

ANIMALS, BIRDS AND INSECTS AS METAPHORS IN MERU PROVERBS*

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In many cultures, there is a special genre of fables or tales of animal life with moralistic themes. The most widely known animal tales are those ascribed to Aesop, a Greek slave from Samos who probably lived in the 5th century B.C. at the court of Croesus at Sardis. A large number of these fables have been translated into Western and other languages. In Africa, animals appear in similar tales but also in creation myths and myths of the origin of death (see e.g. Baumann 1964; Gecau 1970; Kirknaes 1988; Knappert 1970; Parrinder 1968).

The frequent appearance of animals in tales with moralistic aim is due to the fact that many animals seem to have 'personal' characteristics and human-like behaviour. A lion, for example, usually represents power and boldness, whereas a fox or a hyena has often become a metaphor of cleverness and cunning. In many tales, a donkey or a rabbit represents wisdom. A snake is often described as the most cunning and deceitful of all animals.

In aetiological myths, animals and their behaviour are used as a means to explain the origin of death and other similar phenomena in the world. A chameleon, for example, is a very slow animal who does not seem to know where to go. In many African myths, the chameleon is the Creator's messenger of life, but because of its slowness the message comes to the people too late. The messenger of death, a dog or another fast animal, has already arrived to the people and this is why every human has to die.

The human-like characteristics of many animals, birds and even insects have made them useful metaphors also in proverbs. The topic of this paper is the Meru proverb tradition with animal metaphors. Before taking up the purpose of this paper in detail, however, a few words of explanation are needed concerning the role of proverbs in the oral Meru tradition in general.

PROVERBS IN THE ORAL MERU TRADITION

The Meru have a rich oral tradition of myths, entertaining stories, tales, riddles, oaths, blessings, curses, and so on. In their oral tradition, proverbs are a genre that is frequently used by people in their everyday social life. Even if there are

active bearers of proverb tradition who are recognized as proverb specialists, also common people love to employ proverbs. This has been a frequent observation during my life in the Meru area in 1966-1974 and my subsequent visits to Tanzania.

Proverbs exist as a real genre in the oral Meru tradition. A proverb has a designation of its own in the Meru language: it is called a *sumu*. This designation distinguishes a proverb from other genres that have been identified and described in my previous Meru studies (Harjula 1969: 16-20, Harjula 1989b). Generally speaking, the proverbs are 'fixed-phrase genres because their wordings are as fixed as their contents' (Arewa 1970: 436). Also a Meru *sumu* is a short saying with a fixed form and content. These qualities alone, however, do not make proverbs a genre of their own. It is the function of proverbs that distinguishes them from blessings, riddles, oaths and other short sayings with a fixed form and content.

In general, in any culture the proverbs have many common functions. They maintain and strengthen traditional values and social patterns. They also transmit these values and patterns as well as other traditional ideas and conceptions from generation to generation. The proverbs crystallize the practical wisdom of the past generations. In everyday life, the proverbs focus the attention of people to the essentials of common living and offer solutions to human problems. As a vital element of oral tradition, the proverbs represent a 'part of a community's arsenal of rhetorical strategies' (Lieber 1984: 438) and often even a 'ready tool for rhetoric in situations of tension' (Yankah 1986: 280).

In a specific sense, the function of a proverb is closely related to the context of a concrete situation where the proverb is used. In different situations, proverbs with different functions are needed and employed. In this paper, the 'function' means the purpose of a proverb. The proverb functions as a means toward a result hoped for and aimed at when the proverb is used in a certain situation. Most of the Meru proverbs that I have collected and analysed have didactic, corrective, encouraging and other related functions.

THE PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

Considering the common didactic aims of proverbs, one can assume that a proverb with an animal metaphor has a function similar to that of animal tales with a moralistic aim: to remind people about cultural values and patterns, to encourage people to follow these models, and to warn them about a behaviour that deviates from the norm.

The purpose of this paper is to elaborate upon the aforementioned assumption in its various dimensions in the light of a small collection of Meru proverbs relevant to the topic. What kind of people do the animals, birds and insects represent in Meru proverbs? What cultural values and social patterns are manifested or reflected in their proverbial behaviour? What does make animals common and useful metaphors in the Meru proverb tradition?

In some collections of African proverbs, the texts are given in the original language and in English or some other Western language without any further explanations (e.g. Kalugila 1977). Of course, there are proverbs that can be understood in almost any culture and society regardless of their origin. For example, the following Meru proverbs would probably not present any difficulties to a Finn or a Thai or an American: "If a tree is too much for a baboon, how could you climb it?"; "The cockroach on a tray does not know the other one on the wall."

Usually, however, one needs to know the function of a proverb and its context of situation in order to understand the proper meaning of the proverb. It is the context of performance where the lore and the folk are integrated within a particular social situation - to use a conception of modern American folkloristics (Abrahams 1971; Bauman 1971a, 1971b; Ben-Amos 1971) - and where a folklore text gets its actual meaning (Honko 1986: 41). A good example of this is Maryam Abudu's collection of Swahili proverbs (Abudu 1974). The meanings of the proverbs can easily be understood because the functions of the proverbs are explained.

Also in this paper, attention has been given to the function of each proverb in order to make the meanings of the proverbs understandable. For the same purpose, the relevant characteristics of various animals, birds and insects appearing in the proverbs have been elaborated upon whenever necessary. In some cases, also certain Meru beliefs and customs have been explained.

BRAVE BULLS AND OPTIMISTIC COWS

The Meru of Tanzania are agriculturalists who also keep cattle and goats. Traditionally, they have been in daily contact with these animals in many ways. Cattle and goats have had a vital role in the everyday life of the Meru. No wonder that they appear also in the Meru proverb tradition as important metaphors.

1. Kyashe kya shau kikuutaa kyanri kyo kyeni.
1. A young bull takes the tick away itself.

In this proverb, the young bull is a metaphor of a young man. In the Meru culture, the ideal young man is a brave and self-reliant member of the society. As a man he is regarded to be stronger than a woman. He still is young, full of strength and vitality. He has to meet many expectations of his parents and relatives. A young man has to earn his place in the society in many ways.

The proverb is addressed to a young man who requests for help in a matter where he should be bravely self-reliant. The proverb functions as an acceptable means to refuse such a request by referring to an important social value and model (the self-reliance of young men). At the same time the proverb encourages a young man to be self-reliant by reminding him of his youth and strength (see Proverb Nr. 10).

2. Mawe eemaa numbe tinwaa mura ndi.
2. Stones don't hinder cows from drinking water.

The Meru mountain area usually gets rain enough. There are many bigger and smaller rivers in the area. During the dry season, there is less water in the rivers and more stones thus become visible in them. In spite of the stones that make their moving risky, cows keep coming to the rivers to drink the water.

The proverb is used in times when the dry season continues too long and people may become apt to leave their fields and gardens uncultivated because they fear a complete lack of rain. The necessary work, however, should be done in time because a human cannot predict the weather. In this situation the proverb functions as a mutual encouragement.

In addition to this specific context, the proverb is used in other difficult situations where a person needs a lot of confidence and stamina in order to obtain something valuable. The proverb is addressed, for example, to a person who is planning to clear a new field in a stony area or to build a new house. Also in this use, a cow who keeps coming to the river in spite of the stones is a metaphor of an optimistic and confident person with stamina.

3. Ikatura wembe, ikusuvaa na kileri.
3. One who lacks the horn will scratch itself with the chin.

When a goat lacks the horn, the animal must scratch itself with a chin or muzzle. In the proverb, the horn means a child. The goat (not explicitly mentioned) without a horn is a metaphor of a childless person who in many things has to ask for the help of the relatives' or neighbours' children. The proverb is applied to such a person when he or she needs help, for example, in collecting firewood or in bringing water. The proverb is also used by a childless person himself or herself to emphasize the necessity of help.

4. Iiraswaa isikwa iriso.
4. When an arrow is shot the eye is covered.

Blood or blood mixed with milk is a common drink among several East African people like the Maasai who surround the Meru. In the proverb, the verb *irasa*, 'to shoot an arrow', refers to the Maasai custom of taking blood from a cow by incising a vein in its neck with an arrow. While this is being done, the cow's eyes are covered in order to keep the animal at ease. A cow (not explicitly mentioned in the proverb) portrayed in this situation is a metaphor of a person who is tactfully approached with a request. The proverb is used to remind that if a person wants something from other people he or she must approach them in a proper manner.

5. Ilyaa ikabaa nkongo.
5. One who eats sounds a bell.

The Meru word *nkongo* means a bell tied to the neck of a goat or a cow, so that people would know the whereabouts of the animal or the herd. In the proverb, the goat or the cow (not explicitly mentioned) with a bell refers, for example, to a person who tries to hide his or her evil actions. The proverb functions as a warning to such a person: an evil deed does not remain hidden. There are other Meru proverbs that have the same function and meaning, for example, 'Even if you hide the fire, you cannot conceal the smoke' (Kwafisa muro, kufisaa musu ndi).

In the everyday Meru life, the proverb is also applied in other contexts where the metaphor of a goat or a cow with a sounding bell refers to the human and the life in general. In the human life, nothing remains hidden be it love or hatred, true friendship or affectation. Every human action has its token.

THE SHREWD AND CUNNING HYENA

In the Meru area, a hyena is the most efficient scavenger of the nature. Very little of a dead animal is left uneaten by hyenas with their powerful jaws even capable of crushing bones. Hyenas seem to appear cunningly from nothing and disappear the same way. They are cowardly creatures that never attack a healthy adult animal but kill newly born young or aged and weakened animals. These characteristics of a hyena are reflected in some Meru proverbs.

6. Irapupu lyerea likafita ukuu.
6. The hyena was timid and reached an old age.

The proverb is said or applied to a person who is planning to do something foolhardy or too dangerous, or who has just failed in trying to do something too daring. The function of the proverb is to warn such a person not to forget the healthy fear, or to remind him or her of its significance (see Proverb Nr. 11). The hyena in the proverb appears as a metaphor of a person who knows his or her abilities, strengths and weaknesses, and acts accordingly. In this proverb, being timid is not something negative but rather a sign of wisdom and smartness.

7. Kukee are sha kyaalo kyilya kyeerua numbe ivele?
7. Are you like the hyena who pulled a cow up from a pool?

The Meru word *kyaalo* means a kind of hyena that is thought to be very cunning and outrageous. The idea of a cunning hyena as such, however, does not make the proverb understandable. The necessary key to the understanding is offered by a Meru tale, where the *kyaalo* pretends to be a friend of a cow who had fallen into a pool. The hyena helps the cow out of the water to safety - and then eats the weakened animal.

In the proverb, *kyaalo* refers to a person who pretends friendship in order to get benefit from other people. The proverb is a warning to such a person that his or her evil intentions have been exposed so that it is of no use to take the planned action anymore (see Proverb Nr. 15). The proverb may also function as a blame to a person after he or she has acted in such a way.

8. Mwanakwa, kwalea irikya kya vandu kuirikya kya mafisi.
8. My child, if you don't listen to people you will listen to hyenas.

In this proverb, a hyena is not a metaphor of a certain kind of person but the animal refers to something to be afraid of. The proverb is addressed to a child or a young person who refuses to obey the parents or other older people. The function of the proverb is to warn such a child not to be disobedient lest something evil should happen to him or her.

SKILFUL, WARY MONKEYS

In the forests and bushes of Mt. Meru area, there are plenty of monkeys like baboons and Colobus monkeys. Sitting on the ground, scratching themselves and each other, or skilfully climbing in the trees they are animals who surely attract the attention of anyone moving around in the area. No wonder that monkeys appear in the Meru proverbs as important metaphors.

9. Nri ukanlema ifie kumakii yaarukyia?
 9. If a tree is too much for a baboon, how could you climb it?

In this proverb, the baboon is a metaphor of a skilful person or an expert. There are tasks and situations where even an expert may fail. The proverb is addressed to a person who intends to do something that obviously is too difficult even to the most skilful expert. The function of the proverb is to warn such a person not to harm himself or herself by trying to accomplish something impossible. The proverb is also said to or about a person who has tried to do an impossible thing and failed. In this usage, the proverb is not only a warning but also an explanation: the person failed because he or she tried to accomplish something that is even beyond the capability of an expert (see Proverbs Nr. 13, 16 and 20).

10. Nkyeku wa ifie akuutia nri muni.
 10. An old baboon mother applies medicine by herself.

Old baboons often have nobody to pick the flies and ticks out of their skin, but they have to manage this by themselves. The metaphor refers to an older person who in certain situations has to rely on herself or himself because there are no helpers available. The proverb may be said, for example, to or about an old grandmother who has to collect firewood or to cook by herself. The function of the proverb is to encourage an older person to be self-reliant if there is no help available (see Proverb Nr. 1). In this kind of a situation, a person may apply the proverb also to herself or himself.

11. Mafie lia eerea, llyo eengifwa.
 11. The baboons multiplied in number because they were timid.

Baboons often move around on the ground in big crowds. In a hot day, I once left my car alone with the front windows open. As I came back, a crowd of baboons have carried away not only the bananas I had left in the car but also my sweater and my pipe! On the other hand, baboons in the bush are timid animals who quickly disappear if another animal or a human being approaches them.

In the proverb, the baboon is a metaphor of a person with healthy fear. The context of use and the function of the proverb are the same as in connection with Proverb Nr. 6 above with a hyena as the corresponding metaphor.

12. Kyela ndooro ni nkia.
 12. The tail makes a Colobus monkey attractive.

The real local beauty among the monkeys in the Meru area is the black and white Colobus with its long hair. The most striking feature of the animal is its long and narrow tail with a big 'brush' at the end of the tail. In the proverb, the Colobus monkey is a metaphor of a person with a good reputation and fame. The proverb is applied to such a person as a praising statement. The proverb reminds people that a good person's nature is revealed by what is seen in his or her life, that is in his or her deeds and behaviour. The proverb is not related to a person's appearance.

THE BRAGGART HORNBILL AND SOME OTHER BIRDS

In the Meru area, every morning at dawn the choir of the tropical birds starts its daily concert. But it is not only the hundreds of different warblings and noises that fill the landscape. The noise-makers and warblers themselves - big and small colourful tropical birds - are an attractive visual element in the landscape. The large variety of birds with different appearances and behaviour has made many of them suitable for metaphoric use in the proverb tradition.

13. Ikurang'a lyanumbwa, litopiraa mwana kana kakakashaa.
 13. A hornbill said that it will prepare the bill for its brood, but spoiled it.

The Meru word *ikurang'a* refers to a hornbill, probably to the crowned or silvery-cheeked hornbill. In any case, it is no wonder that a bird with the appearance and behaviour of a hornbill has its place in the Meru proverb tradition. The large bird with its casqued bill likes to sit at the top of trees making a raucous noise, 'H-o-o-o, ho-o-o-o!', or 'Ho, ho-ho!'. The typical noise of the bird is reflected in its Swahili name *hondohondo* (Archbold 1966: 73-74). The most striking feature in a hornbill's appearance is the casque or a kind of horn that covers the top of the bird's bill from the forehead almost to the tip of the bill. The bird really looks like something had gone wrong with its bill.

In the proverb, the hornbill is a metaphor of a braggart who boasts of intending to do something really extraordinary and difficult, then tries and fails. The proverb functions as a warning to such a braggart: It is not good to boast of doing something that is beyond your skills. The proverb may also be used as an explanation of a person's failure: He or she (or you) tried to do something too difficult (see Proverbs Nr. 9, 16 and 20).

14. Kukee are sha nkyeku wa kinamashushi atang'inaa?
 14. Are you like an old sunbird mother who has not grown up?

Sunbirds are multicoloured birds that feed on a mixed diet of nectar and insects. Especially they like to suck the sweet sap of banana and aloe plant flowers with their long bill. A sunbird is often seen to flutter around and above a flower like a butterfly. In Swahili, the bird is called *chozi* or *mlaasali*, the latter name meaning 'a honey-eater' (Archbold 1966: 18-20 and Maimu 1982: 21).

In the proverb, the old sunbird mother refers to an adult or an old person who - according to the Meru codes of behaviour - behaves in a childish manner. The proverb functions as a warning or a reminder to such a person to behave according to his or her age. The key metaphor of the proverb, the old sunbird mother, gives the idea of, for example, an old aunt who moves around in a nervous manner and giggles like a schoolgirl.

15. Kukee are sha iruma lyia leemia nrie?
15. Are you like an *iruma* that escorts locusts?

So far, I have not been able to identify the bird mentioned in the proverb. *Iruma* is a bird that seems to enjoy the company of locusts just in order to get an opportunity to eat them. The bird is almost white like a wild duck. In the proverb, the bird is a metaphor of a person who shares other people's interests merely for his or her own personal benefit. The proverb functions as a warning to such a person that his or her selfish intentions are known to the people (see Proverb Nr. 7).

16. Ngongoyo ikaaloka iishi imboo iwore imakii imboo imburu.
16. A hawk that swoops wanting to carry off a chicken perhaps catches only a dry leaf.

The hawk with bad luck refers to a person who, in doing business or in another similar situation, eagerly aims at his or her own profit but may fail completely. The proverb is used as a warning to such a person to reconsider the situation and the risks involved before taking action (see Proverbs Nr. 9, 13 and 20).

17. Kwawara ndee mafuli imaya.
17. If you catch a bird by its feathers, it slips away.

The proverb is used as a warning to a person who intends to accuse someone for a heavy offence or a crime but may not have adequate evidence. Unfortunately, at this point my material is incomplete. It is impossible to say whether the accusation is to be made just between the two persons, in front of neighbours or clan elders, or at a court. In any case, the proverb reflects traditional Meru legal principles, and as such it belongs to the same category

with a great number of similar proverbs used in various parts of Africa (Ojoade 1988). The proverb itself, however, would not seem to be a part of a judicial process at a court (c.f. Golka 1993: 70-87; Johanssen and Döring 1915: 46-53; Messenger 1959; Yankah 1986).

The emphasis in the proverb is on a person who tries to catch a bird in a wrong way, without a proper hold of the bird. The other metaphor, that of the bird that slips away refers to a person who is accused for a crime without adequate evidence and thus easily slips away.

THE GREEDY COCKROACH AND THE BOASTING FLY

Among the insects, a cockroach belongs to the greedy and nasty ones. You never stop wondering how the cockroaches find their way into a closed box of flour or a tin of sugar. But there they are as you open the box and the tin in order to start baking. During my eight years in Tanzania, I had the experience that it is impossible to get rid of these insects - at least for good. One can well understand that in the Meru proverb tradition a cockroach has become a metaphor of a certain type of human.

18. Ikee washeny iishi ikee irwa na mbarata ndi.
18. The cockroach on a tray does not know the other one on the wall.

The metaphor of a cockroach (not explicitly mentioned) refers here to a greedy and selfish person who has got everything he or she needs. The proverb has a bitter taste. It is used by a poor person who would urgently need the help of a prosperous neighbour but does not get it. In such a situation, the proverb may be applied to the prosperous neighbour by other people as well. The proverb functions as an explanation of the situation referring to a common experience: the rich don't know the troubles of the poor.

19. Ng'ishe ikammaka nsweny, ng'ishe toose.
19. If a cockroach descends upon the food, they come all together.

Nswa is a common Meru food, a mixture of maize, banana, beans and milk. In this proverb, a cockroach refers to a thief. The proverb is applied in a situation where a thief has been seen or is told to be moving around. The function of the proverb is to warn people that there probably is a gang of thieves around, as thieves usually operate in groups.

20. Nrii yasisasisa maako ikanumbua iimboo nungu.
20. A fly rubbed its hands together and said that it will lift up the pitcher.

A fly rubbing its legs together is a metaphor of a person who boasts of doing something great that obviously lies beyond his or her capabilities. The proverb is addressed or applied to such a person as a warning not to try to accomplish an impossible thing.

The proverb may also be used after a person has tried to do something very difficult and failed (see Proverbs Nr. 9, 13 and 16).

21. Uko lumwi luutaa nda nrweny ndi.
21. One hand does not rid the head of lice.

Self-reliance is a value that is reflected in many Meru proverbs (in this paper Proverbs Nr. 1, 3 and 10). In human life, however, there are often situations where a person cannot be self-reliant and manage alone. The proverb in question is used by a person who requests help for a difficult work like removing a big stone out of the field. The proverb functions as a means to emphasize the necessity of the help. The lice here does not refer to any person. The insect or the idea of getting rid of it is a metaphor of a task that is so difficult that one person cannot manage it alone.

FROM THE UNCERTAIN CHAMELEON TO THE DANGEROUS MOUSE

In addition to the animals, birds and insects discussed above, there are other common animals in the Meru area that appear in the proverb tradition. Also these animals have some characteristics that make them suitable to be used as metaphors. For example, a chameleon with its uncertain advance and a small but dangerous mouse have their counterparts in the human life.

22. Kilelemung'u kyanumbwa: kwa sharondi norio mwana na kwa lifu;
neendany kungaku?
22. A chameleon said: I have got a grandchild at the son's and at the daughter's; where should I go?

When a chameleon moves on the ground, its advance is very slow. It looks as if the animal would take two steps forward and one step back. It keeps stopping and looking around. The animal gives the impression that it does not know where to go. In the proverb, the chameleon's hesitation is crystallized in

its question: 'Where should I go? Which of my two grandchildren should I visit?'

The wavering movement of a chameleon makes it a well understood metaphor of an uncertain and hesitating person. The proverb in question is used in a situation where a person has difficulties in making up his or her mind. The proverb reminds and warns people that without making decisions one will never get anywhere. Sometimes it is difficult to make up one's mind, but even then a person should make a decision and act accordingly.

23. Kilwa kyavia vana nkia.
23. A frog donated the tail to its children.

The metaphorical idea in this proverb has been taken from the biological evolution of a frog. The form of a frog (or a toad) from the time it leaves the egg to the time when it takes its final shape is called a tadpole. A tadpole has a tail, whereas a frog in its final shape is tail-less.

In the proverb, a (tail-less) frog refers to a person who is too generous. The proverb is addressed or applied to a person who is used to donate his or her possessions to other people so freely that finally this person will have nothing left. The proverb functions as a warning to such a person not to waste his or her possessions. On the one hand, generosity is an important value in the Meru culture. But on the other hand, by being too generous a person may just harm himself or herself.

24. Munyunyu wanumbwa, winitaa wa ndee ukakwinita to muni.
24. A bat said that it will bend the bird's head upside down, but did so to itself.

A bat with its head upside down is a metaphor of a person who has tried to harm other people but got hurt himself or herself. The proverb is used as a warning in a situation where someone is planning to harm another person, for example, by using sorcery or a curse without a culturally accepted reason (Harjula 1980: 116 and 1989b: 128-129). The proverb is also applied to a person who has tried this, but has only done harm to himself or herself. The proverb warns about the consequences of evil intentions toward other people. A person who tries to harm other people may get hurt himself or herself.

25. Sara ikaaloka uriony itiyya fo ifuli.
25. A gazelle that tumbles into a trap leaves behind a hair.

The Meru word *urio* means a trap in the sense of a pit that has been dug and then lightly covered in order to catch animals. If an animal falls down into the

pit and then gets out, it will leave behind at least a hair as a sign of its visit. In the proverb, the gazelle leaving behind a hair is a metaphor of a guest. The proverb is applied in a situation where a person or a family experiences something unexpected soon after having a visitor. The proverb functions as an explanation of anything unexpected after the visitor has left, be it joy or sorrow, success or misfortune, recovery from an illness or getting ill.

Also the visitor gets his or her share from the visit, as another Meru proverb states: 'When a wandering foot returns it has got a thorn or dew' (Urende Iwende-ende lushaa lurie mwinga ana lusha lurie laa). A wandering foot refers to a person who returns home after a visit. A thorn is a metaphor of bad luck or a curse, dew means a blessing. The idea behind these two proverbs is that people always influence each other, especially through their words (Harjula 1989b: 128), either for good or for bad.

26. Mbeva ya ilya nruvi inyaa ndi.

26. The mouse that eats a calabash is not small.

The mouse here is a metaphor of an enemy who looks harmless but is, in fact, very dangerous. A small mouse makes only a tiny hole in the calabash, but still the contents flow away. The proverb is applied to a person who despises his or her enemy as a meaningless weakling. The proverb warns such a person not to belittle any enemy. An enemy is an enemy, no matter how harmless he or she may look.

CONCLUSIVE OBSERVATIONS

In general, the analysis of the Meru proverbs with an animal metaphor corroborates the assumption presented in the beginning of this paper. The function of these proverbs is similar to that of animal tales with a moralistic aim: to encourage people to follow their cultural patterns and values, and to warn them not to deviate from the norms of their society. This, naturally, is the function of almost any proverb. Nevertheless, the proverbs analysed in this paper represent a special type of proverbs, namely those with animal metaphors.

Similarly to animal tales with a moralistic aim, also in the proverbs in question it mainly is **the characteristic behaviour** of animals, birds and insects that makes them useful metaphors. For example, the typical way of a chameleon to move on the ground, taking two steps forward and one step back, stopping and looking around, readily refers to a person who cannot decide what to do (Proverb Nr. 22). A wary hyena and a timid baboon are fitting metaphors

of a person with healthy fear (Proverbs Nr. 6 and 11). The skilful way of a baboon to climb in the trees has made it also a metaphorical example of an expert (Proverb Nr. 9).

The habit of cows to keep coming to the river even during the dry season, when water is scarce and stones make drinking difficult, readily gives the idea of a confident person (Proverb Nr. 2). The typical way of a sunbird to flutter around a flower makes it an understandable metaphor of an older person who behaves in a childish manner (Proverb Nr. 14). The habit of cockroaches to appear in groups makes a person to think of thieves moving around in gangs (Proverb Nr. 19).

In some proverbs, it simply is **the size or the appearance** of an animal that makes it a metaphorical example of a certain kind of human being. A small mouse represents a dangerous enemy who looks harmless (Proverb Nr. 26). A beautiful Colobus monkey with its attractive tail is a metaphor of a person with a good reputation (Proverb Nr. 12). Sometimes **the appearance and behaviour together** make an animal a useful metaphor for the proverb tradition. The casqued bill of a hornbill and its habit to sit at the top of a tree making a raucous noise make the bird a warning example of a braggart (Proverb Nr. 13).

In some cases, **an animal in a certain situation** has become a proverbial metaphor. For example, a bird that slips away if caught by its feathers refers to a person who is accused without adequate evidence and thus easily slips away (Proverb Nr. 17). A cow portrayed in a situation where its eyes are covered before people take blood from the animal is a metaphor of a person who is tactfully approached with a request (Proverb Nr. 4).

In a few proverbs, the animal is not a metaphor of a human being but of something else. A lice may refer to a difficult task where help and cooperation are needed (Proverb Nr. 21). In one proverb (Nr. 8), the hyena represents something to be afraid of. But also in these cases, the characteristics of an animal make the metaphor understandable.

In summary, the Meru proverbs with an animal metaphor manifest or reflect a variety of cultural values and social patterns: determination, confidence, self-reliance, tact, realism, modesty, healthy fear, honesty, a good reputation, being unselfish, helping a person in need, cooperation in difficult tasks, behaving according to one's age, and so on.

Some proverbs just state a common experience or a fact of life (e.g. Proverbs Nr. 19 and 26). In a few proverbs, the animal metaphor becomes understandable only on the basis of a certain Meru belief (Proverb Nr. 25) or a Meru tale (Proverb Nr. 7). But also in these cases, naturally, there is something in the animal's characteristics that makes it a useful and fitting metaphor in the Meru proverb tradition.

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The Meru of Tanzania are an agricultural Bantu group whose main areas of inhabitation are the eastern and southern slopes of Mt. Meru near Arusha in the northern part of the country. Historically, culturally and linguistically, the Meru are closely related to the Chagga of Kilimanjaro (Harjula 1969: 13-14). The Meru of Tanzania are not related to the Meru of Kenya.