.2 Dundes' Theory

Alan Dundes' analysed the structure of North American Indian folktales. In his analysis, Dundes substitutes Propp's function with the term motifeme. He makes use of Propp's names for his motifemes. Cope (1978) considers the adaptations done by Dundes on Propp's theory as most useful in the structural analysis of African folktales. The term function will be used in this dissertation.

#### 4.3 Dundes'/Propp's theory applied

Propp's theory has been applied by Neethling (1979) in the analysis of Xhosa folktales. In his study Neethling identified about 30 out of 31 functions. The only function which he thought was lacking is 'branding'. Marivate (1973) discovered that Tsonga folktales resemble American Indian rather than Russian folktales. Lastly, Moephuli (1972) analysed the Sotho folktales, applying Propp/Dundes' and 8 motifemes were isolated. The fact that Dundes'/Propp's theory is applicable in analysing South-Sotho folktales proves that it can be applied in the analysis of Tswana folktales. South-Sotho and Tswana are both classified as Sotho languages and have basic similarities, so the theory of Dundes'/Propp's will be applied to analyse Tswana trickster tales.

#### 4.4 The form of trickster tales

The structure of a trickster tale is quite simple. The contract is stipulated where the trickster makes his victim an offer. The trickster pretends to be obedient to, and respectful of the contract in order to lure his victim. When the contract is broken and the trickster is discovered, he escapes. If caught he resort to another trick. In the process of



trickery, the trickster uses family terms such as *malome* and *nkoko* to make the victim feel comfortable. A typical trickster tale takes this form:

- Contract
- Fraud
- Discovery
- Capture/Triumph
- Gloat

Such a sequence is clearly illustrated in the *Phokojwe le Bana ba Tau* (Jackal and Lion's cubs) from an oral source.

- Contract: The jackal agrees to look after the lioness's cubs.
- Fraud: The jackal eats the cubs one by one. When the mother demands to see them, he shows her the same cub over and over. When the lioness returns from hunting the next day, the jackal tells her that baboons have killed all her cubs and the lioness asks the baboons for an explanation.
- Discovery: The lioness discovers that the jackal has tricked her and has killed her cubs.
- Chase: She chases the jackal.
- Triumph: The jackal is never caught, so his trick is successful.
- Gloat: The jackal gloats over the discomfort he has caused the lioness.

#### 4.5 Elements of the plot

Plot can also be seen as comprising of elements pertaining to phases, namely the beginning, the body, (middle development) and the ending. Msimang (1986:40) points out:

Conventionally, the beginning and ending are known as the exposition and denouncement (or resolution) respectively. The middle is sometimes referred to as

the body. This is the main part of the plot and it has many aspects as well. These include conflict, complication, tension, suspense, crisis and climax.

Before identifying details of plot in terms of Propp, the investigator will attend to larger phases in Tswana trickster tales.

#### 4.5.1 Exposition

Exposition is one of the most important elements. It serves as the introductory part of the story. The narrator provides the audience with the necessary background material. It is within this element that the narrator discloses the information necessary for the basic understanding of characters and their relationship, so that one can be aware of the possible future conflict.

This is clearly illustrated in the story, *Kago ya Letamo* (The building of the Dam) from an oral source. Different characters are introduced such as lion, leopard, hare, tiger, hyena, and tortoise and what their mission is. At the beginning of the story one can already predict conflict between these animals, because the wily hare is not willing to work.

The conflict can either be implied or explicit. The social and economic background are often provided in the expository phase. The exposition thus discloses the nature and direction of events and progression of thought. The exposition also establishes the setting and a conducive atmosphere for the events to unfold. In some stories elements pertaining to exposition continue throughout the story and is not just confined to one phase or segment of the story. The exposition is what Propp terms, initial situation and he claims it is not an important morphological element of the story.

In the exposition the narrator names the main characters and aspects of their physical appearance, if it is necessary. The story is in the state of equilibrium. In the story, *Kago ya Letamo* (The building of the Dam) from an oral source, the narrator introduces various characters and tells about the drought and this is the background. The change from

normality to imbalance becomes more effective when it is sudden. When transition drags, the plot lacks tension and suspense.

#### 4.5.2 The body

Generally, it is assumed that the body forms the larger part of the plot. It is in the body where events become complicated. The action, which starts with an imbalance, progresses to the climax. Each element and event contributes towards climax. As the situation becomes more complicated, the rising action is rapid. The following elements of the body can be discussed: conflict, complication, tension and resolution.

#### 4.5.3 Conflict

Conflict can be seen as two opposing forces which are intertwined in the plot of the story. It may involve a collision of views, concepts or beliefs.

Pretorius and Swart (1982: 9) says:

Divergent standpoints about mutual interest, conflicting ideologies, etc., may give rise to a clash between characters in a story.

It appears that two types of conflict can be distinguished, namely external and internal conflict. External conflict occurs when the character clashes with other characters, such as a conflict between man and man, man and God. An internal conflict takes place within a character and may arise from thought and moral codes. The internal conflict may then result in external conflict. In Tswana trickster tales, conflict is more evident between the trickster and his victims. The trickster wants to attain his goal while the victims want to get revenge. Conflict emanates from conflicting beliefs. The elephant argues that he cannot be overpowered by the crocodile and the crocodile claims that he cannot be overpowered by the elephant. These conflicting ideas result in a tug-of-war.

Another illustration of conflict is in the story, *Tlou le Mmutla* (Elephant and the Hare) by Mogapi (1980: 66). The hare is chased by the other animals. When he cannot cross the

river, he asks the elephant to help him. The hare sits on the back of the elephant and they cross the river, but on the way the hare feeds on the elephant's honey. The hare asks the elephant to give him some stones to kill birds, meanwhile the hare finishes the honey and puts the stones in the bucket. After they have crossed the river, the elephant realises that the hare has eaten his honey which leads to conflict between the elephant and the hare. The hare flees and hides inside a big hole because the elephant is furious and intends to kill him.

#### 4.5.4 Complication

As already stated, a sudden transition from equilibrium to disequilibrium results in abnormality; complication stems out of this abnormality. This element encompasses the climax phase. The conflict becomes more intense and fierce as tension progressively rises. During this stage, each event or action is a tributary towards the enlargement of the complication which culminates in the climax. The story, *Kgosi ya Dinonyane* (Birds' chief), from an oral source, illustrates complication well. The birds agree that the one who can fly higher than the others, will be their chief. The bat hides under the wing of a vulture. When the vulture has flown high, the bat comes out of hiding and flies higher than all the birds. Events start to get complicated when the birds realize that the bat, the smallest of them all, is to be crowned chief. The animals disagree and are suspicious. The bat demands the crown, but the birds deprive him of it. The birds claim he does not deserve the crown, because they discovered the bat's trickery. They did not see him during the race, he was only seen after the race. When he is exposed, the bat makes matters worse by escaping. He is followed by the angry mob of birds. To save himself, he disappears into a hole and an owl is asked to guard the hole. The owl sleeps, the bat escapes and is never caught. The story shows how complication starts and continues to mount until the climax after which the bat manages to escape.

Complication is also evident in the story, *Tlou le Mmutla* (Elephant and Hare) by Mogapi (1980: 66). The hare tricks the elephant by eating his honey and puts stones in the bucket. The elephant gets furious and chases the hare. The hare hides inside a big hole, but the

elephant grabs his leg. The elephant then lets go of the hare's leg and holds onto a root. Matters become complicated when the elephant pulls the root thinking that he is pulling the hare's leg. The elephant falls on his back and the hare flees. Complication further intensifies when the elephant gets up and chases the hare. The hare meets some baboons and asks them to kill the elephant. He promises to compensate them. The elephant arrives and the baboons tell him to fill a big calabash with his blood; then they will tell him where the hare is. The calabash has a big hole in its bottom, so the elephant gives blood, but the calabash does not become full. The elephant dies as a result of loss of blood. Events are further complicated when the baboons realize that the hare has fled, and they will not be compensated. The story ends with a climax and the baboons feed on the dead elephant.

#### 4.5.5 Tension

It seems that tension is generated when conflict intensifies. The listeners become curious and wonder what is going to happen next. They become more tense when there is a continual strain and crisis. The interest and attention of the audience is aroused in the exposition, and expectations should never be fulfilled until the climax. The conflict must seem to be resolved, but it should never be completely resolved until the climax. Tension is clear in the story, *Mmutla la Nkwe* (Hare and Leopard) by Lestrade (1948: 25). The jackal is aware that all the animals will perish, because the leopard feeds on them. He tells the leopard not to go hunting that day, so the leopard waits and waits. The jackal calls a meeting of all the animals and they quickly gather. He asks them to form a plan to save them from the leopard. By this stage the leopard is impatiently waiting for food.

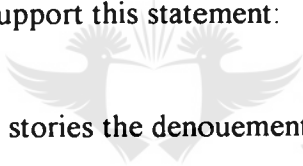
The animals are tense because they think the leopard is coming to find food. Tension mounts because the animals don't know what is going to happen to the jackal. They are victims of the angry leopard. As the animals decide what to do in the forest, they arrive at the sparkling waterhole. The leopard sees his shadow in the water. He attacks himself in the water and drowns. The animals are relieved after the death of the leopard.

The story, *Mmutla le Tau* (Hare and Lion) by Lestrade (1948: 19), is another good example of a story full of tension. The audience is kept in suspense after the killing of the animals by the lion. They want to know what is going to happen to the hare and the lion. The hare ties the lion's tail to the roof. The audience wonders about the safety of the hare, should the lion survive. They become more tense when the hare gets inside the skin of the dead lion. The question is asked, what is he going to do. The tension intensifies when the hare, disguised as the lion, instructs the hyenas to put their legs in boiling water. The listeners wonder how long the hyenas will live. Tension decreases, then the hare is discovered and he escapes.

#### 4.5.6 Resolution

Resolution can be viewed as the last element of the plot. The narrator unravels what has happened up to the climax. The length of the resolution depends on the events of the story. In lengthy stories like, *Kgosi ya dinonyana* (Birds' chief) from an oral source, the resolution must be lengthy to clarify certain aspects.

Cohen (1973: 69) supports this statement:


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 For mystery stories the denouement is usually of special importance, for the clarification of all the events and evidence which have accumulated during the story.

#### 4.6 Functions identified in Tswana trickster tales

Functions of the story can be described as constituents, or components that form a story. Trickster tales have various stages which are constant and are identified according to their place in the unfolding of the story. The functions are thus basic elements of the narrative.

In the analysis of plot constructions in Tswana trickster tales, some functions, as isolated by Dundes and Propp are identified. These functions will be discussed as they occur in both written and oral Tswana trickster tales.

Only functions relevant to this study will be identified, e.g. lack absention, interdiction, trickery, escape, gloat, pursuit and consequence.

#### 4.6.1 Lack

Lack as part of the exposition, appears in the introductory phase of the story. It occurs after the introduction and the opening formula. Lack implies that a particular character lacks something. This lack triggers off the action, as it functions like a motoric moment in drama. Lack can also refer to a problem which has to be overcome. It shows that a situation is in a state of disequilibrium.

An example can be found in the story, *Mmutla le Nkwe* (Hare and Leopard) by Lestrade (1948: 25). The animals lack protection. They are being killed by the leopard. They realise soon that they will all die. They are prompted by a lack of security to convene a meeting.

#### 4.6.2 Absention

This function occurs when one member of a family absents herself/himself from home for certain reasons. It is during this absence that an interdiction is violated. The story, *Leeba le Phiri* (Dove and Hyena) by Malao (1986: 16), illustrated absention well. During the absence of the dove the hyena decides to kill and eat all the dove's children.

#### 4.6.3 Interdiction

Interdiction might follow an introductory situation. It comes as an order or a rule which, when adhered to, will allow things to proceed in a normal way. An interdict can be described as a prohibition usually given by a parent, teacher or other adults, restraining some action. Interdiction can either be implicit or explicit. Most implied interdictions are social norms and values which restrain people from violating certain social codes. An explicit interdiction is a direct instruction, prohibiting a certain action. Implied interdiction is clearly shown in the story, *Phiri le Mmutla* (Hyena and Hare) by Tlhabi (1988: 15). The hare pretends to help the hyena by looking after the hyena's children. During the

absence of the hyena, the hare kills one child and eats him. Killing is an action not accepted by society. Every member of society knows that killing is a serious offence. The story, *Mmutla le Diphologolo* (Hare and the Animals) by Lestrade (1948: 11), is an example of explicit interdiction. It is agreed by all animals that the one who steals the remaining *Motsotsobyane* (a tree that has become ripe) will be killed. The hare breaks the rule that has been laid down by all animals, by waking up during the night to steal the *Motsotsobyane*.

#### 4.6.4 Trickery

Trickery is a popular function in Tswana trickster tales. The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to steal his belongings. The story, *Tlholwe le Mmutla* (Red Hare and Hare) by Mogapi (1980: 19), illustrates trickery. The hare wants the red hare's beautiful whistles. The hare advises the red hare to get inside a big hole, and learn to be a witchdoctor. The hare gets inside the hole first and he comes out without any burns or bruises. The red hare gets inside the hole, but he burns. The hare advises him to kneel down, sleep on his side or stand on two legs. The red hare dies and the hare takes his whistles. The hare has tricked the red hare by digging some smaller holes in the sides of the big one. He hides himself here and the red hare, not aware of these holes goes straight into the big hole and burns to death.

In the story, *Mmutla le Diphologolo* (Hare and the Animals) by Lestrade (1948: 11), the animals eat some *Motsotsobyane*. They agree that the one who steals the remaining *Motsotsobyane* will be killed. At midnight the hare wakes up and eats the remaining *Motsotsobyane*. To save himself he uses a trick. He secretly places the leafy-twigs of *Motsotsobyane* on the red hare's buttocks. The next day when the *Motsotsobyane* is not there, they question one another but find no solution. Since the hare knows about his trick, he says, 'Let us bend down, and he on whose behind *Motsotsobyane* is found, will be guilty'. *Motsotsobyane* is found on red hare's buttocks and he is seized and killed. The hare has used a trick to get what he wanted.



Trickery can be executed using different devices. These are outlined below as stated by Zinta (1983: 98-119).

- Patterning

This is the most popular device in Tswana trickster tales. Patterning concerns itself with repeated verbal statements between characters. In the process of repetition, the trickster deceives other characters. These verbal statements form a particular pattern and may even be in the form of a song. In the story, *Mmutla le Tlholwe* (Red Hare and hare) by Mogapi (1980: 19), the hare wants the red hare's whistles. He formulates a trick. He suggests to the red hare that they should learn to be witchdoctors. The hare digs a hole, and then he digs more than ten holes in the sides of the big hole. He kindles fire in the big hole. He gets inside the hole and comes out without any bruises or burns. When he comes out, he tells the red hare that he is a witchdoctor. He instructs the red hare to do the same, knowing that the red hare is not aware of the smaller holes next to the big hole.

The hare tells the red hare that when he burns, he should say 'Hare I am burning' (*Mmutla ke a swa*). Each time the red hare repeats this verbal statement, the hare tells him what to do. When the red hare is inside the hole and he says, 'Hare, I am burning': 'Kneel on your knees' is the hare reply. 'Hare I am burning', 'Lie on your back' replies the hare. 'Hare I am burning', 'Lie on our side' replies the hare. The red hare performs these actions until he dies. Then the hare takes his whistles.

Another example of patterning is in the story, *Mmutla le Tau* (Hare and Lion) by Malao (1986: 22). It is in the form of a song. The hare tricks the other animals by telling them that the lion has died. The message is circulated in the form of a song. It goes like this:

*Diphologolo tsotlhe*  
*Diphologolo tsotlhe*  
*Sianelang kwano*  
*Le tle go bona*  
*Meno a medile fatshe.*

(All animals  
 All animals)

Run to me  
 Come and see  
 Teeth have grown  
 in the ground.)  
 (Malao, 1986: 22)

In the process of singing, the animals are tricked and cheated. They assemble in multitudes. They are suddenly attacked by the lion and the hare gets what he wanted, meat.

#### - Reversal

One possible effect of a trick, is that the outcome may be reversed. The trickster himself becomes a victim. The trickster can be tricked by the intended victim, or by other character(s). This is the device that entertains the audience most. An example of reversal is found in the story, *Tau le Mmutla* (Lion and Hare) by Rantao (1988: 36). The lion kills some of the animals that have gathered at his kraal. In turn, the lion is tricked by the hare. The hare ties the lion's tail to the roof and he hangs there until he dies. The lion kills the animals, but he never enjoys the meat, because he is tricked by the hare.

Another example of reversal is evident in the story, *Mmutla le Tlholwe* (Hare and the Red Hare) from an oral source. In another version of this story, the hare takes the whistles of the red hare, but is later tricked by the frog. The frog pretends to borrow the whistles and suddenly jumps into the lake with them. The hare retrieves the whistles from the frog, but suddenly the dove appears and says 'Hey hare, let me test your whistles and hear how they sound'. The hare lends them to the dove and he flies away with the whistles. Hare never gets them back. The hare has tricked the red hare, but is in turn tricked by the frog and the dove.

#### - Disguise

The trickster disguises his physical appearance by looking like someone else. He misrepresents his actual identity. Disguise is a very popular device used to execute

trickery or escape in Tswana trickster tales. It can be performed in two ways namely, transformation and magic.

#### - Transformation

The trickster transforms or changes his physical identity to trick other animals. Transformation is illustrated in the story, *Tau le Mmutla* (Lion and Hare) by Rantao (1988: 36). The hare transforms himself into a lion to scare the other animals. He demands food from the hyena, threatening him with death. When he is discovered, the angry hyena chases him away. He arrives at another hyena's place, where he offers himself as a nurse maid. He kills all the hyena's children. When the hyena demands to see them, he escapes and transforms himself into a stone. The angry and frustrated hyena takes the stone and throws it to the other side of the river, unaware that he is saving the hare. The hare has transformed himself into a lion, and later into a stone.

Another example of transformation is shown in the story, *Legapa la Khudu* (The Shell of the Tortoise) by Mogapi (1980: 18). The birds are invited to heaven. The tortoise wants to go but he cannot fly. He borrows wings to fly to heaven. The birds want to be accompanied by the tortoise, because they know he will apply his intelligence and protect them. The tortoise knows that he is going to be given more food and attention than the rest of the birds. He is given the new name *Lona Lotlhe* (All of you). The tortoise transforms himself into a bird and in heaven he is given first preference to the food. The tortoise eats it alone. The other birds get angry and leave him there. The tortoise used transformation to trick people in heaven.

#### - Magic

Disguise can also be achieved through magic. Magic is the art of using secret charms and spirits to make unnatural things happen. The performer does tricks through magic. In most Tswana trickster tales, however, human beings are not depicted as having magical powers.

- Substitution

Substitution is another way of executing trickery. The following story shows substitution. *Mmutla le Khudu* (Hare and Tortoise) from an oral source. The tortoise tricks the hare by putting other tortoises in various resting places. The hare and the tortoise start one race and when the hare arrives at the first resting place, he finds the tortoise already there. They continue with the second race, but when the hare arrives at the second resting place, the tortoise is already there too. The tortoise has put different tortoises in the various resting places to substitute for himself. Substitution is then used to execute a trick.

The story, *Tau le Mmutla* (Lion and Hare) by Rantao (1988:36), is another example of substitution. The hare looks after the hyena's children. He kills the first one and when the hyena demands to see the children, the hare tricks her by bringing the same child over and over again. One character substitutes for many.

- Verbal Deception

This device takes the form of lies and flattery. The trickster uses language to trick his victims. The trickster in this case is the master of verbal artistry. He applies gestures such as facial expression and body movements to clarify meaning. Verbal deception is illustrated in the story, *Phiri le Phokojwe le Molotsana* (Hyena and the sly Jackal) by Malao (1986:1). The jackal convinces the hyena's girlfriend that the hyena is very stupid and assures her that he urinates in bed. The girl is flattered and convinced; she gives up the hyena and falls for the jackal. This illustrates how the jackal uses language to trick the hyena.

In the story, *Leeba le Phiri* (Dove and Hyena) by Malao (1986:16), the hyena speaks kindly to the dove, and convinces her that she (hyena) will look after her children. The dove accepts the offer, and when the dove goes to hunt, the hyena kills the dove's children. The hyena has used language to trick the dove.

#### 4.6.5 Escape

The trickster or the deceiver usually commits a crime and escapes. He has violated instructions and attempts to escape in order to avoid a difficult situation for which he is responsible. In Tswana trickster tales this function follows violation.

An example of escape is shown in the story, *Tau le Mmutla* (Lion and Hare) by Rantao (1988: 36). The hare kills the hyena's children and when he is discovered, he escapes.

#### 4.6.6 Gloat

It can be described as the trickster's enjoyment of the victims's distress. The trickster is successful, he has used a trick to get what he wants. He then goes about gloating and boasting about the displeasure he has caused his victim. Gloating is illustrated in the story *Tlholwe le Mmutla* (Red Hare and the Hare) by Mogapi (1980: 19). The hare succeeds in tricking the red hare and when he (the red hare) is dead, the hare takes his whistles. The hare goes about singing, gloating and boasting that he has taken the red hare's whistles. Another example of gloating is found in the story, *Mmutla le Diphologolo tse Dingwe* (Hare and Other Animals) by Mogapi (1980: 19). The animals go out hunting and come home with *motsotsobyane*. During the night the hare wakes up and eats *motsotsobyane*. He takes the leaf of *motsotsobyane* and puts it on the red hare's buttocks while he (red hare) is asleep. In the morning the hare is the first one to remark that the *motsotsobyane* is finished. He immediately suggests that all the animals should stoop, and see whose buttocks has *motsotsobyane*. The leaf of *motsotsobyane* is found on the red hare's buttocks, so the red hare is killed. The hare then starts singing and gloating that the red hare is dead when he never ate *motsotsobyane*. He (the hare) ate *motsotsobyane* and he boasts of his achievement.

#### 4.6.7 Pursuit

The transgressor, having violated the interdiction, escapes and is pursued. In some trickster tales he is caught but in most tales he is never caught. In the story, *Tau le*

*Mmutla* (Lion and Hare) by Rantao (1988: 36), the hare has tricked the lion and the hyena, and has killed all the hyena's children, so the hyena pursues him. Seeing that he is about to be caught, he transforms himself into a stone. The hyena throws the stone to the other side of the river, unaware that he is saving the hare. The trickster escapes and he is never caught. In the story, *Mmutla le diphologolo tse dingwe* (Hare and other Animals) by Mogapi (1980:19), the hare gloats that the red hare was not the one who ate *motsotsobyane*. He, the hare, had eaten it. The animals discover that they have killed the wrong person and pursue the hare. However, he escapes and is never caught.

#### 4.6.8 Consequence

In this function, tension is at its highest. Listeners wonder what punishment is going to be meted out to the transgressors. Counteraction is an element of consequence. As soon as the mishap or the trick is carried out by the villain, action is taken against him to counteract. The deceived, robbed or cheated takes revenge against his opponent. Revenge can be carried out by friends or relatives. However, whether the action is taken by the deceived himself or by his associates, the aim is the same; to bring the trickster to judgment and give him the appropriate punishment.

In most Tswana trickster tales the trickster is caught but he is never punished. Once caught, he comes up with another trick to escape, or alternatively, he is tricked by other characters. In the story, *Mmutla le Sediba sa Diphologolo* (Hare and Animal's dam) by Mogapi (1980: 20), the hare is caught after tricking the animals by drinking water from the dam. It is agreed that the hare should be killed but the hare comes up with a trick. He asks the elephant to throw him high in the sky so that he can die easily and quickly. The elephant agrees and as the hare is thrown in the sky, he flees and is never caught.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

In conclusion it must be noted that only eight functions have been identified in most Tswana trickster tales. These are lack, absentation, interdiction, trickery, escape, gloat, pursuit and consequence. It is important, however, that more functions can be identified

in other Tswana trickster tales. The concern here is not the number of functions identified but the application of the Propp/Dundes theory in the analysis of plot in Tswana trickster tales. It must also be borne in mind that these functions are not separate entities, they often overlap and must be seen as complementary to one another. They are there to form a story in totality.



## CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSION

Trickster tales as part of folklore; occupy an ambiguous position; they often reflect everyday human life, but they also transgress rules of decency. In essence they provide a foundation for teaching the wisdom needed for social and physical survival. Themes such as love, jealousy, greed and hatred are directly, or indirectly taught to the young, using the tales. The story, *Leeba le Phiri* (Dove and Hyena) by Malao (1986: 16), is a good example of a theme such as ignorance. It is a lesson to the dove that she should never leave her children with strangers. The story, *Tlhotwe le Mmutla* (Red Hare and the Hare) by Mogapi (1980: 19), illustrates envy and greed.

The leading characters in Tswana trickster tales were discussed. The hare is the favourite trickster among the Tswana people. In other stories the tortoise is the trickster. This was proven by *Kago ya Letamo* (The building of the Dam) from an oral source. The hare is clearly cheated by the tortoise. Different animals fail to catch the hare, but the tortoise tricks him, humiliating and outwitting him. The hare is creative and capable of applying different devices to execute trickery, as was proven by various trickster tales, mentioned earlier. Possibly this is the reason why, among other tribes, the hare enjoys a higher standing than the tortoise.

The jackal is probably 'imported' from European trickster tales. Mofokeng (1954: 239) supports this view:

In the South he is found in Afrikaans where he is the local representative of the European fox in the tales that came with the Colonists. From Afrikaans he has entered the neighbouring Bantu languages.



The jackal also has a dominant role in Tswana trickster tales. The story, *Phiri le Phokojwe wa molotsana* (Hyena and the sly Jackal) by Malao (1986: 1), is a good illustration of a jackal having the characteristics of a trickster character.

Tswana trickster characters are classified into two clear categories: the successful and the unsuccessful tricksters. In the story, *Tselane* by Malao (1986: 40), the giant (ogre) appears as a trickster. He successfully imitates Tselane's mother and is then in the position to capture Tselane, thus giving the impression of being a successful trickster. As the story develops, the giant is tricked and appears as a dupe, thus he is not a true trickster. In the story, *Kago ya Letamo* (The building of the Dam) from an oral source, the hare appears to be an unsuccessful trickster, because he is tricked by the tortoise. In most Tswana trickster tales, the hare is a successful trickster, even though he can be caught. He will always come up with another trick to save himself. The hare is therefore in constant flight. The story, *Tau le Mmutla* (Lion and Hare) by Rantao (1988: 36), is a clear example of the hare having power to trick. In such stories, trickery is evident throughout and the trickster will never, at any stage be tricked. It can be noted that the common factor between the two categories lies in the actions of trickster characters which are socially unacceptable.

In most Tswana trickster tales, it is evident that the character used as a trickster is small and weak. He has an appearance which encourages other characters to look down upon him, or despise him. The small and weak, trick the muscular or fearful characters such as a lion, or simply play two fearful characters up against each other. He then gloats and boasts over the success of his trickery. In some tales, the weak and small character can be the victim of another trickery as illustrated in the story, *Kago ya Letamo* (The building of the Dam) from an oral source. Such incidents are very rare in Tswana trickster tales.

In this study various trickster tales have been discussed and analysed. Trickster characters are also identified and furthermore, 'Propp's/Dundes' Theory is applied to analyse the plot structure of trickster tales. Various functions have been identified. Tales with a less

complex plot follow the sequential system of Propp and Dundes. Therefore the law of fixed order is maintained.



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