LANGUAGE AND STYLE IN CARTOONS:

A CASE STUDY OF *BEN 10*

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DECLARATION AND APPROVAL

DECLARATION

This project is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree at any other university**.**

signature…………………………..date…………………………………

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This project has been submitted for examination with our approval as the University Supervisors**.**

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my dad, Athanas Kaula Ngove who inspired my interest in scholarship from an early age.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the language and style used in *Ben 10;* a Television cartoon programme that has generated interest from the Kenyan children. The study focuses on twenty episodes from four series of *Ben 10.* The study was informed by the fact that, children who have access to film and a good command of the English language are gradually changing preference from literature in print form to film and especially cartoons. The few scholars that have analyzed cartoons as an alternative way of accessing Literature have concentrated on those cartoons watched by children aged between three and six years. Cartoons watched by children above six years have hardly received critical attention. This study analyzes the language and style of cartoons watched by children above six years. The study has four objectives: to evaluate the use of fantasy in *Ben 10*, analyze the language and style employed in *Ben 10*, analyze *Ben 10* series as a form of popular culture and identify children's views on *Ben 10*. The study seeks to investigate the hypotheses that, there is a close relationship between fantasy and reality, there is a unique language in *Ben 10* that arouses children's interest, *Ben 10* is a form of popular culture and *Ben 10* causes children to form certain views that they articulate. Using the theory of children's literature and semiotics, the study looks at the cartoon as a genre of children's literature where children take up the main roles, and the themes addressed appeal to children. It does this using semiotics, a theory that looks at the signs and sign processes employed in a text. This study has employed critical reading of secondary texts, watching *Ben 10* series and interviewing children aged between six and ten years and analyzing the findings.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background

This study analyses the styles and language as a literary expression in film form in the cartoon *Ben 10*. *Ben 10* is an American cartoon first published in 2007 by Cartoon Network Studios. As indicated at the beginning of every episode, it is a media franchise created by Man of Action, a group consisting of Dancan Rouleau, Joe Casey, Joe Kelly and Steven T. Seagle. The cartoon is about a boy by the name Benjamin Tennyson together with his grandfather Max and his cousin Gwendolyn Tennyson. Ben 10 is on a summer camping trip with his cousin and grandpa. He finds an alien pod on the ground. When he examines it, he finds a mysterious watch-like device called the Omnitrix (full name Omnimatrix).When he reaches out to touch it, the device attaches itself permanently to his wrist and attaches itself to his DNA, giving him the ability to transform into a variety of alien forms, each with its own unique powers. The device allows anyone who wears it to turn into alien creatures. Although Ben soon realizes that he has a responsibility to help others by averting disaster, saving people and fighting off hostile villains and aliens that include Vilgax, an alien warlord bent on using the Omnitrix to outfit an alien army, with these new abilities at his disposal, he is not above a little super-powered mischief every now and then. Along with Gwen and grandpa, Ben embarks on summer long adventure to fight evil, both extraterrestrial and earthly.

The characters in *Ben 10* are young children aged between ten years and sixteen. They include Ben 10, his cousin Gwen, their friends Kevin and Allan and in a few episodes Ben's classmates.

This aspect of age appeals to the children viewers who identify with the child characters. The only adult characters are Grandpa Max, Ben's parents and a few other adults who only take supportive roles.

The cartoon genre has become an alternative way of packaging and accessing Literature for children. This is in line with their changing needs and interests. They can choose to access Literature through written, audio or audio-visual mode. The film mode which includes cartoons is increasingly becoming popular among those children who have access to it. A cartoon can be defined as a two dimensional illustrated visual art intended for caricature, satire or humour. Children between the age of six and ten enjoy adventure. This is because they are at a stage when they are discovering that they can think independently. According to Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development, these children are in the Concrete and Operational stages and can think logically. The stage is characterized by the development of logical thought, that is, children become more logical about concrete and specific things, though they still struggle with abstract ideas and hypothetical concepts. They can identify with characters and relate with issues. This is because their thought process becomes more rational, mature and adult-like and more operational. Children are able to take in different aspects of an object, simply through looking at it and they can imagine different scenarios or 'what if' something were to happen. This is because they now have operational thought. Erik Erikson calls them 'ideological minds'. He says that, they can suppose and imagine situations; they have the ability to be creative. This means that in their understanding of *Ben 10*, they can imagine, suppose and fantasize situations. This is because they can 'enter into the shoes of the characters' and imagine what would happen or what they would do if they found themselves in a situation like the one the character is in.

Scholars are increasingly realizing the importance of children's Literature and are coming up with ways of improving accessibility of Literature to child readers. As technology is getting accessible, more people are finding it a tool in which they can access Literature. Preachers in churches use iPads or Smart Phones to access scriptures rather than peruse the Bible, people are accessing the dictionary through their phones and newspapers are increasingly getting to the readers through the internet. Leon de Kock observes that, 'Evolution of digital communication has changed the face of literary studies completely and that the world of the screen has become so commonplace that we sometimes forget to what extent it has begun to supersede and swallow up its predecessor technology for universal human communication-the Gutenberg text' (Leon de Kock 2012). This shows that digital technology is fighting for space in the literary world. Children with access to technology now seem to prefer accessing Literature through watching Television rather than reading story books. Cartoons now seem to be taking centre stage in the lives of modern children. May J Pill asserts that 'today's youngsters seem less able to take time for reading…. when asked if they have read a certain book, their answer is in the affirmative but what many mean is that they have a visual representation of it'. She goes ahead and says 'for many contemporary children, pleasure comes on a screen' (May 1985).

Children see and experience literature in a way that is different from that of adults. This could be because of the visual aid in film like pictures, sound and colour. It could also be because through the pictures they connect better with the story. Children also enjoy the world of fantasy and imagination. To them, all things are possible and the more abnormal things look, the more exciting and entertaining they are. According to Chesaina in *Daisaku's Contribution to*

Children's Literature, 'Fantasy and dream help to capture and maintain children's attention because the young readers, being dreamers and masters of fantasy, imagine themselves in the positions of these characters' (Chesaina, 2001).

The cartoon genre is becoming popular especially among children. This could probably be due to the presence of motion, music, colour and sound. Motion is achieved through a process called animation which means 'having life.' It is the process of making films in which pictures appear to move. It is the process of 'breathing life' into an object and making it move like animals do. It gives the viewer an illusion of movement, thus giving the images 'live.' Music enhances the message and the mood of the film. The song forms a part of the film's sound track which also includes dialogue and sound effects comprising a number of orchestral, instrumental or choral pieces to enhance dramatic narrative and the emotional effect of the scene in question. Apart from music, sound effect also plays a crucial role in film. Sound effect or audio effect refers to any sound recorded or presented to make a specific story telling or creative point of view without use of dialogue or music. Sound effect could refer to any sound heard in a film, may it be a sound of a bird at the background, a coughing sound or even shuffling of feet. Most pictures in film have colour which plays a very significant role. The choice of colour can determine the mood of a text or the traits of a character. According to Musonye in her article, 'Fantastic Realism as a Vehicle of Edutainment in Children's Cartoons: A Case study of Walt Disney's Lion King II Simba Pride,' colour plays a very crucial role in conveying meaning in the eyes of children. She analyses the importance of colour in *Lion Simba Pride* and concludes that, the characters with positive attributes are presented in bright colours and appeal to the children while those presented in dull colours possess negative attributes and do not appeal to the children. This

shows that the choice of colour in a film should be done purposively. These qualities appeal to the child reader because the child finds it easier to imagine and identify with the characters.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

With changing times, children with easy access to film and with an educational background that exposes them to sustained use of English are increasingly shifting their interest from reading story books to watching films. The focus of this study is on the language and style employed in cartoons to bring out the intended subject matter. In Kenya, there are studies that have focused on cartoons as a genre of children's Literature that have concentrated on that Literature consumed by children of ages between three and six years. For instance, Musonye has analyzed *Lion Simba Pride* in her article, 'Fantastic Realism as a Vehicle of Edutainment in Children's Cartoons: The Case Study of Walt Disney's Lion King II Simba Pride' as a cartoon for children aged between three and six years while Kahenya in her thesis entitled, "Children's Literature: An Analytical Study of the Content Value of Tintin Comics" has analyzed *Tintin Comics,* also as a cartoon consumed by the same age. In effect, the literature of children above six years has not been given the critical attention it deserves yet it is necessary that their works for which they are the primary audience be analyzed because they also watch cartoons. The study focuses on the children aged between six and ten years and aims to fill this gap which has been left unattended for a long time. The style needs to be analyzed to establish what attracts these children who are transiting from childhood to adulthood. Neither of the two critics has looked at the language and style which are central to the enjoyment of the cartoon. Both studies look at the themes whereas

this study goes further to look at the critical aspect of the cartoon. It is only by analyzing the style that one can get to the aesthetic value of the text.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of this study are to

  i) Evaluate the use of fantasy and realism in *Ben 10*.

  ii) Analyze the language and style employed in *Ben 10*.

  iii) Analyze *Ben 10* as a form popular culture.

  iv) Identify children's views of *Ben 10*.

1.3 Hypothesis

The study intends to investigate the hypotheses that

  i)   There is a very close relationship between fantasy and realism.

  ii)   There is a unique language and style in *Ben 10* that arouse children's interest.

  iii)   *Ben 10* is a form of popular art.

  iv)   *Ben 10* influences children to form certain views that they can articulate.

1.4 Justification of the Study.

Ben 10 is a cartoon that appeals mostly to children between the age of six and ten years. This is in accordance to Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development which looks at children at this stage of their lives as 'operational' and able to imagine and ask 'what if happens'. Being a cartoon with a lot of incongruous features, the child is able to fantasize and place the incongruous features into the practical world. Mwanzi in her M.A thesis, "Children's Literature in Kenya" says, 'Children at this stage are impressionable. This is a stage in which children are trying to put an understanding of the world and of their place in it.' (28) This is a critical stage because adults view children as just children, yet according to Jean Piaget, these children have mature and 'adult like' thoughts. This means that they view themselves as adults. They are at a stage when they like imitating what they see and therefore need to be exposed to literature that addresses their needs; literature that is both educative and entertaining lest they find themselves experimenting on the challenges of adolescent which are setting in at this stage.

With the introduction of digital technology, more and more urban children seem to be migrating to film. This demands to have the genre of film analyzed. The study is justified to verify its strengths and weaknesses in the context of our reality in a developing African country. More children are likely to be watching cartoons and what they watch affects them. According to Piaget, children aged between six and ten years are able to look at themselves as individuals and

reason logically. The society needs to realize this and give them their space by making sure that the children access their literature through the most convenient and accessible mode. These are the basis on which the study is going to look at what styles appeal to children aged between six and ten years.

1.5   Scope and Limitation.

This study limits itself to the language and style in the four series of the cartoon *Ben 10* namely: *Original Ben 10, Ben 10 Alien Force, Ben 10 Ultimate Alien and Ben 10 Omniverse*. Each series is divided into seasons. Available material in the market shows that, *Ben 10 Original* has four seasons. Season one, season two and season three all have thirteen episodes each and season four has ten episodes*. Alien force* has three seasons. Season one and two have thirteen episodes each while season three has twenty episodes. *Ultimate Alien* has three seasons with season one having twenty episodes, season two has thirty two and season three has twenty episodes. *Omniverse* has eight seasons each with ten episodes. Ben 10 as a character runs his adventures at the age of ten years then at fifteen and sixteen. *Ben 10 Original* is about Ben 10 at the age of ten years; *Ben 10 Alien Force* is about Ben 10 at the age of fifteen while *Ultimate Alien* and *Omniverse* are about Ben 10 at the age of sixteen years set only two weeks apart. In the course of looking at the language and styles employed, the study looked at children's literature, Ben 10 as a form of popular art and the language and styles employed in *Ben 10*, how children interpret the text and what really interests them in this cartoon.

The study limits itself to the first season of every series. In this study, a series refers to a set of related television programmes with a specified setting, closely related themes, cast and format while a season refers to a set of shows in a particular series that focus on a particular cast and

setting. The study further limits itself to five episodes per series where an episode refers to a television show that is part of a series with separate and distinctive events. In choosing the five, attention was given to those episodes that have used the techniques in question more frequently. Each series had to be considered because some of the aliens appear as the film continues. In *Ben 10 original*, Ben can only transform into ten aliens while by the time of *Omniverse,* he has over one million aliens. The scope was further limited to children in Nairobi City and its environment. This scope was informed by the fact that, more children in the urban areas have access to film than those in the rural areas probably due to availability of electricity and affordability of Television sets among the urban folk. Bearing in mind that the cartoon uses English as the language of communication, and specifically American English, the study is further limited to those children with a good education background and a good mastery of the English language.

1.6.0 Literature Review

This review looks at the existing literature related to the study under; children and literature, cartoon and children's literature and language and style in children's literature. The review is based on the understanding that Television and film are becoming popular ways in which Literature is packaged and that children's literature is an important genre since the literature children are exposed to so much influences what they become in future. It is also informed by the fact that the techniques used to convey a message may just have the same impact on the reader/audience as the words used.

1.6.1 Children and Literature

The field of Children's Literature is still overlooked by critics today. Indangasi observes that, 'Children's literature is a neglected area in departments of literature in universities all over the world.' He continues to say that when it is taught at universities, it is referred to as 'childish literature'. He further says

> Sometimes we catch ourselves wondering about the wisdom of teaching children's literature to students who are no longer children. Yet as we see in the fourth issue of the Nairobi Journal of Literature, the future of our youth and indeed our society will be determined by the kind of children's literature that is consumed by our children. (P.12)

Cindy Lou Daniels observes that children's literature for teenagers or young adults has also not been given the seriousness it deserves. She says

> Contemporary works that have been labeled 'Young Adults' (YA) tend to be ignored by many serious critics. Some still believe that YA is merely a secondary category of child-like story telling –didactic in nature-and unworthy of serious literary evaluation, when, in fact, it is really an overlooked and an underappreciated literary genre that has only recently began to attract the critical attention it deserves. (P.78)

Children's literature is an integral part of the society and cannot be ignored. Perry Nodelman says

> There would be no such thing as children's literature books if adults did not believe that children are different enough from adults to need a special group of books and imagine a category to contain them. (P.96)

This implies that children have their own literature different from adults yet equally important. Hunt concurs with Nodelman. He says

> Children's books are different from adults. They are written for a different audience, with different skills, different needs and different ways of reading. Equally children experience texts in ways which are usually unknowable, but which many of us strongly suspect to be rich and complex. (P.93)

This underscores the importance of children's Literature since it addresses issues affecting the society just like adult Literature does. It also addresses contemporary issues.

Since children have their own literature, they should be allowed to experience it without much interference from adults. Sometimes adults force children to adopt their interpretation of a text yet children of between six and ten years can think independently and make their own interpretation. May, together with her husband carried out a research on children's and adults' response to literature using their two daughters as children readers and themselves as adult readers and concluded by saying that, 'We began to understand that children saw literature differently. They perceived characterization and events in ways we were not expecting' (May 159-160). To children, the more incongruous things look, the more appealing they are to them.

Children's Literature, just like adult Literature, changes with the times and adapts to contemporary lifestyles. *Ben 10* addresses the subject of space which is a contemporary subject especially to children in America where people have gone to space and back. The rest of the children may watch the cartoon for fun but the children in America easily identify with the subject. Lee Galda et al say that 'Children move with the times'. He continues to argue that

> Current studies are often based on an understanding of how texts are nested in the social, cultural and political contexts in which they are both created and read. Studies explore gender, culture or other social issues, often through the lens of social theory. (P.33)

The study is therefore going to investigate how children identify with the views in *Ben 10.*

Mwanzi in her thesis, "Children's Literature in Kenya" looks at the use of imagery and the impact it has in children's perception of Literature. She looks at children aged between nine and eleven years. She compares the imagery used in Eurocentric Literature to that used in colonial Literature and the one used in African folklore. She argues that, 'The writer aims at influencing the reader, giving the reader a particular social stand as well as entertaining him' .This means that the writer of children's Literature should be cautious enough to write literature that influences the child positively. She further argues that, 'Literature in general is crucial to the mental, psychological and social development of a child. It stimulates children's imagination and sharpens their awareness of the world around them'. This means that the kind of literature children are exposed to determines who and what kind of adults they turn out to be.

Benton and Fox concur with Mwanzi. They argue that, 'children project through their behavior what they read in a story and through such projection, one can determine the kind of image they form out of the story'.

Ted Hughes comments on literature's ability to influence the child's future and notes that:

> When we tell a story to a child, to some extend we have his future in our minds in so far as we have a hold in his imagination. That is the key. What affects a person's imagination affects their whole life. (p.89)

Marrow and Cabrell in their article, "Understanding Children's Literature" further support this argument. They say, 'Early research pointed out that, reading children's Literature influences children's attitude towards reading and increases knowledge of the world and of text patterns' (P.14). This study investigated the influence that the cartoon *Ben 10* may have on the social values of the Kenyan child.

1.6.2   Cartoon and Children's Literature

Cartoons have been in existence since the 18th century but the ways and form of presentation have been evolving over time. They can broadly be categorized as print cartoons and digitalized cartoons. Ann Akinboyewa in her Dissertation,"A Critical Discourse Analysis of Editorial Cartoons, Selected from the Guardian Newspaper" says this about the history of cartoons

> The term has evolved over time. The original meaning was in fine art of the late middle ages and renaissance, where it referred to a preparatory drawing for a piece of art , such as a painting or tapestry. In the 19th century, it came to refer to humorous illustrations in magazines and newspapers and in the early 20th century, it was sometimes used to refer to comic strips. In more modern usage, it commonly refers to animated programmes for television and other picture motion media. (p.12)

Present use of the term cartoon often refers to Television programmes and short films for children featuring super-heroes, the adventures of child protagonists and related genres. Cartoons are presented through a process known as animation which refers to the rapid display of a sequence of images to create an illusion of movement. Through animation, the cartoon presents caricatured pictures. A caricature is a rendered image showing the features of its subject in a simplified and exaggerated way. It can be used to ridicule or to complement a character. This creates humour which attracts the audience.

Though the film has been in existence for a long time, it is only until recently that critics started treating it as an alternative way of packaging and accessing Literature. More specifically, scholars have not given cartoons the seriousness that they deserve. This is because there has not been much critical work on them and children's Literature. Gadassik Alla, a film scholar, commenting on the neglect of animation studies in her article, "Animation and Critical Theory" says

> In cinema studies, the persistent neglect of animation remains a key example of the discipline's internal exclusion. Despite its central role in cinema history, animation typically remains invisible in departmental course lists, faculty specializations and conference programmes. (2002, 59)

There is need to bring this neglect to light because parents too seem to encourage their children to watch cartoons. Musonye in her essay "Fantastic Realism as a Vehicle of Edutainment in children's cartoons: A Case Study of Walt Disney's Lion king II Simba Pride" observes that

> Generally adults see cartoons as a diversionary activity that helps children pass time in a non-destructive manner. This is especially in the case of animated TV cartoons which children can watch for almost the entire day during which time they need no adult supervision or attention. (P.112)

This means that the time that children spent listening to or reading literature is now being consumed by the watching of films. This gap can be bridged by making sure that children watch the right films so that they benefit from them just the way they benefit from the other medium of literature.

Many of the scholars who have analyzed cartoons have concentrated on cartoons watched by children aged between three and six years. Musonye looks at the good/bad guy motif and mood in *Lion King II Simba Pride,* a cartoon meant for children aged between three and six years. She establishes that the children tend to identify with those characters with good/positive attributes. She also looks at how issues of colour are used to advance the good/bad guy motif. She

concludes that, 'children's cartoons are not just a form of toy for entertainment; rather, they should be seen as a form of entertainment/edutainment'. (Musonye, 2006). Her focus is on how children perceive meaning in cartoons. However, my research was based on children aged between six and ten years, an age that has not been given much attention. I looked at what styles contribute to the popularity of this cartoon among children of six to ten years.

Kahenya, in her M.A Thesis "Children's Literature: An Analytical Study of the Content Value of Tintin Comics" looks at *Tintin Comics* and analyses its relevance to the Kenyan child. She argues that children's literature is supposed to help the child to grow into a socially acceptable member of the society. Her concern is mainly the social aspect of literature in the life of the child. She concludes that *Tintin Comics*, which is an Italian cartoon, is not an appropriate cartoon for Kenyan children especially because it promotes racism and the hero succeeds through socially unacceptable means. My research was based on how the cartoon *Ben 10* influences the world view of the Kenyan child. It looked at whether *Ben 10,* which is an American cartoon, has any social relevance to the Kenyan child.

Ndede, in her M.A thesis, "Reconstructing Fantasy in Digitalized Folktales: A Case Study of Tinga Tinga Tales" looks at how children aged between three and six years interpret cartoons in print text and in film. She compares the two medium of presenting African folk tales and establishes that, even though the Kenyan child seems to prefer digitalized tales to printed ones, the digitalized tales lack very fundamental aspects of the African folklore like face-to-face interaction and personal warmth. In my study, I looked at the language and styles used in *Ben 10* to bring out meaning and establish if the themes are relevant to the Kenyan child.

1.6.3 Language and style in Children's Literature

The style employed in a literary work has a lot of impact on how that literature is appreciated. Chesaina argues that, 'The writer has to be conscious of children's psyche as well as their concentration level. For the message to be clear, the writer has to be sure that there is rapport between the text and the young reader' (P.48). My study looked at the appropriateness of the cartoon *Ben 10* to the child aged between ages six and ten.

Children enjoy a well illustrated work of literature. They do not just concentrate on the words in the text but pictures also enhance their understanding. Their literature employs styles which are unique to children. Pictures help to enhance children's understanding of the text. In her book, *Children and Literature: Views and Reviews*, Virginia Havilland supports this argument as she says, 'The qualities which are basic in good writing are literary values; that is, they do not concern the subject so much as how it is presented'. Serafini and Layne in *Looking at Children's Literature from Two Perspectives* say, 'What goes into a work of children's literature and young adult's literature is more than writing or illustration.' They further argue that

> …authors and illustrators are working first and foremost to create a work of art using words and images or a carefully constructed combination of both words and images that readers will understand, appreciate and enjoy. (2013)

This means that children enjoy a story told through pictures more than just mere words. They even enjoy more if the pictures have colour, can move and even communicate directly like in the

case of cartoons. The study investigated how the pictures enhance understanding of the cartoon by complimenting the words.

Laura Jimenez concurs with them in her article, "Books for Young Readers: Strategic Selection of Children's and Adolescent Literature." She says, 'Often crucial elements that may be overlooked are the illustrations that appear in many forms of literature. For example, picture books and graphic novels must have both image and text to tell the complete story.' Film is basically a story told in picture form. Schindel Morton highlights the importance of pictures in film as he says, 'Storytelling through motion pictures, film strips, recordings and other audio visual media represents simply the most recent refinements in the tradition and yet the use of films to tell children's stories has received widespread pedagogical attention' (Schindel, 93) This study will therefore look at the effects of the use of motion pictures in children's cartoons.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Georg Lukacs defines theory as 'a body of ideas and methods used in the practical reading of literature. It is something like a conceptual lens, an air of spectacles used to frame and focus what is being looked at. It is a tool for discerning, deciphering and making sense.' (Qtd.Auslander 2008)

The study was guided by the Theory of Children's Literature and Semiotics. The theory of children's literature is concerned with the creation, promotion and consumption of literature for children. Mwanzi says, 'Literature is crucial for the mental, psychological and mental development of a child. At the same time literature shapes the child's world view.'(P.9)

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This underscores the importance of exposing children to the right literature. Though scholars do not generally agree on what can really be termed as children's literature, they tend to agree on the fact that children's literature should have a simple plot, simple language and themes so that the art is seen from a child's point of view. Inevitably, the main characters should be children with adults taking supportive roles (Hunt1994). Chesaina further say that,' To facilitate comprehension of young readers, the writer allows his young protagonists to be at the centre of the reconstruction process of nurturing life' (2001, 48). Hunt further argues that, 'A recognizable children's literature requires a recognizable childhood and should not be totally shared with adults' (p80).

 Scholars further argue that, children's literature should be more for pleasure than for didactic purposes. May Jill criticizes scholars who replace children's literature with serious literature study. She condemns those students who study children's Literature as a requirement as she says that 'they don't believe that pleasure reading and literary patterns are relevant in their training, (May, 6). Touponce concurs with May as he argues that, 'Most historical accounts of children's books depict a steady increase in playful and entertaining textual features (William Touponce, 1995). Harvey Dartons continues to say that, 'by children's books, he means printed works printed ostensibly to give children spontaneous pleasure and not primarily teach them, nor solely to make them good, nor to keep them profitably quiet (Darton, 1992). May affirms this stance by arguing that children should be allowed to read books of their choice and adults should not dictate the books that children read. They should also be allowed to interpret the texts themselves and adults/teachers should not impose their own interpretation on the children. This allows the children to read for pleasure as well as interpret the text according to their world view. However,

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Sarah Trimmer does not agree with May. She argues that, as the number of children's books multiply to an astonishing and alarming degree, a lot of mischief lies in them and therefore,

> the utmost circumspection is therefore requisite in making a proper selection, and children should not be permitted to make their own choice, or to read any books that may accidentally be thrown in their way, or offered to their perusal; but should be taught to consider it as a duty, to consult their parents in this momentous concern.(p 4)

Trimmer's argument restricts the child reader because children may not like what their parents think is the right literature for them and this may kill their reading spirit. According to May's research with her husband and two daughters, what parents think may interest their children can turn out not to be; after all different children get attracted to different kinds of literature as exhibited by May's two daughters.

Other scholars have argued that there is no harm in exposing children to a literature which is higher than their comprehension. Elizabeth Rigby in her article, "Cartoons" supports the idea of allowing children to choose their own literature and adds that, 'There is benefit in presenting a child with ideas beyond his easy and immediate comprehension. The difficulties thus offered, if not too great or too frequent, stimulate curiosity and encourage assertion.' (p.10)

This theory is going to guide the study to establish the role of children in their own literature and the impact it has on them.

Semiotics is the study of signs, symbols and signification. It includes the study of signs and sign processes, indication, designation, likeness, analogy, metaphor, symbolism and communication. It highlights the structure and meaning of language as well as non- linguistic sign systems. It is also the study of how meaning is created, not what is. Semiotics is divided into three broad categories namely: semantics which deals with relationships between signs and the things to

which they refer (meaning), syntactic which refers to the relations among signs in formal structures and pragmatics which is the relation between signs and sign using agents like words, sounds and body language. Semioticians argue that a text is an assemblage of signs (a sign in a semiotic sense takes the form of words, images, sounds, gestures, objects or body movements used to show attitude or emotion) constructed and interpreted with reference to the conventions associated with a genre and in a particular medium of communication. A text for Semioticians refers to any message recorded in some way (such as writing, audio- and video-recording) so that it is physically independent of its sender or receiver.

The theory of semiotics was first founded by Swiss Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1957-1913). Other key figures in the early development of semiotics include the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) and later Charles William Morris (1901-1979). Other leading semiotic theorists include Roland Barthes (1915-1980), Algirdar Greimas (1917-1992), Yuri Lotman (1922-1993) Christian Metz (1931-1993), Umberto Eco and Julia Kristeva.

Taking signs, both linguistic and non- linguistic (sign-using behavior) as the object of study, the theory of Semiotics guided this study in analyzing how meaning is achieved in the cartoon *Ben 10* through the use of sounds, objects, body movements, music, gestures, words and the way all these are intertwined to bring out the meaning of the text in such a way as to attract the child reader. The study further looked at the background of the setting of the text which is set in America. The subject of people going to space is not new in America because the first people to go to space were from there. Sophisticated machinery like jets and space ships are also not a new phenomenon in America. Therefore, sophistication is not new in the social, political and

economic environment of the American child. The child thus finds it easy to identify with the technological context in the text.

1.8.0   Methodology

1.8.1   Method of Research

 The methodology was guided by the theory of children's literature and semiotics.

The study used qualitative sampling where twenty episodes were chosen from the four series of *Ben 10.* The choice was informed by looking out for those episodes that made use of the techniques in question more often. Guided by semiotics, the study involved a careful watching of the cartoon, with close attention to assemblage of signs such as words, image movement, gestures, sound and music operating within the text in order to identify the codes. It further entailed critical reading of secondary works which included journals, articles, books and the internet. It also included exposing sampled children to the film, interviewing them and observing them as they watched the film.

The library research was carried out to understand cartoon as a genre of children's literature, throw light on children and cartoons and the theory behind producing cartoons for children. It also established the working of children's minds and how research has shown children's perception of the world. The study also interrogated *Ben 10* as a form of popular art.

In order to find out children's response to conclude the popularity of the cartoon, it was important to subject some children to the film and interview them after watching the film. The sampling was guided by the ages of the children in order to document their immediate responses. Children aged between six and ten years are found in standard one to five. Two boys and two girls were sampled from each level. In the sampling, priority was given to those children who said that they had watched at least one episode of the cartoon. A total of twenty children were interviewed. Using the theory of children's literature, the children answered the questions orally on preferred characters and why. They also said why they identified with the cartoon. These responses were sampled and used to verify the hypothesis of the research.

1.8.2 Location of Study

The field work was carried out in Milimani Kitengela Junior Academy, Kitengela Township in Kajiado County which is located about twenty five Kilometres from the city of Nairobi. Since Ben 10 is a cartoon for slightly older children, the study used purposive sampling technique. Children were selected from class one to class five. Two boys and two girls were selected from each class. Twenty children were selected from Milimani Academy.

CHAPTER TWO

BEN 10 AND POPULAR CULTURE

2.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I looked at children's literature and the cartoon as a mode of accessing literature. In this chapter, I am going to examine *Ben 10* as a form of popular art.

2.1 What is Popular Culture?

The Encyclopedia Britannica (2011) defines popular art as 'Any dance, literature, music, theatre or other art forms intended to be received and appreciated by ordinary people in literate, technologically advanced society dominated by urban culture'. This definition seems to suggest that, the ordinary people do not generate popular culture but only consume what is produced by the elite and the urban folk. To some extent, this definition may be true because in most societies, the urban folk are usually the pioneers of most popular culture but those in the rural areas soon embrace it and it becomes a culture for all. Popular culture is a people's culture that predominates in a society at a point in time. According to Flores Juan, this culture is referred to

as popular because it is the culture of 'the people', the poor and the powerless who make up the majority of society. Karin Barber, in her 1987 paper, *Popular Arts in Africa* defines popular art as a new kind of art created by a new emergent class, the fluid heterogeneous urban mass. (1987, 4) Popular culture is heavily influenced by the mass media; this is why some scholars like Dwight Macdonald prefer to call it Mass Culture. It concerns itself with a society's everyday life. It includes movies, music, television, sports and news, politics, fashion and technology. In the Kenyan context, scholars like Musonye have looked at *Mchongoano,* a form of teaser statements, as a form of popular art among the urban youth. Popular Culture in Kenya can therefore be said to refer to that culture that emerges and attracts the attention of the masses regardless of the social status of the people. It includes movies and films that the majority of people watch, the music they listen to, the fashion of dress, the games they play, the food they eat and the language they speak. In this study, popular art refers to films or cartoons that take the attention of the majority of children in the society. It will refer to what attracts the majority of children regardless of their social background. This includes laughable incidents, incongruous happenings and retelling stories watched or experienced.

 Bernth Lindfors argues that, 'popular art emanates from the will to speak directly to as many people as possible'. According to him, 'there is little obscurity or subterfuge in this kind of literature because it is aimed at making immediate impact'. (Lindfors 1991, 2)

2.2 Elements of Popular Culture in *Ben 10*.

Though scholars have not looked at children's literature as popular culture, cartoons qualify to be a form of popular culture. This is because they belong to the category of movies which are watched and enjoyed by children of all social levels. The majority of the world young population

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can access and watch cartoons either through television programmes or by watching audio-visual devices like VCDs. Cartoons are dynamic and flexible thus appealing to children at different places and times. They are presented in a playful and humorous manner to address serious issues in the society. They also address a wide range of subjects thus appealing to a wider audience of children. In Kenya, more children in the urban areas watch cartoons compared to those in rural areas probably because more urban children can access electricity while only a small percentage of those in the rural areas have the facility. In addition, more people in the urban areas can afford television sets while only a few in rural areas have access to television sets.

Ben 10 is among the cartoons that are watched by a relatively big number of Kenyan children. Previously, the cartoon used to be aired on NTV, one of Kenya's local channels on Saturdays. Today, children can access the cartoon through VCDs and the few who may not afford television sets can watch in video shops at a small fee. The film is therefore available to people of all social standings. It therefore qualifies to be part of the Kenyan popular culture.

Popular art is dynamic and flexible. It changes constantly and occurs uniquely in place and time. The norms of popular culture are highly individualistic and constantly changing. This is because, popular art gets influenced as different groups interact and copy ideas from each other. This blend of different cultures comprises the means via which large heterogeneous masses of people identify themselves. Looking at cartoons, we realize they have evolved over time to meet society's changing needs and will probably continue changing as the needs of the consumers change. There are different types of cartoons including political cartoons which satirize politicians and political matters, editorial cartoons found in news publications and news websites and scientific cartoons which satirize and ridicule issues in the field of mathematics and science. Cartoons today address issues that are related to the contemporary world like corruption, family,

politics and capitalism. In *Washington BC*, Ben and his cousin Gwen and friends try to save Ben's mother who had been kidnapped by Dr. Animo. The issue of family security is pertinent and anyone would want to identify with this episode since all people would do anything to save their parents from danger. The cartoon mode of communicating this message is appropriate especially for a child because he is able to see how Gwen uses her powers to save her aunt and issues a stern warning to Zombozo, who was in the custody of Ben's mother.

According to Karin Barber, popular art includes visual, literary and performing arts. She refers to the film as popular art which is a blend between local African art and art which has been influenced by western form. She observes that, popular art has evolved over time. As opposed to the western model of popular art namely, traditional, popular and elite, Barber identifies only two positive terms, traditional and elite referring to arts originating in pre-colonial Africa and those produced by post-colonial-era minorities who have assimilated European language.' (9) African popular art is a form of art which has evolved from traditional folktales which include riddles, proverbs, narratives and songs which are presented through performance to a popular art born out of the influence of western culture to the African culture. It emanates from the urban colonial and post colonial world and emphasizes the importance of picture and performance. Karin identifies this syncretism as a characteristic feature of popular art. To her, this art is neither African nor western. *Ben 10* cannot be said to be purely western nor purely African because though it is an American cartoon, it has been developed using modern technology which is a universal phenomenon. It also makes use of literary techniques which are universal. Furthermore, it addresses issues that cut across the world. *Ben 10* addresses human values that cut across all the communities in the world. For instance, the cartoon delves into the good man/bad man motif. Good people are believed to succeed while bad/evil people are wished

failure in any part of the world. Ben uses his powers to save the world and will do anything to destroy those who are out to destroy the world. He always succeeds in his endevours by turning into the alien appropriate to fight the enemy in question. No wonder even when he exhibits some mischief and strikes the Omnitrix harder than he is supposed to, and turns to an unintended alien, that unintended alien still ends up being useful to the situation at hand. In Ben *10 Omniverse*, he fights with Aggregor for the Map of Infinity. Aggregor wants to get the whole map by capturing the holder of the key to where the map is kept. He already has a piece of the map and is trying to get the remaining quarter of it. Once he has the whole map, Aggregor will have the power to destroy the whole universe. Ben fights him to protect the holder of the key. Though Aggregor looks more powerful than Ben, Ben still wins. Whenever Ben changes into a certain creature, Aggregor turns into a predator of that creature thus Ben becoming the prey. This is a very easy way that Aggregor can use to defeat Ben but Ben either quickly turns into another creature or moves away very fast before the predator attacks him. In this case, virtues are upheld while vices are condemned. This is done through the use of humour, a literary style that will appeal to anybody regardless of the part of the world they come from.

Popular arts are an effervescent and protean aspect of contemporary culture in Africa. (Jules-Rosette 91). Rosette observes that, Karin Barber's overview captures the style, flavor and general sociological significance of these art forms for both artists and consumers. As the people's mode of entertainment changes, the art they produce and consume has to change to accommodate the people's needs and interests. The Kenyan child watches and enjoys cartoons primarily for entertainment. He even enjoys it more because this cartoon is not static. The aliens in *Ben 10 Original* are not necessarily the ones in the other series. In fact, *Ben 10* original has only ten

aliens while there are over a million aliens in *Omniverse*. They increase at every level as they acquire more powers. The aliens in *Ben 10 Original* and *Alien Force* advance in powers and in the third series they are called 'Ultimate' because they have ultimate powers. In *Ben 10 original* and *Alien Force*, the Echo Echo aliens are one dimensional motion pictures that can multiply into large numbers and scare their enemy by producing a very high pitched sound. In *Ultimate lien*, their technology has advanced such that with Ben's command, they can multiply and turn into Ben himself and the 'several Bens' can be in different places at the same time. As the film moves to *Ben 10 Omniverse*, the aliens continue multiplying and gaining more powers. This means that the child will not be watching the same characters always. He will be able to see the characters advancing in powers and abilities. In addition, the different series are produced at different times. The four series were produced between 2007 and 2012 and the producers are working on a fifth series called *Reboot* which is expected to be released in 2016. As the children watch the cartoon, they anticipate for more because they are aware that it is always developing and expanding. This emphasizes on the cartoon's dynamic nature.

The African child has moved through these changes that Barber defines. Their interest and way of accessing literature is increasingly moving from print literature to film. They watch it both for leisure and to learn. *Ben 10* is one of the cartoons that have captured the attention of the Kenyan child. Though it is an American cartoon, it presents the three forms of popular art namely visual, literary and performance arts. Cartoons use animated pictures that tell a story. *Ben 10* presents exaggerated pictures in form of human and supernatural creatures called Aliens. This aspect of being visual attracts the attention of the child and enhances the level of entertainment in the text. Performance too captures the attention of the child. The cartoon does not just present words

spoken by the characters but performance by the characters accompanies the words. A combination of words, visual forms and performance completes the text. Being an American cartoon, it employs American English and the sounds and music are also American based. For instance, the theme song which is sung at the beginning of every episode says in stanza three line four,'cause he's the baddest kid to ever save the day'. The words 'cause' and 'baddest' are not in Standard English but American English.

Barber supports an approach which distinguishes between 'official' and 'unofficial' ideology and warns against the imposition of the western model of the arts on the African context. She argues that, 'popular arts proclaim their own importance without encouragement or recognition from official cultural bodies. (Barber 1987, 2) While official ideology and arts reinforce existing hierarchies, prevailing truths and established orders, unofficial arts create 'a world inside out.' (Bakhtin, 1984: 11) The cartoon presents humour, hyperbole and fantasy which render it flexible and unofficial. This unofficial nature allows it to accommodate both African and western forms comfortably. It also opens up for both the ordinary people and the elite. For instance, the theme of love cuts across all backgrounds and social standings. In the episode, *Not all That Glitters*. Gwen gets infatuated by the looks of Michael Morningstar to the extent of relinquishing her powers to him. She only realizes her folly when Morningstar starts using those powers to harm her cousin Ben and friend Kevin. The issue of women being viewed as gullible especially on matters of love cuts across all societies and applies to both the elite and the non elite. Its unofficial nature also allows the theme of love to be tackled well since this is one theme that calls for light moments and playfulness.

According to Barber, the defining features of the unofficial or contemporary urban popular arts are playfulness, dynamism, innovation, fashion and topicality. Barber goes ahead to suggest that, it is their unofficial status which allows these contemporary urban arts to accommodate the new and celebrate it. (p.80) Flores, in support of Barber comments that 'popular art is not a genre that is taken seriously.' He observes that, to some, it is not a genre for serious study because it addresses issues in a light way. This is a wrong way of viewing popular art and Barber warns that,

> Even art forms which are predominantly or purely verbal like popular drama or fiction do not necessarily wear their meaning on the sleeves, even when they look most 'simple', 'artless' and 'naïve'. In repressive regimes the writers or creators probably have no choice but to conceal what they want to say…popular texts then should not necessarily be taken at face value; they cannot be assumed to mean all they say or say all they mean. (Barber 1987, 16)

Scholars should therefore note that the playful and humorous nature of cartoon does not mean that they have nothing serious to communicate. It presents serious subjects and serious lessons in a laughable way. *Ben 10* presents a very serious issue of some alien creatures who are out to destroy the world and the powers that Ben has to fight these creatures and protect the world. The creatures are also given laughable physical features like human beings with tails, extra body features like four arms, non human features as well as other caricatured body features. Though the issue of using technology to destroy the world is possible and serious, like using nuclear bombs to destroy the human race, the whole idea is presented in a playful and humorous way and one should not be blinded by the humour to forget that there is a message in the text just like there is in any other form of literature. This aspect of the cartoon agrees with those scholars of children's literature who argue that children's literature should first of all be purely for pleasure then the literariness of the text can follow.

Because of its unofficial nature, the cartoon can assume many different forms, some real and others fantastic. Ben 10 is a young boy who undertakes his adventures between the age of ten and sixteen. The cartoon allows him to change into different alien forms in order to conquer the evil aliens. He can also move both on earth and in space. He also decides what form he wants to take. For instance, when he transforms to Humungousaur, he has the ability to increase his body size and has a lot of energy; he could also transform to Jetray, the fastest of his alien forms, depending on the kind of enemy he wants to fight. The cartoonist uses animation to achieve this.

Urban popular art is innovative. Through animation, the cartoonist is able to present the characters as if they are moving and undertaking various activities. When Ben strikes the Omnitrix, through animation the viewer sees Ben slowly changing to the alien that appears in the Omnitrix. The picture is presented in a way that the child viewer is convinced that Ben has actually transformed to the new creature. In *Ben 10 Returns,* when Ben's hand is cut off by the aliens, he transforms into Swampfire, a creature that enables him to take the hand and fix it back. This shows the innovative nature of the cartoonist who is able to make the child to think that it is actually happening. The cartoonist is able to create creatures that have abilities to operate both on earth and in space. He does this by creating creatures that can fly and even transform into sophisticated technology like jets and space ships.

Urban popular art changes with the times to serve the taste of the time. This is the reason why according to Barber, African art has slowly moved from the African folklore to other forms of

popular art like music, dance and film. The child wants to move with the fashion of the time. The

mode of presentation and the topic presented changes with the times. Traditionally children were

exposed to literature by listening to oral artists who sat with the audience and performed the

stories. They were also exposed to popular culture through creating their own child plays,

riddles, retelling stories told earlier but today those who have access to the film can access

literature without necessarily moving from the comfort of their sitting room. Today, some of the

African oral literary forms have been recorded in film so that children can access them without

the inconveniences of looking for a performer. For instance, the *Tinga Tinga Tales* of Africa,

which are common African etiological tales, have been recorded in film and children can even

access them through the Kenyan local media. They are currently being aired on Citizen TV, a

local Television channel. The programme used to be aired every Saturday on citizen TV, a local

television channel. Though this film may lack the fundamental features of an oral narration like

the warmth of interaction, it can perform the role of the performer because children in urban

areas may not have access to a traditional narrator or may prefer the film to the narrator.

 The topics that appeal to people change over time. They also depend on the targeted audience.

Rosette observes that

> Popular artists often produce for diverse audiences. They draw upon commercial genres
> originally targeted towards outsiders in order to enrich local popular art forms. By the
> same token, they borrow syncretically from both conventional and new communal art
> forms to diversify their artworks. (93)

Since people's interests are constantly changing, popular artists have to produce art that moves

with the time. Popular art is determined by the interactions between people and their everyday

activities like style of dress, use of language or even the food they eat. The traditional child

enjoyed listening to oral stories. This was also the mode of education of the time. With the

advancement in technology, children with access to film tend to spend their leisure time watching it. They enjoy watching movies especially those that address contemporary issues. May Jill observes that, 'Majority children will claim to have read a text when in the actual sense they have only watched a movie.' *Ben 10* is a cartoon that looks at creatures on earth and in space. It also portrays characters with strange powers as well as children exhibiting unusual strength. With advancement in technology, the issue of the space is of interest especially to the American child where the cartoon is set. Going to space sounds real to them because it has happened in their country and so they find it easy to identify with the subject. The Kenyan child is inert in matters of space but he still enjoys the cartoon for entertainment as well as love for adventure but not to identify with it. The child always enjoys that which is stranger than fiction. Rigby, E. says, 'But with children, who only live in anticipation, delight most in what they do not comprehend. (p 10)

Jules-Rosette observes that Karin Barber's overview captures the style, flavor, and general sociological significance of popular art forms for both artists and consumers. Barber criticizes the views that popular arts are produced by an artistic elite and the approach that produces such art forms to a residual cultural category. This is in response to Nelson Graburn's view that popular arts are those produced by artistic elite whose arts often take the forms of European traditions, but in the content express feelings totally different, feelings appropriate to the new cultures that are emerging among the leaders of the third world (P 91). *Ben 10* affirms Grabun's view since the cartoon takes American traditions but when viewed outside America, it appeals to those audiences even those in the third world. However, one does not need to be elite to be able to produce a cartoon or music, dance or even to design clothes. The members of Man of Action

who are the producers of *Ben 10* are only popular in America but not very much known in other parts of the world but have produced a work of art that has been acclaimed worldwide. The four members of the franchise are American comic book writers. Dancun Reoleau is also an artist. He released his first original graphic novel *The Nightmarist* in 2006. Joe Casey has worked on several image comic books. Joe Kelly is a penciller and an editor and Steven Seagle works in the comic book, television, film, live theatre, video games and animation industries.

Popular culture is versatile. It can incorporate several themes. Barber says, 'popular arts penetrate or are penetrated by political, economic and religious institutions (1987, 1). This versatility allows cartoonists to produce a whole series which deals with various themes within the same text. *Ben 10* for instance has many episodes addressing many different themes which include; power, greed, revenge, insecurity, family loyalty, love and friendship as well as advancement in technology. The producers use the same characters and the same text and are able to stretch the text as much as they wish and address all areas of interest. The flexibility of *Ben 10* allows the producers to address power as Ben transforms to different alien forms, his love affair with Julie is also addressed, his relationship with his cousin Gwen and Grandpa Max, the aliens' greed and the different technological sophistications.

Barber's argument that commercial art 'produced and consumed by the people' encompasses "the vast majority of all arts usually described as popular" which include dance, music, urban theatre, and popular painting and fiction may not be true in the case of the cartoon *Ben 10*. This is because, looking at the labels on the goods displayed in supermarkets and being sold on the streets, almost all the *Ben 10* items are imported from China, an indication that *Ben 10*, though

an American cartoon, has become popular in many parts of the world. Looking at her typology of urban popular art, *Ben 10* can be classified as art not produced by the people but consumed by the people. It is produced in America and consumed in other parts of the world.

Popular culture is transcendent. Appiah Kwame Anthony asserts that, 'the modern popular arts have the capacity to transcend geographical, ethnic, and even national boundaries.'(15) Barber too says that, 'there is no definite and boundaried corpus of popular arts'. But Rosette criticizes Barber's proposed typology that characterizes art forms in terms of their producers and consumers and says that Barber's model is static and accounts for neither social change nor artistic production and communication. Flores, in support of Barber, argues that, 'it is important to see the relation between the people and the writer in terms of time, temporally, and as a historical relationship'. The consumer who in this case is the child does not care about who the producer is. Many of the children who watch *Ben 10* admitted to not knowing who the producers are but they still watch and enjoy the cartoon. The American child is actually the primary viewer of *Ben 10* because it is set in their environment and addresses issues that are only familiar to that environment, the Kenyan child therefore becomes a secondary audience who only watches the film for entertainment but cannot claim to identify with it fully because, though some characters like Allan are black, there are no black experiences. In fact the cartoon alienates the Kenyan child by moving him from the local environment. It persuades the child to identify with other art at the expense of the local and familiar one.

2.3   Conclusion

Using the theory of children's literature, the study establishes that, *Ben 10* is part of children's literature since its main characters are children and the only adult characters take supportive roles. Much of the action is undertaken by Ben, Gwen, Kevin and Ken, Gwen's brother. The plot is simple because the viewer sees Ben striking the Omnitrix and changing to the alien that appears on it. The names that the characters are given symbolize their appearance or character. The characters also shout out the names of their new forms and the child quickly gets to know the names of the various alien forms. Though the setting is unfamiliar to a Kenyan child, the underlying themes are simple and any child from any part of the world can identify with them. The cartoon appeals to the Kenyan child probably because of the themes and the styles that are not new to him. Humour, hyperbole and symbolism appeal to everybody regardless of race or setting.

The study also establishes that, although there is no scholar who has looked at children's literature as popular culture, *Ben 10* is a form of popular art because it is watched by children of all social levels who have access to it. It is also watched in many parts of the world. It is not static but advances with time as new episodes continue being produced and above all, it addresses universal themes; themes that appeal to people in all parts of the world.

CHAPTER 3

THEMATIC CONCERNS IN *BEN 10*

3.0 Introduction

In the last chapter, the study examined *Ben 10* as a form of popular art. It further examined if it is a form of children's literature and how appropriate it is for the Kenyan child. In this chapter, the study is going to analyze the themes which have been highlighted in *Ben 10* series..

Most works of art are intended to pass a particular message or address certain issues in the society. A theme can be defined as the subject matter or the message that a work of art intends to pass to its audience. The storyline, language and styles are woven together to communicate the thematic concerns in a text. Some of the themes addressed in *Ben 10* include power, love, violence and revenge, escapism, greed and solidarity in times of threat.

3.1 Power

The theme of power is highlighted in a number of ways. Power is the ability to influence or control the behavior of people. It is the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others. Power may also refer to physical strength and force exerted by someone or something.

The theme of competition for power is seen in the episode, *Everybody Talks about the Weather* where Ben and Allan engage in a fight because Ben views Allan as one of his enemies. Allan transforms himself into Heatblast. He can operate at very high temperatures and can use heat energy to fly. He emits fire and attacks by throwing jets of fire to his enemy. Ben on the other hand turns into Jetray, a creature that can move at a very high speed, in fact faster than light. The creature shoots laser beams or massive explosions through its eyes or tail. The children enjoy the episode as they cheer the two and take sides as to whose weapon is more lethal than the other. Heatblast throws jets of fire as Jetray shoots laser beams. Ben wins the fight and those in his support are excited while those in support of Allan are disappointed.

Competition for power is further seen between the two when the weather gets snowy. Unlike the other characters, Allan cannot be frozen because as Heatblast, he has the power to thaw the snow. Before Ben is frozen, he quickly turns to yet another creature called Swampfire which possesses a lot of energy and grows like vines. He curls his vine-like body around the weather-control- machine and destroys it by felling it. He therefore gains control of the weather. It emerges that though Allan is able to thaw the snow, he does not have as much power over the weather as Ben does. The episode highlights the theme of power and competition as Ben and Allan are out to establish who is more powerful than the other and the children argue over whose weapons are more lethal or powerful. The most powerful character gains more admiration

from the audience, in this case Ben is declared more powerful. Children love competition especially where they imagine that they will come out as the winners like in racing and fighting.

Some creatures like Humangousaur are given extra ordinary size and strength to fight their enemies. When Ben takes this form, he can grow extremely big and with his extreme strength, he easily fights off his enemies. Furthermore, he has the power to grow his body as much as he likes or as the situation requires. Whenever he comes across any of his enemies, he picks them up and easily throws them like light objects. Four Arms too uses physical power to defeat his enemies. With his four arms he can fight off several enemies at ago. The theme of power and competition is exposed as the two creatures gain control of people and situations through the use of physical power. Some children bully others because they take advantage of their big size as they always imagine that they will emerge winners. Sometimes they win but some other times they may not.

Apart from physical power, the characters also engage in mental power where characters use their brains to gain power and control. When Ben changes to Brainstorm, he has a lot of intelligence and can electrocute his enemies. He uses his brains to perform complex calculations on how to attack his enemies. He therefore gains power using his brains. As Grey Matter, Ben also uses mental power to defeat his enemies. He is able to observe any device and deduce how it functions then decides on how to counter it. He is intelligent enough to observe how Vilgax's robots work and goes ahead to disable them thus defeating him. He jumps on the robot, breaks the wires that enable the robot to move. He thus immobilizes it rendering Vilgax powerless. This theme appeals to children who realize that they can use their brains to evade punishment or responsibility, con or manipulate others or even avenge themselves.

Gwen has the power to command other characters just by stretching her hand and issuing commands. This power gives her control and children wish to have the same control over their surroundings.

It is worth noting that there are many ways of exuding power as one may decide to own a certain territory. Some characters in *Ben 10* use smell to exude power. They will attack by subjecting their enemy to bad smell or emit bad smell to keep their enemies away from them. For example, when Ben transforms to Swampfire or Stinkfly, he attacks his enemies by ejecting them with a smelly, irritating liquid thus keeping them away from him. This is a common phenomenon among children where they use bad smell to irritate or keep people away from them. They can use smell to take control of a territory.

Some characters like Dr, Animo and Vilgax are power hungry and will stop at nothing to gain power. Dr Animo is Ben's first human enemy. He was a very brilliant and promising scientist who performed experiments on animals. He had hoped that his research would win him an award in veterinary science. Due to his longing for power, he started performing experiments to create giant monsters and even went ahead to try to bring back dead creatures to live. This was too ambitious of him and unfortunately he failed in his bid. He went further to try to get information from the Omnitrix to enhance his creatures. His hunger for power leads to his downfall. The award ended up being given to another doctor called Kelly. This drove him insane. His failure could also be a warning to the human race that the power of life and death is not in their hands but there is a supreme being who controls lives. Vilgax too is power hungry and will stop at nothing to take the Omnitrix and use it to gain power. Fortunately for Ben, he is able to change into aliens that counter his tricks and at the end Vigax is defeated as Ben disconnects all his robots. The message is that, it is wrong to be power hungry and over ambitious. People who are

power hungry do not succeed because they tend to use unfair means and the society never forgives them for that.

3.2 Love

Another theme explored in *Ben 10* is the theme of love. This theme appeals mostly to children in their teen-age. Love in this case refers to both intimate love and in love of family. Intimate love is seen in Ben who has a girlfriend by the name Julie who sometimes accompanies him in his escapades. Though Ben is violent and vengeful towards his enemies, through Julie, the affectionate side of him is seen. He takes time out of his schedule to go and see her and support her when she plays tennis, her favourite pass time event. In the episode *Duped*, he realizes that he has other commitments and yet he has to go and watch Julie play. He decides to turn into Ultimate Echo Echo and becomes three images of Ben 10. He does this in order that one Ben 10 goes to give Julie moral support as she plays tennis; the other Ben goes to the cinema as the other one goes to look for the Forever Knights. This gives Julie satisfaction that her boyfriend is present to cheer her as she plays. The audience appreciates the effort that Ben makes to make her happy. Intimate love is further expressed through Gwen and Michael Morningstar who fall in love at first sight. Gwen is quickly infatuated by Morningstar's good looks and relinquishes her powers to him. She only realizes her folly when Morningstar uses those powers to attack Ben and Kevin. At first, the children are excited about the new love affair but the girls soon realize that Morningstar is taking advantage of Gwen and are disappointed. When Morningstar finally loses his good looks to the zombie girls and the powers back to Gwen, the children are happy

and laugh at Morningstar's new ugly look. They realize that Morningstar was only pretending to love Gwen.

Ben also loves his family members. He loves his cousin Gwen, Grandpa Max and also his parents. When his mother is kidnapped, he mobilizes Gwen and Kevin to pursue the kidnappers. Ben changes to Big Chill and is determined to freeze and immobilize Vulkanus wherever he will find him. Vulkanus is a diminutive alien who wears a mechanical armor to compensate for his small size, making him extremely strong. He is one of Ben's worst villains who once attempted to build a weapon capable of destroying the solar system but Ben managed to thwart these attempts. Ben had sworn that, if he finds his mother in the hands of Vulkanus, he would face Ben's wrath.

Gwen too loves her family as seen when she pursues Zombozo who had kidnapped her aunt, Ben's mother. She tells an intimidated Zombozo to tell the other aliens never to go after her family again otherwise they face her wrath.

The theme of love is pertinent to any society and people will want to love and be loved. They will also do anything to protect their families. Like Gwen, teenagers easily get infatuated yet they also get heartbroken when their love affairs backfire.

3.3 Violence and Vengeance

Contrary to the theme of love is the theme of violence and revenge. In the episode, *Save the Last Dance*, Ben turns into Big Chill, a creature that operates at very low temperatures and attacks by freezing the enemy. He freezes the police who want to shoot him. The children are excited that

the police who are known to humiliate and harass people are now the ones being harassed and are at the mercy of Ben. Though the police are violent towards Ben, he on the other hand is not ready to forgive but he wants to avenge himself. He therefore becomes violent towards the police by freezing and immobilizing them.

In *Midnight Madness*, Ben is hypnotized by a man who is jealous of his powers and as he sleep-walks, he steals other people's property. The police start pursuing him and when he regains his senses, he transforms to Upgrade and possesses a helicopter, transforming it into a gunship with laser cannon. Ben and the police engage in a fierce fire exchange. Ben is fighting from the air while the police are on the ground. Due to his sophisticated weapon, Ben automatically wins the fight. The image of the police is again subverted because the police, who are the ones that people run to in times of danger, are now being outsmarted by a small person like Ben.

Violence is also expressed through Ben when he transforms into Diamondhead. He pursues some thieves and using his spiked body he deflates the tyres of their vehicle thus immobilizing them. Though it is a good thing to attack thieves and punish them for their evil deeds, the theme of violence and vengeance is exhibited as Ben punishes the thieves for stealing.

Revenge is again seen when Dr. Animo tries to build a 'Transmodulator', a device that can mutate animals into giant monsters and bring back dead creatures. He attempted to use his new monsters to take his revenge against Kelly and take his prize but he was stopped by Ben.

More violence and revenge is seen through Vulkanus in the episode, *Kevin's Big Score*. According to Kevin, he once betrayed Vulkanus a few years earlier. The two used to engage in hawking alien technology together. When the Plumbers arrived, Kevin ran and left Vulkanus holding the merchandise. Although Vulkanus tried to escape, the Plumbers destroyed his ship,

making him unable to leave the earth so he resulted to trading level three alien technology to survive. When he meets Kevin later, he decides to get back at him for the betrayal by forcing him to absorb a small piece of gem so that he, Vulkanus can get an endless supply. He does not get far with his violence and revenge because his plans are foiled by Ben who freezes off his armor, revealing Vulkanus' true form.

3.4 Escapism

Escapism and masking have been used by some characters to camouflage or conceal their identity for various reasons. For instance, Big Chill is not only able to freeze his enemies, but he is also able to become invisible. This creature has wings that it uses to fly, and can also fold them to resemble hooded robed figures to become unrecognizable. This is a way of camouflaging and escaping from reality. Just like Big Chill. People have a tendency of concealing their true self especially when they engage in unacceptable behavior. Ben also has a mask that looks like the DN aliens which helps him to attack without being noticed. When he wears it, the DN aliens think that he is one of them. This gives him the ability to attack them incognito. Kevin too has the ability to turn into any matter that he touches and this makes him unrecognizable. If he touches a stone, his whole body resembles that stone. He also owns a big glove 'the gauntlet' which he wears in his whole body and becomes unrecognizable. Kevin uses these as weapons because it is a way of camouflaging and he can attack his enemies without being noticed. People may use masking as a way of escaping responsibility. They may also use it for self defense.

Some characters use masking for hypocritical purposes. For example, Michael Morningstar fraudulently takes away the zombie's beauty and leaves them suffering and unhappy with their looks. His newly acquired looks are a way of concealing his identity. He pretends to be a very good friend of Ben and Kevin who quickly accept him and they start sharing their secrets with him. He also pretends to be Gwen's lover until he gets her powers and starts using them to attack Ben and Kevin. It emerges that Morningstar was only pretending to be in love with Gwen so that he could get her powers and use them for his selfish gain. When the zombie girls get their beauty back, his hypocrisy is unmasked. He had been using the good looks to deceive people that he is a good person but now the truth is revealed. The theme of selfishness is also seen in this episode. Morningstar does not care about their suffering, their cracked faces and their wobbling walking style. All he cares about is himself and his looks. He represents those people who do not care about the welfare of others but only think of themselves. There are others who camouflage by wearing very friendly faces and deceptive looks so as to get favours from others.

3.5 Greed

The theme of greed is seen through the aliens who do not understand Kevin's fighting gimmicks. Kevin is capable of turning into any matter that he touches. In the episode, *Kevin's Big Score,* Kevin touches a precious stone and his whole body transforms into that matter. When the aliens come across the precious stone, they quickly start mining it and this gives Ben and Kevin a chance to attack them. In the same episode, Vulkanus forces Kevin to turn into a small piece of the hardest and rarest gem in the galaxy as revenge. This caused Kevin's body to mass-produce the gem, thus giving Vulkanus an endless supply. Dr. Animo is also greedy. He is said to have

been a brilliant scientist but due to his greed, he started performing twisted genetic experiments on animals hoping that his research would win him the Verties Award. All the greedy people in the film end up being losers and therefore greed is condemned.

Kevin is also greedy as he engages in hawking alien technology in the black market. He uses Aljet to sell on his behalf. Sometimes Aljet steals the technology and sells for himself. The two are seen to be greedy for material things. Kevin too engages in the same business with Vulkanus but later they fall out when they are discovered and Kevin runs away, leaving Vulkanus to be caught by the plumbers. In the contemporary society, there are people who engage in illegal business like drug trafficking and stealing merchandise to sell in the black market. Like Vulkanus, such people may not get far with this kind of business because the law could catch up with them. The relationship between Kevin and Vulkanus does not last as well as that with Aljet who sometimes goes behind Kevin's back to sell his own technology. Again this emphasizes the fact that, relationships established to engage in socially unacceptable activities may not last long.

3.6 Solidarity and Fear

Another theme that is explored through Ben is solidarity during moments of threat. This is expressed through the Echo Echo aliens who use their big numbers to make very loud noises that scare away the enemy. In fact, sometimes they are so loud that the enemy falls down due to fear. This appeals to children who realize that they do not always have to involve adults to sort out issues for them but they can gang up and use whatever is at their disposal to deal with their issues. Solidarity is also seen through Spider Monkey when he attacks Dr. Animo's servant. He produces a web from his tail and winds it around the servant's body thus immobilizing him. He

then jumps on top of a pole and fells it on the servant killing him. This again shows solidarity and unity as the two qualities of Ben work together to beat their enemy. This emphasizes the importance of team work as the children can take advantage of each one's strengths, gang up together to make one strong team and defeat their enemies. They could also use their big numbers to cause fear and scare away their enemy.

The above discussed themes point out to the fact that, though *Ben 10* is presented using a lot of fantasy and incongruity, it has messages that are universal: messages that are relevant to people from all parts of the world and all social standings.

CHAPTER FOUR

FANTASY AND REALISM

4. 0 Introduction

In chapter three, the study focused upon themes in *Ben 10*. This chapter is going to look at how those themes have been articulated to the audience so that the interest of the child is evoked to watch the cartoon. It is going to look at the relationship between fantasy and realism as it establishes if the themes addressed through fantasy actually address reality.

4.1 Fantasy and Realism

The more fantastic a situation is, the closer it is to reality. Fantasy does not stem from a vacuum but from the society. It deals with the day-to-day activities of a people. Fantasy in *Ben 10* is not

too far from what is happening in the lives of the children and this is why they are fascinated by it. They are able to compare reality with what they see. Animation being a product of technology uses visual as well as audio mode of communication. This combination of visual and audio makes the film to appear real in the eyes of the children, enhancing the children's understanding of the text hence appealing to them.

Modern technology can animate anything to fascinate children as well as address social concerns. Animators use several techniques to create pictures that appeal to children. Some of these techniques enable the animators to create strange pictures and situations. In this way they create incongruous circumstances.

Through animation, social concerns that are common in our day-to-day lives are addressed and as the characters get engaged in these activities, viewers connect with them easily as their actions seem to be very close to reality.

4. 2 Incongruity and Fantasy

 Incongruity can be defined as a kind of strangeness when considered together with other aspects of a situation. It can evoke either laughter or pity. It refers to a kind of strangeness, unevenness, unlikeness or a striking difference that causes humour or pathos. An author uses objects that are obviously unmatched to bring out humour or to emphasize the tragic nature of events. For example, in *Ben 10*, Ben is a very small, young boy who is able to conquer the huge supernatural alien creatures by using powers which he gets from the Omnitrix; the powers are far beyond the normal ability of a human being at any time. He is able to transform into different alien forms with exaggerated features like big eyes and ears, extra body parts like four arms and even into

inanimate objects like vehicles, jets and ships for his own convenience. This excites the viewers because they know it is Ben and not an object that they are watching. Incongruity entails a comparison between the normal or the expected and what actually happens. For instance, a very small creature like Echo Echo is able to amplify his voice and scare away all his enemies. Gwen just stretches her hands to produce powers and is able to fight all the aliens who threaten Ben. Incongruity is used in cartoons to entertain as well as educate its audience. It can be achieved through the use of fantasy, hyperbole and symbolism.

Animators use fantasy to achieve their desired outcome. According to Ndede

> fantasy is presenting the impossible as if it were possible and in terms of creating mental images; a kind of daydream brought about by captivating and fanciful events carrying the audience to speculative world where they imagine, think of a probable, guess, suppose and visualize possibilities in their imagination to produce humour. (Ndede 32)

4.3 Fantasy and *Ben 10*

Fantastic realism involves taking real life situations and characters and introducing them into a real world where unexpected and unexplainable things happen. 'Stories involving paranormal magic and terrible monsters have existed in spoken forms before the advent of printed Literature' (Simeral 1937). For instance, Shakespeare included a ghost among his characters in the play *Hamlet*. In African oral literature, ghosts were presented as incongruous creatures with extra-ordinary powers and features. Some were presented as partly human and partly animal. Some had abnormal body features like tails, extra eyes and ears or even very long arms which could catch someone from a distance. Some could transform from their ghostly forms to become very handsome young men and vice versa. This brings an element of incongruity. At some point they

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duped the people and it is at this point that it was discovered that they were actually not real human beings. This incongruity fascinated children as they learned a number of moral lessons from the narratives. Some stories like ogre stories warned children against going to isolated places like forests alone because it was dangerous, others like trickster narratives ridiculed gullibility and stupidity while others instilled virtues like patience and unity.

Ben 10 is Children's Literature dramatized and filmed with most of the events being incongruous. They appear strange and out of the ordinary, yet they address issues that appeal to children. They address issues through caricatured creatures called Aliens as well as human characters that have unusual powers. Like the oral story, the film encourages virtues like unity, obedience and patience and condemns vices like greed, gullibility, stupidity, laziness and selfishness.

Every episode is introduced by a theme song that summarizes the plot of the story. The song says

> It started when an alien device did what it did
>
> It stuck itself upon his wrist with secrets that it hid.
>
> Now he's got super powers, he's no ordinary kid
>
> He's Ben 10
>
> So if you see him you might be in for a big surprise
>
> He'll turn into an alien before your very eyes

He's slimy, freaky, fast and strong

He's Ben 10

Armed with powers, he's on the case

Fighting off evil from earth or space

He'll never stop till he makes them pay

'Cause he's the baddest kid to ever save the day

Ben10

Ben 10.

The song explains how Ben found the Omnitrix and goes ahead to describe the characteristics of the aliens that Ben is able to turn into then clarifies Ben's main objective; to fight evil from earth and space. The song is used to heighten the aspect of fantasy as it emphasizes on the theme of protecting the environment by changing into various alien forms. There are many tunes that accompany the different events in the cartoon. They also heighten the mood of the events in question.

Ben is able to change into a number of different forms known as Aliens. Whenever he wants to transform from his human form to an alien, he strikes his Omnitrix with his hand and immediately transforms into the new and strange creature that appears on the Omnitrix. As he transforms to the new creature, there is always a loud sound like a bang and a green coloured, smoke-like substance comes from the Omnitrix. This is used to set the mood and helps the viewer to understand what is happening whenever the sound is produced. The smoke makes the

situation to look real as it symbolizes some kind of power or energy being produced. When Ben's help is required anywhere, the Omnitrix has a ringtone that alerts him. Twenty children aged between six years and ten were exposed to the cartoon to establish whether they identify with it. Their reactions as they watched the cartoon were observed and they also answered some oral questions after every episode watched. This quick change from one form to another is fantasy which appeals to children with majority wishing they could have such powers. When asked why the powers fascinate them, some of the children said that given such powers, they would tour the whole world while others said that they would transform into as many creatures as possible. There is an element of escapism. Sometimes children find themselves in trouble with adults so they would wish to escape from this. When asked why they would wish to transform into many creatures, Joseph Oloo said that it is just exciting while Agnes Muthoni said that it can help if one wants to conceal her identity. Moses Omboga said that he would wish to have such powers for self defense. This again shows that children would wish to escape from reality. They also love adventure.

In some episodes, Ben is able to change himself into some small creatures called 'Echo Echo' which can multiply in number whenever he wants to attack. The creatures speak in a way that their voices produce a loud echo. They can scream in ultrasonic frequencies because their body is a living amplifier. In their big numbers, they can scream until they stop a projectile in midflight. This is how Ben manages to beat his enemies. The creatures use numerical strength to subdue their enemy. This occurrence has a direct relationship with the reality of the children. Children are aware of their weakness in the event of an attack and in that condition they develop an unarticulated longing for ability to defend themselves and therefore this ability to multiply in numbers and get the ability to fight back appeals to them. They also imagine that numbers can

help them to win in any situation they find themselves in. They will also use any means available to defend themselves however crude it might be. The creatures are not physically strong but they use what they have; their voices to defend themselves.

Ben also transforms to a new creature called Diamondhead which can create crude crystal weapons from any part of his body on demand or fire crystal shards from his hands. These are diamond-like heads used as weapons. He can also make a shield from those spikes. Anthony Kamau said that if he were Ben, he would make the diamond then sell it to make money. In *Ben 10, A Change of Face*, he pursues some thieves and using the diamond spikes, he pierces the tyres of their cars thus immobilizing them. The tyres produce a sound similar to that of a tyre burst and one is completely convinced that the actions are real since one can actually see the tyre becoming flat as some smoke-like substance is produced from the tyre, an indication that pressure is coming out of the tyre. This really excites the children and Leshan Rampei says he would wish to become a police officer and possess such powers so that he pursues those thieves that have caused such insecurity in the country. The child is able to fantasize a situation of having the power to control things and situations. He/she is able to cause damage to anyone who causes trouble or those who escape responsibility. From the children's responses, they are impatient with the police who are always giving excuses and not taking the appropriate action whenever insecurity issues arise. They wish they had the power to handle some situations.

Ben can fight both on the ground and in the air and as they fight, there is always a rhythmic sound which is well matched with the movement and gestures of the characters giving the illusion that they are actually fighting. He transforms into an alien called Upgrade which has the

ability to possess technology. This alien merges with any technology regardless of size or level of sophistication, making it capable of upgrading or changing to far beyond its original design thus taking control. Upgrade's body is a black headless creature with a green strip that runs round its body. To show that he has possessed the technology, whatever he possesses gets that green strip around its body too. In *Ben 10 Midnight Madness*, Upgrade merges with a helicopter fitted with a searchlight. He possesses it and in its 'upgraded' form, the helicopter becomes a gunship with laser cannon. Ben shoots the police from the air as the police shoot back. The sound of gun fire rents the air and one is left thinking that there is a real fire exchange. When the bullet hits its target, a yellow powder-like substance is emitted which adds to this fantasy as it looks real. The children fantasize how exciting it would be if they were in a position to make such sophisticated machines and engage the police in a fire exchange. They fantasize a situation where they can have the power to transform whatever is at their disposal to suit their current need. This is a way of rejecting the restrictions that the society imposes on children and they wish to get freedom to manipulate their environment without restrictions. This brings the children to their own world of modeling. They imagine themselves making something more superior. They can fantasize an exciting experience of modeling a car that can fly. They admire Ben's ability of transforming into a creature that has such superior powers. It is also an opportunity to hit back at elders in the society especially the police who harass people. Due to their love for adventure, the children imagine a situation where the police appear hopeless. They get excited at the sight of the police exchanging fire with Upgrade and they only imagine themselves emerging winners. They do not see the possibility of their opponents outsmarting them and probably being harmed or killed.

Ben and Gwen are able to do things which cannot be done under normal circumstances. In *A Change of Face*, the two are held hostage and their hands are tied by their enemy alien Charmcaster. When Gwen wants some lotion to oil her hands, she kicks the bottle which is in her hind pocket continuously until the lotion bottle flies into her hands. Through animation, the children are convinced that it is possible and many say they will try it later and they are sure they will succeed. The sound produced by the bottle makes fantasy to look real because of the way the sound and the motion of the bottle are matched well as the bottle gradually moves and lands on Gwen's hand. The children are inspired by the fact that even if one is handicapped, there is always a way out. To them everything is possible. Even disabled people can do things by themselves. Children reject powerlessness and are convinced that they are able to do some of the things that adults imagine they cannot do.

In addition, Ben is able to change himself into another creature called Swampfire which takes the form of a living plant that can control plant life and produce seeds that quickly grow into vines. The creature has a vast regenerative ability that allows him to alter his own body. This expresses itself through tunneling underground in vine form, growing his feet to root himself into the ground, healing his lost limbs or producing others. This creature emits a bad smell and has tongues of fire on its head which he sometimes uses to attack his enemy. He is able to restore his body when he is injured. Like a plant, Swampfire is green in colour and the same qualities of plants sprouting after they are cut are seen as he restores his lost limb. In the episode, *Ben 10 Returns*, the DN aliens cut off his arm in a fight and he quickly restores it to its place. This fascinates the children and many of them say they wish they had such powers so that they can heal themselves whenever they are injured. Through animation, the hand is restored. Many events in *Ben 10* can be understood from a surrealistic point of view. The pictures are animated

then matched with voices giving the viewer an illusion of reality. In this case Ben picks the hand and restores it to its original place. Through fantasy, the viewer believes that it actually happened. This fantasy also allows the child to be able to imagine and suppose him/herself being able to control all situations. Swampfire also emits a bad smell. He pulls his enemy close to his stinking body thus irritating him. Children use bad smell to annoy people or to keep off from them. For example, children may find fun in farting but they can also use it to annoy their friends or keep them off. Rooting helps the children to fantasize things that they hear about but they look impossible become reality. It gives them hope that those situations that look helpless can be restored. The growing vines reflect wild freedom. They are able to answer question like 'supposing', 'for example', 'Supposing vines can grow so fast and fill the whole world and allow them to eat sweet potatoes always?'The majority children seemed to love fruits like mangoes and wished that mango trees would grow that fast so that there could be mangoes always and everywhere. This answers the children's dreams and desires. The harmful aliens also emit some yellow-coloured mucus which they use to keep their enemies off. Children are aware that this is disgusting but they will still enjoy playing with mucus sometimes to disgust people. The bad smell motif is also used by Stinkfly, an alien form who shoots a toxic slime. He also has a mouth with pollen ducts that can excrete foul-smelling liquids some of which can be flammable and toxic. As he emits these fluids, he produces a sound suggestive of somebody who is vomiting. The children admire Swampfire and Stinkfly but say that the mucus from the other aliens is disgusting. When asked why, Jamie Kalui, an eight year girl old said that it is because the DN aliens use their mucus to destroy the universe while Ben uses his to save it. They may probably identify with Ben because he is human like them. Moreover, the DN aliens are big so children do not associate with them but they identify with Stinkfly who is small and has the ability to fight

successfully using what he has. This gives children self determination and they feel that despite their small size, they can defend themselves and defeat bigger creatures. They use smell for self defense. It is clear that children at this age are able to think and are impressionable. They are able to evaluate an individual and judge him for who he is. They do not judge people by their looks or appearance but by their personality and what they can offer to the society.

When Ben meets Allan in the episode *Everybody talks about the weather*, Allan is able to transform himself into a strange creature called 'Heatblast', a creature that emits fire and attacks by throwing jets of fire to its enemy and can also use its heat to fly. Ben on the other hand changes into a new creature called 'Jetray' which is capable of flying and swimming at a speed greater than light. He can shoot laser beams or massive explosions through his eyes or tail. The two engage in a fight because Ben, Kevin and Gwen view Allan as an enemy. As Allan emits jets of fire, Ben emits laser beams. The fight continues until Allan is beaten. The children watching the film automatically take sides, some in support of Allan and others in support of Ben. The room almost goes out of control. Those who are in support of Allan express disappointment at his defeat while those in support of Ben cheer up and jeer at their opponents and from their behavior, it is clear that they think what is happening is real. As the two fight, there are rhythmic sounds and movements that give the impression of people fighting. This heightens fantasy. This episode attracts the children more than any other because children love competition. When two creatures fight or compete and one wins, this is something that excites the children. They watch and take sides. The episode introduces the child to lethal weapons. The cheering imbibes the values of violence because although fire is dangerous, rays are more powerful. This shows that,

the more lethal a weapon is, the more attractive it is to the children. It therefore emerges that it is children's wish to destroy their enemies and therefore no room for forgiveness or reconciliation.

When the weather is snowy, Heatblast touches the snow with his finger and the snow thaws. The children get very excited by this and Jeremy Kaula commented that he would like to be Heatblast so that he can warm himself during cold weather. Jesse Gikandi said that he would like to be Heatblast so that he would use the fire to burn his enemies but Lynn Wanjiru said she does not admire creatures that harm other people. The majority children were excited by the fact that they can change the weather to suit themselves. This is probably because children are aware that adults are always insisting to them to dress warmly. They wish they would just warm themselves without the bother of extra clothing. The DN Aliens have guns that freeze somebody when they shoot at them because they emit snow instead of bullets. As they shoot, the sound of the 'snow bullets' is rhythmically produced as some small tongue-like devices freeze Ben, Kevin and Gwen. Allan cannot be frozen because he is Heatblast. Ben and Kevin are frozen. Fortunately for Ben, he changes to Swampfire who has enough strength to fell the tower that controls the weather, the weather machine. At this point the interviewees argue about who is stronger or more admirable. Some say that being Heatblast would allow them to melt the ice and change the weather to suit them while others wish to be Ben 10 because he has powers to destroy the weather machine and therefore change the weather and take control of it. The aspect of competition and power is again reflected. They want to know who has more influence as far as control of the environment is concerned. This interview reveals the various reactions of the children on the various mundane things around them like the weather. It puts them in a situation

where they have control of the weather. It also emphasizes the human aspect of always wanting to be the best.

Besides changing into Heatblast, Ben is also able to change into a new alien called Big Chill, a moth-like creature made of ice and cannot survive in extreme weather. It is able to freeze as well as become invisible. It has wings which it uses to fly and can fold them to resemble hooded robed figures so that it becomes unrecognizable. This creature is blue in colour, probably reflecting on the beauty of a butterfly. In the episode, *Save the last dance*, Ben freezes the police who try to shoot him. He also has the power to lay eggs and multiply in number. This creature also helps Gwen from her enemy 'Helen' in the episode, *Plumbers Helpers* by freezing the enemy. The children get very excited when the police are immobilized. This reveals their attitude towards the police and crime. The police are frozen and made unable to arrest. There is a reversal of roles. The image of the police is subverted. The children are excited because normally, the police are the ones who harass, humiliate and arrest people but now it is the other way round. They would want to emulate Ben. This emphasizes the children's attitude towards law enforcement and crime. The likely effect of this episode on the children is that of encouraging crime. It also encourages masking and camouflaging as a way of escaping reality. People who are out to do evil mask themselves to wield evil powers incognito. This is a way of escaping responsibility. Ben has a mask that gives one the ability to change to anything. Whenever he wants to attack the DN Aliens, he puts on this mask so that he looks like them and is able to attack them without being noticed. Masking is a technique that expresses the wish not to be recognized.

Ben changes into a crab-like creature known as Brainstorm which has a big head and is very intelligent. This creature is able to perform several complex calculations and has the power to electrocute its enemies by ejecting electric rays. He also has the power to levitate, create force fields and cause a storm just by thinking. His intelligence makes him selfish and eccentric. Whenever he wants to use his intelligence, the head opens and the brain is exposed. The brain emits small spike-like objects to show the amount of intelligence and his ability to electrocute. This fascinates the children who get restless at the sight of these powers. When asked why they are restless, the majority shout that they would wish to have such powers so that they do not struggle in school, especially in Mathematics. Kevin Mokaya, a ten year old, says that he would use the powers to electrocute his teachers and parents whenever they punish him. Unexpressed desire to revenge is fantasized in this creature. Electrocution is murder and therefore no room for reconciliation and forgiveness. Brainstorm is used to act out what people cannot dare say. This creature also brings out the evil genius motif. He uses his intelligence to destroy, similar to characters like Hitler, Napoleon and Edward the Third in Shakespeare's works. His calculations cause a storm. Children wish to have the power to control like Brainstorm as seen when they play games such as 'mother and father'. This is something they act out in real life. Brainstorm has a negative impact on the children because they admire his brains and may want to use theirs in the same way.

In *Ben 10*, all the characters have supernatural powers. Kevin has a big glove which can enlarge and cover his entire body thus protecting him from his enemies. Victoria Nkatha commented that she would like to own such a glove because she really fears being beaten or hurt. Kevin also has the powers of the Osmosian Family that is capable of changing into different kinds of matter.

Whatever kind of metal he touches, his body changes into that metal. In the episode *Kevin's Big Score*, he touches a precious stone and his entire body changes to that stone. The aliens start mining the mineral and Ben and his friends get a chance to attack them. Again this brings out the fantasy of being incognito in order to escape responsibility. The power to be what you want to be is a sign of self rejection. The aliens start mining the metal as a sign of greed and Ben's attack on the enemies is a wish to attack those who mistreat you. The child gets the desire to punish those who offend him/her. There is no room for reconciliation and patience as a virtue is completely forgotten. Children want quick fix to problems. Even Kevin who is in the form of matter erupts to attack. This is a caution to the greedy people. The episode fantasizes our greedy world.

Gwen too has special powers which she has inherited from her grandmother. She draws powers from nature. She stretches her hands and issues commands against the aliens. Whenever she stretches her hands, a pink vapour is emitted from her hands and a sound similar to that of moving wind is heard. The colour pink is usually associated with young girls and the fact that Gwen draws her powers from nature may be the reason for the sound of moving wind. In *Ben 10 Returns*, she stretches her hands and commands the aliens. They all fall down. Through animation, the children are convinced that it really happened and are all envying Gwen and wish they would be like her. The power to command is expressed in this episode. As children watch their mothers toil, they develop a wish that they could become that powerful to command and overcome any of the challenges they face. The children also fantasize a world without struggle and can defend themselves. Since children are vulnerable, they desire to defend themselves especially girl children who are vulnerable to boys and adult men.

In the episode *All that Glitters*, Gwen meets Michael Morningstar, a zombie who has the ability to absorb the other zombies' powers so as to become handsome. When Morningstar greets Gwen, some light is emitted which signifies the power of love. Michael says, 'aah.. that has never happened before.' Gwen is attracted to this man and gets so infatuated that she surrenders her powers to him. He later tells her that, 'From the moment I touched you Gwen, I knew you are the girl I needed'. He usurps her powers and defeats Ben and Kevin. She later realizes her mistake and gets her powers back. The other zombies also get their beauty back and Michael Morningstar loses his beauty as the zombies regain theirs. Most of the girls were very excited at first by the way Michael was treating Gwen with affection but when he took her powers away, the majority said they no longer liked him. Joanne Muthoni, a ten year old girl commented, 'I hate him for taking away Gwen's powers and using them to attack her cousins.' All the children seemed to identify with this episode probably because of the theme of love which appeals to children in their adolescent stage. The boys identified with Michael who appeared to be a conqueror and the girls identified with Gwen and felt they had won when she finally got her powers back. Gwen's behaviour could justify the African myth that women cannot be trusted with serious things like power. She is compared to the stereotyped woman to whom love means everything. Her ceding the power to the man plays out the woman's inability to judge wisely. This is replicated in Shakespeare's play '*Hamlet,* where Hamlet's mother flirts with Hamlet's uncle who killed her husband. Later, Gwen gets her powers back. This indicates that she has realized her folly. There is restoration and Morningstar's hypocrisy is condemned and the hypocrite is unmasked.

Aljet, an alien who takes the form of a porcupine hawks alien technology. He has spikes that act as his weapons. Kevin steals technology and uses Aljet to sell for him in the black market. In the episode *Kevin's Big Score* Aljet attacks Kevin and Gwen by piercing them with his spikes until they become paralyzed. Ben has to change to Big Chill to save them. The children reiterate that Aljet is ugly and unappealing and cheer when Ben saves them. He is able to do his hawking without being noticed. Hawking alien technology can be equated to today's illegal business of hawking cocaine, bombs and any other contraband goods which is done under very tight cover. The episode also appeals to children because in real live they would want to use other people to do evil on their behalf and play innocent. They are also fond of passing the buck whenever they are caught.

Ben changes to yet another alien called Humungousaur who resembles a dinosaur and can grow abnormally big since he has the power to increase his body size. He possesses great strength and a thick layer of skin that provides vast resistance to injury. This alien form is brown in colour, close to the colour of the dinosaur. The colour is not appealing to the eyes and the overall animal is quite ugly. Whenever Ben transforms into this alien, he talks in a loud, guttural scary voice as he says; 'I am Humungousaur!' He makes very loud noises with his feet when walking. When he comes across an explosive alien device which can easily explode and wipe out mankind, he takes the explosive and throws it into space where it explodes hence saving the world. This shows a desire for peace and end of war by watching the dead on screen. Children's desire to be part of problem solving systems is expressed. The wish to end violence is there but this is only delayed destruction because once that device is thrown into space, it will still come down to earth due to the force of gravity. Children have a keen awareness of their size as a limitation and their own

longing on screen is expressed. They long to grow and increase their body size hence wish they were Humungousaur because he has control of his size. It is worth noting that children of age six and above do not value colour so much because as stated earlier, they are impressionable and have judgmental skills. Humungousaur is very ugly, with a dull colour, an unpleasant voice and a big tail but they still do not detest him for that. They judge him for what he is able to do and admire him for being able to save others from problems.

Apart from transforming to Humungousaur, Ben can also change into another alien called Four Arms which has four arms, four eyes, is very strong and can jump very high. Four Arms can create shock waves simply by pounding the ground or clapping all four hands together. With four arms, Ben has a tendency of bragging that he can do something 'with three hands tied behind my back'. In *Washington B.C*, Four Arms fights an alien called Woolly Mammoth by spinning him round and throwing him into the air. The mammoth falls with a thud and dies. This episode excites the children who really admire Four Arms for his strength. Irene Wanza says she would wish to be like Four Arms so that everybody would fear her and she would spin her enemies like Four Arms does. The urge for power is again reflected. Children yearn to have power over everybody around them and unfortunately most of the time they wish to use it to harm people. When asked why they do not sympathize with Woolly Mammoth, Jacinta Cherono says that the wool on his skin makes him look ugly and unlikeable. The children are excited when he is defeated. In the actual sense, Wooly Mammoth is not uglier than Ben when he takes some alien forms like Humungousaur, Brainstorm, Spider Monkey or Crash -hopper. So it is not really the ugliness in Wooly Mammoth but it is the fact that he is fighting Ben whom as a child they identify with.

Spider Monkey is a four-eyed and four-armed creature that combines the features of a monkey and a spider. When Ben is in this form, he is flexible and can trap his enemy through webbing. Spider monkey is able to execute nimble hand-to-hand fighting. Despite not being a strong form, Spider monkey's wiry frame is suitable for evading danger. In the episode, *Reflected Glory,* Ben*'s* school bullies want to gain fame by saving Ben who is about to be killed by the DN aliens but when they are just about to save him , their battery goes down. Dr. Animo's servant saps powers from the bullies and Ben quickly manages to transform to Spider Monkey to save them. He forms a web from his tail around the servant. Like a monkey, Ben jumps on top of a pole and the pole falls on the servant killing him. The web is used in West African oral literature to represent the trickster in Ananse narratives. In this case it is used to confuse the servant who is not able to move and Ben is able to attack him further. The fact that a small animal beats a big one gives the children hope that they too can do things. For instance, they can use survival tactics to evade danger. Immobilizing the enemy in order to subdue him is the wish of every child. Because of their size, children can gang up and one immobilizes the enemy while the other attacks either by hitting or even biting. Instead of waiting for an adult to come and help, the children unite and one defends the other. They are happy when they get their victory.

Ben is capable of transforming into yet another alien called Grey Matter, an intelligent, grey-skinned frog-like alien. Though Ben dislikes turning into this creature due to its small size, it is through this alien that he gains a calculative and technical intellect, being able to outwit larger enemies, create almost everything from spare parts, deduce the function of any device at a glance and analytically help in difficult situations. His size allows him to squeeze into small spaces and climb walls due to tiny suction cups on his skin, and he has sharp teeth and slimy skin that makes

him difficult to grab. In the episode*, The Alliance*, Grey Matter uses his intellect to destroy an alien robot hired by Vilgax to get the Omnitrix. Grey Matter jumps on to one of the robots and cuts its wires. The second robot can fly using technology so he disables the wires of the jetpack causing it to malfunction. The children marvel at the way Ben gains control of the robots to protect the Omnitrix. They are also happy that Vilgax and all his associates are defeated and Ben is still in control of the Omnitrix. Though at first the children also do not admire the frog, as they continue watching his escapades, they realize that his intelligence and small size is a blessing to him. Farahau Sefu says that he could use the intelligence to make his own technology. The children realize that intelligence has nothing to do with size or appearance and are happy to realize that even in their small size they could be brighter than some big people. One does not necessarily need physical strength but can use intellect to fight and win. Sometimes it is brains but not brawn that works.

Cannonbolt is a hulking broad- shouldered alien covered in natural armor plating and curls into a ball. He can encase himself in his armor becoming virtually invulnerable. Besides, in his ball-up form, he can roll across terrain at high speed. As he rolls, the sound of a rolling ball is heard. The drawback is that sometimes he picks up momentum and loses control of his speed. In the episode, *Map of Infinity'*, Ben finds himself in a booby trapped building. He quickly transforms into Cannonbolt because he is fast and has an armor to break the wall. He manages to hit the wall and breaks it to get away. As he hits and breaks the wall, the sound produced convinces one that actually the wall is being hit and will soon break open. Susan Kanini, six years old, says that Cannonbolt is a very good creature because he can hide without being seen owing to his small size. She also admires him for his armor that allows him to break through hard places. The

children identify with Cannonbolt because of his small size yet he is stronger than some big animals. This probably gives them the consolation that, even though they are small, they have some potential. Speed appeals to children especially in games that require speed like skating. They enjoy the idea of moving without control like Cannonbolt. When he breaks the wall, all of them are excited. Children hate confinement and are happy when Ben breaks the wall. To them, this is rejection of confinement and the act of breaking is a victory of freeing oneself.

Vilgax is a warlord from a race that can turn into giant squid-like creatures when exposed to water. His empire is based on the planet Vilgaxia. He is ruthless, cruel, and power hungry as he will stop at nothing to take the Omnitrix and use it to build an army capable of conquering every planet in the galaxy. He is one of the most feared aliens in the galaxy, having conquered ten worlds, destroyed five others, and created a black hole. In fact, he is so much feared that almost no biological life form is willing to work for him, forcing him to use robots for his entire crew. He is also a self proclaimed master of the Omnotrix, as he claimed that unlocking the Omnitrix's master control function was 'child play' for him. Though the children admire Ben's powers, they do not like Vilgax's because he is out to take away Ben's source of power. They are biased as to whose powers they admire. This is probably because Vilgax is power hungry and children do not like such people because they are oppressive and children are the first victims. He is the antithesis of what they admire. He is the embodiment of what they hate or fear; power and total control. His creation of a black-hole can be equated to the depletion of the ozone layer which can cause a lot of harm to the human race. Ben, apart from being human, is a child like them and he shares the same thoughts of wanting to live in a peaceful world.

Charmcaster is a sorceress who carries a magic satchel from which she can draw all manner of items, such as magical explosives, throwing blades, or even various clay animals to enlarge and animate. In the episode, *Hit 'Em Where They Live,* she teams up with Zombozo and Vulkanus to kidnap Ben's parents. They manage to get the mother so as to bring Ben, Gwen and Kevin to their hideout, then separate them and let the members of his team take them down one by one. Their plan eventually backfires when they try to kill Mrs. Tennyson in a slow and cruel way. Ben transforms to Big Chill and pursues Vulkanus, Kevin turns into a stone and pursues Charmcaster and Gwen goes after Zombozo and manages to find Ben's mother. She threatens an intimidated Zombozo to spread the word to the other villains not to go after their families again. Again the children express their hatred for Vulkanus, Zombozo and Charmcaster for fighting Ben and they rejoice when Ben's mother is saved. Children do not like people who threaten the lives of their loved ones. They are protective of their parents and siblings and will go to any length to protect them. Evil people will always be detested and Charmcaster's beauty cannot persuade the children to like her.

Unfortunately, Ben is not always in control of his aliens. When he turns to Rath, he loses control of his temper. He resembles a large muscle-bound humanoid tailless tiger-like alien. Rath suffers from aggressive temper and decreased reasoning power. He is not ready to be told anything by anybody. For example, in the episode *Hero Time*, he meets a superhero called Captain Nemesis who adores him. He invites Ben to his party and all the attention goes to Ben due to his fame. Captain Nemesis is unhappy about this and he sets up a racing competition pretending it is a friendly one though it emerges later that it is personal. His aim is to prove that he is better than Ben. Ben decides to change to Jetray who is the fastest of his aliens. Unfortunately he strikes the

Omnitrix extremely hard, something he has been warned against several times. Jetray does not appear but instead he gets Rath. When the race starts, due to attitude, Rath refuses to run and asks the starter, 'Why should I go? You won't tell me when to go; I will go after five minutes'. The super hero wins the race. When asked about this alien with such an attitude, Jamie said he really admires him because one does not always have to do what he is told. This shows that children would wish to have extreme freedom to do what they want. Sometimes they wish to be strong heads and left alone to do things at their own will. They feel this is akin to being bullied and they do not like it.

4.4 Conclusion

Ben 10 addresses themes that are common in our society today that include greed, selfishness, love of play, solidarity in moments of threat and stress, power, freedom, love, responsibility versus escapism, masking, violence and vengeance. Some of these themes like love of play, power, freedom, love and responsibility give the children an opportunity to explore what adults cannot allow them to dare in real life. It allows them to fantasize situations where they are in control of their lives. The good man/bad man motif is also highlighted. The good people are rewarded by being portrayed as winners while the evil ones are punished by being portrayed as losers. This gives the children a relief from constant monitoring by the parents as well as glorifying virtues that the children know that they are upheld. These could be the reasons why the children enjoy watching *Ben 10.*

In the Kenyan set up, *Ben 10* has become popular among many children. They view Ben as a hero who is able to do the impossible. Children wish to identify with Ben and this could be the reason why *Ben 10* T-shirts and toys are popular among Kenyan children. The cartoon addresses common themes which appeal to children of all social levels in a playful and humorous way.

CHAPTER 5

LANGUAGE AND STYLE IN *BEN 10*

5.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the study looked at fantasy as a way of articulating realism in people's day-to-day activities. In this chapter, the study is going to look at the language and style which have been used to convey the thematic concerns in the film.

Style refers to the way in which a writer or artist communicates the intended message to his/ her audience. It is a strategy of relaying information to the audience particularly to develop the narrative, usually to make it more complete and interesting. The producers of *Ben 10* series have

used some unique language and style to communicate to their audience. Some of the styles applied include, rhythm, humour, symbolism, hyperbole and irony.

5.1 Rhythm

Rhythm refers to a particular pattern or tune in a song. The theme song, which is used to introduce every episode in the cartoon, has a rhythm created by the use of rhyme and refrain. In the first stanza, there is external rhyme with all the last words of each line rhyming. The three lines end with the words 'did', 'hid' and 'kid.' Stanza three also has rhyme with the following words appearing at the end of the lines. 'Case' and 'space' in lines one and two respectively, 'pay' and 'day' in lines three and four. The names of the members of the Tennyson family also rhyme. They are Ben, Gwen and Ken. Rhyme helps to make the song rhythmic and interesting. There are also other songs and tunes in the film that add to the rhythm in the film. For instance, there is a tune played every time Ben and his allies are in trouble. This serves to warn the audience that there is danger larking ahead of Ben. It also serves to heighten the tension in the film as the audience is eager to know what kind of danger is coming and how Ben is going to deal with it.

Each stanza ends with a refrain which further enhances rhythm. It ends with the words 'Ben 10' which are repeated in the last stanza. This renders the song appropriate to mount each episode.

5.2 Humour

Humour is a stylistic device that is used to cause laughter and amusement. *Ben 10* uses a number of humorous incidents. For example, in the episode, *And Then There were 10*, the Omnitrix

attaches itself on Ben's wrist when he is out on a summer holiday. His first reaction is humorous as he shouts and tries all means to remove the watch including using a stick to pull it off. The stick breaks because the Omnitrix is firmly attached to his wrist. As he tries all means, he hits the Omnitrix and unexpectedly the first alien appears. This first alien he transforms into is Heatblast. When he looks at himself, he gets so scared and shouts, 'I'm on fire! I'm on fire!' He immediately realizes that he is not burning and starts bragging as he shouts, 'I look hot, I look hot'. This really amuses the children who feel that Ben is a coward but they admire his sense of pride when he realizes he is not burning. They now look at him as a hero who can catch fire but does not burn.

In the same episode, when he is asked to light a campfire, he opts to turn into Heatblast instead of lighting the fire. He wants to revert to his real self but he is unable. Gwen and Grandpa Max are coming and he wants to hide in the forest but his body is still on fire. He climbs a tree and when it is almost time out for him to revert to his real self, the tree catches fire and he falls down. The whole forest catches fire. The children burst into laughter and when asked why, they say they are laughing at his stupidity of trying to hide when his body is on fire and every one can see him.

Sometimes Ben strikes the Omnitrix so hard that it gives him a different alien from the one he intends. He is always warned against this by Azmuth, the creator of the Omnitrix who guides him on how to use it and warns him when something is about to happen. In the episode *Hero Time,* he strikes so hard that instead of changing to Jetray to beat Captain Nemesis in the race to prove who is more popular than the other, he changes to Rath who suffers from an aggressive

temperament and decreased reasoning and when the race starts, he refuse to run thus giving Captain Nemesis a chance to win and prove himself a hero. The children laugh at Ben's stupidity which makes him lose to a weaker character. He does not follow Azmuth's instructions and loses the race due to his clumsiness. Even his words are humorous as he says, 'Why should I go, you won't tell me when to go, I will go after five minutes'. No wonder even Kevin and Gwen keep on laughing at Ben whenever he takes this form.

More humour is seen in the episode *Duped* when Ben wants to be in three places at the same time. He realizes that he did not plan well. He goes to the washrooms and transforms to Ultimate Echo Echo. The advanced Echo Echo can take the real appearance of Ben on the instructions of Ben himself. 'One Ben' goes to the cinema, 'the other' goes to watch his girlfriend Julie play tennis and 'the third one' goes with Kevin to look for the Forever Knights. Though the children admire this ability to be in three places at the same time, they are amused at the confusion that Ben finds himself in at first. They see him as a poor planner, but it also excites them as they imagine what a way to deal with such confusion.

The Echo Echo alien is also funny both in appearance and mode of operation. The body is a living amplifier with headphones connected to square appendage resembling an MP3 player in his back with a port on it decorated with a binary digit situated like the number 10. They can scream at ultra sound frequencies, capable of overloading machinery and stopping projectiles in mid-flight. Their high pitch sounds funny. It is also humorous to see projectile being stopped by sound as well as huge creatures getting scared just because of a high pitch until they run away or fall down. The juxtaposition between the loud noise and the size of its producer is also laughable.

Aljet is involved in hawking alien technology in the black market but he is such a coward that when he is scared a bit he runs very fast. It is amusing that he wants to engage in illegal business yet he lacks the courage to do so. In the episode, *Kevin's Big Score*, the Echo Echo aliens shout at him until he falls down and it is only after they revert to Ben that Aljet wakes up. It is also funny that Kevin steals the technology and sends him to go and sell it in the black market yet many of their deals backfire. Sometimes Aljet also steals some of the technology to go and sell by himself. A scared thief/poor results disparity is laughable and clumsy.

Smell has been used to enhance humour. The first time he transforms to Swampfire, Ben is shocked. He smells at himself and asks, 'Is that me?' Swampfire gets hold of his enemy and draws him close to his body. The enemy is disgusted by the irritating smell and as he struggles to free himself, Swampfire uses his energy to keep him there longer and irritate him more. Stinkfly too emits a foul smelling liquid and the children laugh at the reactions of the creatures that are attacked using smell. Children normally get amused by bad smell.

In *Not All That Glitters,* the zombies lose their beauty to Michael Morningstar, who is humorously presented with yellow hair, a scarf around his neck and a high-waist pair of trousers to heighten his beauty. His sense of pride is also funny as he tries to win Gwen's love. The zombie girls are very ugly with cracked faces and knock-kneed legs. They walk in a wobbling manner and sometimes they even fall. Though the girls deserve sympathy due to the mistreatment meted on them by Morningstar who has taken away their beauty, one cannot avoid laughing at their looks and walking style. It is also laughable to see Morningstar losing all the beauty and consequently the pride. He becomes ugly and embarrassed.

Several of the creatures in *Ben 10* have strange appearances. Aljet takes the appearance of a porcupine while Crash-hopper takes the head of a grasshopper with a cone–shaped head that can pierce the ceiling when he jumps high. Almost all of Ben's alien forms are humorous because of their strange nature. Spider Monkey combines the features of a spider and a monkey while Grey Matter, a mere frog is associated with extreme intelligibility. Kevin also looks funny when he touches matter and his body becomes that matter even if it is a stone. These funny-looking creatures amuse the children and they contribute in a big way to their interest in the cartoon. Incongruity makes them amused.

5.3 Symbolism

In addition to humour, there is use of symbolism. Symbolism involves the use of words, names, objects, persons or situations to represent something else. It is used to enhance the meaning that the artist intends to convey. In *Ben 10,* symbolism is achieved in several ways.

Firstly, *Ben 10* relies on name symbolism. The names given to some of the characters are related to the characters' behaviour. For example, in *Ben 10 Original* and *Ben 10 Omniverse,* there is a character known as Dr. Animo. This name is symbolic because Dr Animo is a brilliant mad scientist obsessed with genetic experiments on animals. He was once a promising researcher in veterinary science that had a special way with animals, but his career was cut short when it was discovered that he was performing twisted genetic experiments on animals. His aim was to build a 'Transmodulator', a device that can mutate animals into giant monsters and bring back dead creatures. He tried to create armies of mutant monsters and was even able to use DNA

information from the Omnitrix to enhance his creatures. His name 'Animo' sounds like the word 'animal' referring to somebody who deals with animals.

Another symbolic name is Rath. This is a play on the word 'wrath' which is an informal synonym of extreme anger. Ben has no control of his temperament when he is in this state because he lacks reasoning. Sometimes he fights anything that breathes regardless of whether he fights his own friends or enemies. Rath's mannerisms and speech are reminiscent of a professional wrestler. He is fond of saying, 'Let me tell you something!' then followed by the full name of whoever they are talking to. In *Omniverse*, Ben goes to look for Dr. Animo and does not find him at his cell. He goes to an anthill and transforms to Rath and in anger he fights the ants so vigorously until he affects the power of the Omnotrix whose power goes down. Fortunately he transforms to Crash hopper and the Omnitrix regains its power.

The name Humangousaur symbolizes a combination of a dinosaur and a human being. Humangousaur is a big, brown dinosaur-like creature with a big tail and a very thick skin. He has two hands and walks on two feet like a human being. Some of his physical features are human while others are dinosaur like hence the name. Just like a dinosaur, he is ugly and can grow abnormally big yet he also has some human qualities like being humane and protecting the world by throwing a device that was meant to destroy the world into the space. He has the power to increase his body size and his strength increases in the same proportion.

Charmcaster is also a symbolic name as it refers to Gwen's enemy, a sorceress who has the power to cast spell or charms to her enemies. She is skilled in various magical spells. Forced to flee to earth when her father died, Charmcaster resolved to become a great sorceress so she can have her revenge. In A *Change of Face*, she attempts a body swap spell with Gwen. This fails and leads to her losing her spell book to Gwen while she is trapped in a female's juvenile hall and this becomes the source of their enmity.

Brainstorm's name suggests a creature with a lot of brains. He has a very big head and is very intelligent. Brainstorming refers to a situation where many people think at the same time. His name suggests that he alone thinks as if they are many people.

Diamond Head derives his name from the fact that he can control his crystal physiology at will allowing him to create crude crystal weapons from any part of his body on demand and can fire shards from his hands. His crystal body acts as a prism that can refract light and energy beams. He uses the diamond-like crystals on his body to pierce or cut his enemies.

Some other names point to the appearance and the behaviour of the characters. For instance, Cannonbolt takes the shape of a cannon ball which allows him to roll at a very high speed. Since his body is armored, he is able to attack his enemy by hitting him with his hard body. In the episode, *Preplexahedron* Ben fights with Aggregor who has absorbed all the powers of the aliens. Ben had taken the last quarter of The Map of Infinity and Aggregor wanted to destroy the keeper of the key so that he gets the rest of the map. If Aggregor manages to get the key, he will destroy the universe. Ben transforms into Cannonbolt and rolls on him until he defeats him.

Jetray takes the appearance of a bat and his speed is compared to that of a jet. He has the ability to move at a speed of a jet as well as a ray. His name therefore reflects on his speed. Whenever Ben is fighting a fast moving enemy, he transforms into this form. Grey Matter is a grey skinned and intelligent creature. The term 'Grey Matter' refers to the brain. The name therefore refers to a character endowed with a lot of brains. Though Ben hates transforming into this alien who takes the shape of a frog, the form helps him to use his intelligence and conquer very big creatures. Heatblast generates heat which allows him to move at a very high speed. He can also use the heat to burn his enemies. Big Chill's name suggests that he can freeze his enemies and he cannot survive in extreme weather.

Stinkfly emits an irritating jelly that stinks. His size is compared to that of a fly but he is able to use what he has to fight big creatures and defeat them. His name also suggests his stinking nature. He uses smell as his weapon and the creatures run away from him. For example, in *The Alliance*, Dr. Animo captures Ben using a flying bird. To get to Gwen, Ben changes to Stinkfly and jets out his acid to the bird until it releases Gwen. All these names symbolize the behavior of the characters.

In *Ben 10 Omniverse*, there are creatures called Buzzshock but are commonly referred to as Mega Watts that take the shape of a battery. They can enter power lines and go wherever they want. This shape represents what they do. In *The More Things Change Part 1*, Rook Bonko, Ben's new ally uses these aliens to catch up with his enemy since they are fast then Ben catches up with him later since he uses the Omnitrix.

Humungousaur is a tall dinosaur-like alien which possesses great strength and a thick layer of skin just like a real dinosaur. He has power to increase his body size and his strength increases as he grows. He has the qualities of a dinosaur of big size and immense energy. His voice symbolizes his size. He has a loud deep voice which matches his big size.

Rath takes the appearance of a tiger, an animal known for its fierce nature. Rath's attitude is equated to that of a tiger that has a volatile temperament. Whenever Ben turns into this creature, other human beings fear him because he loses control of himself and can attack anybody even his own friends and family.

Brainstorm is used symbolically in several ways. First, he is a very intelligent alien hence his name. His big head represents his superior brains. He uses his brains to make very complex calculations. He calculates the possible ways of destroying his enemies. He is fond of saying, ''According to my calculations……'' When Ben takes this form, he speaks with much greater diction and with a British accent. The name also suggests many thinkers in one. Brainstorming refers to many people thinking of one issue and giving their ideas. This means that he has a lot of brains such that when he thinks alone, he is like many people thinking at the same time.

Crashhopper is also a symbolic name. This alien takes the form of a grasshopper and is able to hop very quickly from one place to another. It can also jump very high and crush a missile with its cone-shaped head. In the episode, *Of Predators and Prey*, Ben had transformed to Stinkfly and wanted to get away from the predator since the hunter would transform into a predator of

whatever form Ben took. Ben had to change to Crash-hopper and jump from the tail of the predator and start spinning and kicking the predator.

The characters in *Ben 10* represent the society today. Ben, his parents, Gwen, Grandpa Max and all Ben's allies represent the good people who are out to protect the world at whatever cost. They go out of their way to risk their lives for the sake of humanity. Ben fights with very huge creatures which almost harm him sometimes but he never gives up. For example, Vilgax is his worst enemy and will stop at nothing to get the Omnitrix. At first, he only chased Ben for the Omnitrix but his several defeats made him resolve to kill the boy as well. Ben does not get cowed down but continues protecting the universe.

The destructive aliens who include Vilgax and the Forever Knights represent evil people in the society who are out to cause harm to other people and destroy the world. They use technology which is supposed to help humanity for their own selfish gains. For example, in *Ben 10 Omniverse,* Dr Animo tries to enlarge earth's ant population and use them to take over the world. However, Ben thwarts this move and Dr. Animo is returned to his cell.

The antagonism between the two groups shows the forces that operate in the real world. Technology is supposed to help people to improve their lives but people have misused it and tried to destroy what they have not created. Probably Ben's win means that nobody has power to transform the world or destroy it. This means there is another power beyond human ability that controls the world and the human race does not have the power to destroy the world. They can only interfere with it up to a limited level.

5.4 Hyperbole

Another dominant technique in cartoons is hyperbole. Hyperbole is a figure of speech which involves exaggeration of ideas for the sake of emphasis and humour. It is a Greek word meaning 'over-casting' Hyperbole is generally achieved through the use of caricature and sometimes overstatements. Caricature refers to a distorted representation of an individual that is achieved through distorting or enlarging some parts of the body.

Some creatures in *Ben 10* are given exaggerated features. For example, Azmuth, the creator of the Omnitrix has very big eyes that stand out on his small body. This caricatured appearance is meant to make him stand out as a special character which has played an important role in creating the story. He belongs to the Galvanis species who are the makers of the Omnitrix. This means that he understands the Omnitrix more than Ben himself or any other creature.

Grey Matter is a small frog-like creature that has a very small body and extremely big eyes. The eyes contrast with the small body to emphasize on his ability to see far and dodge its enemies through small openings. They also reflect on his intelligence as his name suggests. His level of intelligence is exaggerated as he can think very fast and quickly go through a very small space to evade his enemies.

Besides Grey matter, Diamondhead has a head with diamond crystals and can grow more crystals even to the ground. This is an exaggeration because it is not a normal occurrence to have a creature producing diamond heads at will.

Most of the activities in *Ben 10* are hyperbolic because the characters engage in activities that are exaggerated and beyond human ability. The human characters like Ben, Gwen and Kevin posses supernatural powers. Ben derives his powers from the Omnitrix which he strikes and changes to any alien he wishes. The operations of the Omnitrix are hyperbolic. It can produce over a million aliens with numerous alien powers. Gwen, like her grandmother sucks power from nature and she only needs to stretch her hands and issue a command. She saves Ben whenever he is in danger.

Kevin can absorb all the powers of the aliens of the Omnitrix to be one. He also has the ability to absorb the properties of any solid matter he touches. In *Ben 10 Omniverse*, Kevin sucks the powers of all the other aliens and grows extremely huge with different colours in different parts of the body. His body size is exaggerated. His power to suck all the other aliens' powers is also an exaggeration.

Four Arms has extreme energy. He has four arms and can fight several people at a go. He has so much energy that he can lift a huge creature, spin him round several times and throw him several kilometers away. In the episode '*The More Things Change Part1*', Four Arms uproots a huge tree using his hands and uses it to hit and harm his enemy. His energy is exaggerated.

Jetray has exaggerated speed. Whenever Ben wants to fight jets and spaceships, he transforms into this creature that no enemy has ever beaten in speed. He is said to move faster than light. Light is known to move extremely fast and therefore one would wonder how fast this creature moves. These abilities are exaggerated to appeal to the imagination of the children.

5.5 Irony

There are ironical situations in *Ben 10*. Irony is a technique of indicating an intention or attitude opposite to that which is ostensibly stated. It is a figure of speech in which words are used in such a way that their intended meaning is different from the actual meaning of the words. It may also be a situation that may end up in quite a different way from what is generally anticipated. It is a difference between the appearance and the reality.

The most outstanding ironical situation is seen in Ben who is a young boy of between age eleven and sixteen years and is able to fight and defeat very strong and powerful creatures. He does this through striking the Omnitrix with his hand and immediately assumes the form of the creature that appears on it. Most of the creatures he fights with are much bigger than Ben himself who ends up defeating them even as they also possess some powers. This irony fascinates children because it gives them the impression that their small size is not a hindrance to their achieving their goals. Size is not always the measure of ability.

The Echo Echo aliens also portray an ironical situation. They are very small in size but can produce very high pitched voices that scare away the enemies. These enemies who are very big in size and view themselves as very strong are defeated by very small creatures using their voice. This shows that physical strength is not always the only weapon one can use for self defense.

Stinkfly is also a small animal that is able to jet out a foul smelling acid that scares away its enemies. Though a fly is a very small creature, it is able to use what is at its disposal to fight and beat his big opponents. This is again ironical that an animal with so much physical energy can be beaten by a small and weak animal like a fly.

As Ben uses the Omnitrix, sometimes he loses control and gets unexpected results. This is ironical because instead of being in control of the Omnitrix, the Omnitrix takes control and transforms him to a creature he does not intend. Fortunately for him, even if he turns into a creature that is not his choice, that creature still ends up helping him. For instance, whenever Ben changes into Grey Matter, he is very unhappy because this creature is small but through its intelligence, it ends up helping him. In the episode, *Enemy of My Enemy*, the forever knights want to blow up the museum and Ben wants to transform to Humangasour because of his big size and strength so as to outdo them. Unfortunately, he over-strikes the Omnitrix and transforms into Rath who gets angry and keeps on complaining. In his bad temper, he reaps the top of the tanker Where the Forever Knights are hiding. He defeats them.

Techniques have been effectively used to show that there is a very close relationship between fantasy and reality because fantasy is not created from a vacuum but from what happens in real life. It is through these techniques that fantasy is realized.

CONCLUSION

This research report has analyzed the language and the style as well as the themes in *Ben 10* drawing several conclusions.

The first is that, *Ben 10* has become so popular among Kenyan children that it has been printed on clothes, Ben 10 games have been produced and Ben 10 toys are on super market shelves. Research shows that Ben 10 toys and T-shirts do not last a week on super market shelves. Below are examples of *Ben 10* items found in the streets and on supermarkets shelves.

There is a very close relationship between the African traditional narrative and the film. They both make use of the narrative voice to tell their story. This means that with change of economic times where parents no longer have time to tell oral stories to their children, the film can step in and fill the gap. Just like the face-to-face interaction in an oral narration, the child audience is able to interact with the pictures.

Due to the close relationship between fantasy and reality, *Ben 10* appeals to children. This is because it addresses issues that are part and parcel of the children's real world. Children desire to have power and freedom but in most cases parents and adults do not give them the opportunity to enjoy this freedom. All the twenty children interviewed had watched at least one season of any of the four series several times. They all wished to watch all the series but availability of the film in the local market was only limited to some seasons. They all said that they envy Ben who

enjoys a lot of freedom at a very young age. The cartoon addresses themes like love, escapism, revenge and power which are part of their day-to-day life. Fantasy helps them to enjoy on screen what they may not enjoy in reality.

Ben 10 uses modern technology to convey the message in it. Children of age six to ten enjoy manipulating objects with their hands. They also find it fun to manipulate technology like the television, mobile phones and computers. The development of each episode is based on manipulating technology and therefore the cartoon makes them feel as if they are part of this manipulation as they watch Ben manipulate the Omnitrix and other sophisticated objects. Since they also enjoy adventure, they feel part of the adventure that Ben engages in. He is able to change into creatures that give him power, freedom, control and the ability to change into incongruous creatures. Incongruity appeals to the children. The fact that he changes into some forms that allow him to be invisible, appeals to the children who sometimes would like to do things incognito. During some of their games like 'hide and seek', this invisibility appeals to them.

The cartoon applies simple language and styles that appeal to children. Most of the events are humorous and children will always enjoy watching what makes them laugh. This humour is achieved through the use of styles like hyperbole where characters have very exaggerated features like big body sizes and extra body parts. Some parts are caricatured making the characters look funny. The names given to the characters are symbolic because they represent certain characteristics of familiar creatures. Such symbolic names appeal to the children because to them, these are not abstract names but names that communicate meaning. The characters have

appearance and shapes that symbolize their behavior hence making it easy for the children to identify with them. The cartoon is divided into series and episodes. Each episode takes approximately twenty minutes which is short enough for the child to watch without getting tired.

The main characters in the cartoon are children. Ben, Gwen and Kevin are young children ranging between ages eleven and sixteen. This makes it easy for the children to identify with the film. Adult characters who take part like Grandpa Max and Ben's parents only take supportive roles. This adds to the reality in the film because it is not possible to have a world of children only; there must be adults who take care of the children. The DN Aliens and the Forever Knights are viewed by the children as their enemies because they fight Ben, Gwen and Kevin. The children also hate them for attacking Grandpa Max and Ben's parents because children will always protect their parents and their siblings. This makes the cartoon appropriate for children.

The study influences the child to see everything as being possible. This is what sparks the children's appeal to the cartoon. Ben is given positive values like saving the world and caring about others. This spark can be taken advantage of and used to communicate these values to show the children that even though they are young, they have a role to play in the society. They can save other people from danger, they can save the environment and like Gwen, they can save their parents and family in times of danger.

America being a multi-racial society, the cartoon has helped to enhance tolerance among races. Allan, a good friend of Ben, Gwen and Kevin is black and the text does not display any

discrimination against him. In the same way, some of the zombie girls are also black while others are white but they all suffer the same fate under the hands of Michael Morningstar. This is positive in the eyes of the Kenyan child who realizes that no race is superior to another and people go through the same experiences as human beings regardless of colour or gender.

Though the cartoon can be used to stand in the place of the oral story, it can lead to the loss of very fundamental elements of the oral story. For example, the loss of warmth of a group interaction during a narration process, which is what fostered inter personal and inter communal relationship in traditional Africa. There is always a basic instinct in every human being that dictates necessity for human contact which is achieved during an oral narration. Though film is audio, the audience only interacts with a machine. In this case the performance cannot take into consideration the mood of the performer or the audience. The audience does not have the opportunity to interrogate the performer and the performer cannot adjust the narrative to suit a specific audience or setting. The audience can only comment amongst themselves, but they cannot have any influence on the performance.

The cartoon has a negative effect on the children. The theme of revenge is highly emphasized. In most of the events, Ben is seen pursuing his enemies to execute revenge. The children get the idea that there is no room for dialogue, forgiveness or reconciliation in life and one can only get justice through revenge. The reaction of the children to various episodes revealed that children get a certain kind of satisfaction when they revenge and harbor the wish to destroy their enemies. They also expressed the wish for self defense which again may lead to the children harming anyone who offends them.

Intelligence is supposed to help people to solve problems but in *Ben 10* it is used to harm and destroy. The evil genius motif is widely used and this may influence the children negatively. It may give them the impression that, it is alright to use one's brains to do evil like coning, manipulating, blackmailing and destroying others. In this regard, the study finds this cartoon not appropriate for a child since he/she is still in the formative stage and whatever literature he/she is exposed to is certain to influence what he/she becomes in future.

Ben 10 gives the child confidence and hope that despite his small size, he can play a role in the society and can be responsible of himself. This confidence can also be taken advantage of to influence children to undertake tasks that are deemed to be too difficult for them.

APPENDIX

Questionnaire

The following are the questions subjected to the twenty pupils of Milimani Kitengela Junior Academy to establish how far they identify with *Ben 10* cartoon series.

1. Have you ever watched *Ben 10?*

2. If yes, did you enjoy it and why?

3. Which character appealed to you most and why?

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