

THE IMAGE OF MEN AND WOMEN: A LEXICAL-PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO LEXICAL CHOICES OF SELECTED BUKUSU CIRCUMCISION SONGS

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Abstract

The present paper is a lexical-pragmatic approach to lexical items used in selected Bukusu circumcision songs to bring out the image of men and women. Thus, the paper's aim is to analyse the lexical items in the selected Bukusu circumcision songs so as to find out which lexical item is given much prominence in the selected Bukusu circumcision songs. The research that gave forth the present paper arose out of the realization that the development and the growth of towns and industries have contributed to changes in the ways of life in African communities. Thus, if African heritage, including circumcision, is not preserved in writing future generations will greatly miss on their past. Methods used in data collection include observation schedules, interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions and purposive sampling of respondents was done for the songs used in the research. The paper used lexical pragmatic theory, especially the communicative principal of relevance. The conclusion of the paper is that it cannot be pointed out which lexical choices are used most in the selected Bukusu circumcision songs because the intention of the song determines the lexical choices to be employed.

Key Words: a pragmatic approach, lexical choices, Bukusu, Circumcision Songs.

1.0 Introduction

Every era in time is accompanied by music of its time, almost like an imprint that reflects cultural reality always striving for aesthetics. Music is truly a narrator of what human beings have gone through and still evolving to become. Thus without music, the life span will be shortened because our ability to emotionally express will be limited and that would be directly linked to our mental and physical health. Singing and dancing are an integral part of African culture. Most songs have deep expressions and employ figurative language. Songs serve the function of teaching, mourning, entertaining, criticizing, soothing, consoling, thanking, expressing love and inspiring people in a

particular community. The songs are classified according to the situation in which they are sung. Some of the situations that demand particular songs include child birth, naming, lullabies, initiation and wedding. Initiation songs play an important role in African culture and particularly to the Bukusu people.

Circumcision songs among the Bukusu people have perhaps been studied in different fields of academics. Wanyama (2006) identified, investigated and explained the various structures, forms, meanings and functions of traditional Bukusu circumcision songs against the backdrop of modernity. It is important to note that this work by Wanyama is not exclusively linguistic. A lexical pragmatic approach to songs from other communities like Kalenjin, Dholuo, and Kipsigis have been sporadically discussed by Koech (2013), Omollo (2014) and Keter (2013) respectively, but to date no systematic study of this approach has been done on Bukusu circumcision songs.

Although many Bukusu people have embraced foreign faiths such as Christianity and Islam, there are many adherents to traditional religious beliefs. These traditional beliefs and practices pervade the initiation rites and normally come to the fore during the initiation season. Embalu, Bukusu initiation rite, is believed to be a traditional practice which the young Bukusu men must undergo before being considered as adult members (people ready to marry) of the society. This practice prepares the youth for eventual life in the community and orientates them to practice the norms and values of the Bukusu society.

2.0 Objective

The present paper has one objective, namely;

1. To analyze the lexical items used in selected Bukusu circumcision songs using a lexical pragmatic approach.

3.0 Rationale

Technological development and the growth of towns and industries have contributed to changes in the ways of life in African Communities (Wanyama 2006). These changes have given rise to new concerns and by extension to the new performance styles. Despite these, traditional Bukusu circumcision songs embody aspects of social control that are worthy preserving for the future generation. This paper is important therefore as it analyzes the lexical items used in selected Bukusu circumcision songs and this can be preserved in a scholarly manner for future comparison.

4.0 Theory

Lexical pragmatics is a rapidly developing branch of linguistics that investigates the processes by which linguistically – specified (literal) word meanings are modified in use. This is important because in communication, words are often used in ways that depart from their ‘literal’ meanings; that is, the meaning assigned to them by the grammar. Wilson and Carston (2007) state that an input is relevant to an individual when it connects with available contextual assumptions to yield positive cognitive effects. For the present paper, the most important type of cognitive effect is the contextual implication, an implication deducible from input and context together, but from neither input nor context alone. Other things being equal, the greater the cognitive effects, and the smaller the mental effort required to derive them (by representing the input, accessing a context and deriving any contextual implications), the greater the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.

According to the communicative principle of relevance, utterances (and other acts of ostensive communication) are special among cognitive inputs in that they raise presumptions or expectations of relevance in their addressees. To understand the interpretation of the difference between the encoded concepts and the communicated concept, one must understand ad hoc concepts.

Ad hoc concepts are considered as the essence of lexical pragmatics. They cannot be understood without a relevance theoretic account. Ad hoc concepts refer to a communicated concept that can only be accessed in a given context through the process of pragmatic inference. An ad hoc concept is an occasion - specific concept sense, based on interaction among encoded concepts, contextual information and pragmatic expectations or principles (Wilson and Carston 2007). The use of ad hoc concepts to account for the contribution of the principle of relevance to explicit communication has two straight forward consequences. In the first place, it helps to explain how loose use, metaphor, symbolism or irony arise unconsciously and spontaneously without needing to acquire or learn social maxims or norms. In the second place, the fact that such uses contribute to explicit communication is favoured by the use of single pragmatic principle, cognitive in nature that explains all cases.

Ad hoc concepts are therefore important in the analysis and interpretation of the figurative language used in selected Bukusu circumcision songs. The concept of context has been important in our study of these songs for it helped the researchers to infer meaning from the figurative language used.

5.0 Methodology

5.1 Data Collection

The most suitable instruments for collecting data for the study were observation schedules, interview, questionnaire and focus group discussions. The instruments were used to clarify how and why men and women are portrayed in Bukusu circumcision songs.

5.1.1 Observation Schedules

Observation involves collection of data and recording without manipulating it. The researchers used systematic observation when listening to some circumcision songs sung by youths and in televisions and while observing the non verbal feedback from the singers. These television stations included KBC Channel 1 and KTN. The purpose of observation in the context of this study was to listen to the lexical items used when the songs are in progress. From it, the researchers deduced the most common lexical items used by singers in selected circumcision songs.

5.1.2 Interviews

Our research used the unstructured interview schedules to collect data from persons who were considered to hold crucial and relevant information on Bukusu circumcision songs. In this case the targeted respondents were youths who participated in composing and singing of the songs and elderly members of the society who have experienced various changing phases of the practice of Bukusu circumcision for a period of time. The interviews had open ended questions focusing on the research objective. The questions were left open to enable the interviewees to express their feelings and perspectives. Because of the open nature of the unstructured interviews, probing was commonly used to get deeper information intended to lead the respondents towards giving data to meet the study objective.

The style of the interviews was conversational and was meant to make the interviews interactive.

5.1.3 Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a set of questions on a topic or groups of topics designed to be answered by respondents. Our research found this instrument to be apt to our study because it is free from bias of the interviewer and gave respondents adequate time to give well thought answers. The first questionnaire was filled by literate youths of age 14 to 25 years from three locations from Bungoma East Sub County; that is, Chatembe, Misikhu and Namarambi. This was used to seek first hand information on the message conveyed from the songs since most songs are composed and sung by the same youths.

The second questionnaire was filled by three old men and three old women of age between 50 – 70 years from the three locations and who were also literate. The targeted old people were those deeply rooted in the traditions of Bukusu and understood well the cultural values of the community. This enabled the researchers to come up with the true picture of the kind of language used in selected Bukusu circumcision songs. Some artists like Jua Kali have also sung these circumcision songs as part of their music. Their video tapes were much utilized too.

5.1.4 Focus group discussions

Three groups consisting of 9 youths (in every group) were chosen from the three locations that were under study. The chosen groups discussed different meanings they thought came up in selected Bukusu circumcision songs under the guidance of the researchers.

It was basically a qualitative method in which the researchers, with the help of predetermined guidelines, stimulated free discussion among the participants on the subject under study. The order in which the topic was covered was flexible. At the end, some follow up questions were asked to reveal more in-depth information about the subject of discussion.

The focus group session was held in a natural setting and in a relaxed manner. The full discussion was recorded on videos and tapes. The researchers also observed and noted nonverbal group feedback and transcribed the complete discussion based on notes and tapes. These transcripts then served as basic data for our analysis.

5.2 Sampling of Songs

The researchers selected 22 songs from the community using purposive sampling. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) define purposive sampling as a sampling technique that allows a researcher to use cases that have the required information with respect to the objectives of his or her study.

Therefore, subjects are handpicked because they are informative or they possess the required characteristics. In this study the sample size of subjects consisted 22 circumcision songs, 27 youths and 9 elderly people. The 22 selected songs carry the linguistic devices under the study. The researchers also listened to the recorded songs; recorded live performances then selected songs relevant to the study. The selected songs were then analyzed and examined with the aim of identifying the lexical items and to find out which of them carry the linguistic devices under the study.

5.3 Data Analysis

The 22 songs which were found to be carrying the linguistic devices under the study were selected with the aim of establishing which lexical items are used. For this reason, each song was examined and the figures of speech employed in the songs noted and tabulated (e.g. metaphors, symbolisms

and ironies).

The 22 selected songs were then transcribed in the original Bukusu and translated into English. The researchers relied on their encyclopedic knowledge in translating the songs and tried to be as close as possible to the original meaning of the songs. Other native speakers especially the old, of age 50-70 years, were also consulted. Previous works done on the two languages were also relied on where researchers were in doubt especially on the meaning of figures of speech.

6.0 Lexical Choices of Selected Bukusu Circumcision Songs

This paper examines the choice of lexical items of the selected Bukusu circumcision songs. The paper begins with a brief discussion on the choice of lexical items in the selected songs. The paper then explores the various word formation processes of lexical borrowing, compounding and derivation which will enhance our analysis of the use of figurative language in Bukusu circumcision songs. The paper also discusses different strategies that form the base of the lexical items used in selected Bukusu circumcision songs. These include tabooed words and euphemisms, and figurative language like metaphors, symbolism and irony as used in the songs.

The selected Bukusu circumcision songs use language that is highly evocative. The social setting of the community provides the choice of lexical items to be used. The social environment in which people live plays a major role in shaping people's attitudes and behavior. It constantly supplies them with information that may influence the way they choose lexical items. This also plays a significant role among the Bukusu community beliefs and attitudes about what it means to be a male or female member of the society.

Basically, the selected Bukusu circumcision songs make use of three main word formation processes which have greatly contributed to the choice of lexical items. The word formation processes include borrowing, compounding and derivation.

Bukusu circumcision songs employ certain linguistic strategies to convey their messages to the recipients. The linguistic strategies used include tabooed and euphemistic words and figurative language that centres on the use of metaphors, symbolism and irony.

6.1 Tabooed and Euphemistic Words in Selected Bukusu Circumcision Songs

In the Bukusu community, an aspect that is significant in respect to the status of men and women is the imposition of taboos. Songs involve subjects that are tabooed which are a prohibition against performing certain acts and is motivated by social sanction (Balandier and Magnet 1974). It is a way in which a society expresses disapproval of certain kinds of behavior believed to be harmful to its members, either for supernatural reason or because such behavior violates a moral code (Wardhaugh 1986). Within the Bukusu cultural practices, taboos are used to enforce moral values. This is evident in some songs. For example:

Song Code 1

Soloist	Response
Eeh Eeh senganakananga	Khu Nyikuri, Marita yanyola End akhu Nyikuri
Ingo w aMarit amang'anyu kandia	Khu Nyikuri, Marita yanyola Enda khu Nyikuri

English

Eeh eeh I have been thinking	About Nyikuri, Marita was Impregnated by Nyikuri
I am afraid of Marita's home	About Nyikuri, Marita was Impregnated by Nyikuri.
I am afraid of Marita's home	About Nyikuri, Marita was Impregnated by Nyikuri.

According to Bukusu people, it is a taboo for a girl to conceive before marriage. Marita in the above song is being condemned for such behavior. Though this is expected on both Nyikuri and Marita, in the song we find only Marita being criticized. The choice of the lexical items in the songs is biased against Marita just because she is a girl.

Whereas the lexical items used in the Bukusu circumcision songs condemn women, some songs are used to encourage men to engage in sexual affairs with their own relatives. When such an incidence occurs, it is considered normal for men but a curse for women. This is an infantile stereotype that demoralizes women as they are disowned by their families and at times ex-communicated from their society.

Let's consider the data below;
Song code **6**

Soloist

Nachile Khane Omwana
Lusibo emwalo
Newenya Khureba orebaNaity
English

Response

Khane Omwana lusibo
Khane lusibo emwalo
Oreba Naity woluswa

I went there only to find that the Girl had a hole If you want to seduce Seduce Naity	the girl had a hole, had a hole in her private parts Seduce Naity who practiced incest.
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The song talks of a girl Naity who slept with her father. The lexical items used in the song i.e lusibo 'a hole' and woluswa 'who practiced incest' condemn the girl's character and call on men to seduce her as she is considered loose. There is nowhere again in the song where the father is condemned despite what he did to the daughter. This song considers Naity's father as either a hero or a blameless person unlike the daughter.

The treatment given to boys and girls during and after circumcision also reveals gendered culture. Among the Bukusu peoples, after circumcision, boys go through a ceremony called Khukhwalukha (cleansing ceremony) where they are taught on cultural and societal expectations. During this time, women are forbidden from joining the groups. This initiation activity is an exclusive preserve of men. In order to prevent women from having its knowledge, they are traditionally not allowed to get involved in it so as not to understand the teachings that go on. Ironically, sources from elders who teach the youths say that most of the teachings encourage men to rule over women. This infringes on the freedom of women. The lexical items used in the songs sang or recited during this period also attack women. This can be well illustrated in song code **7** below;

Soloist	Response
Kumuliango kukwukukhe	Kukwoo ingila
Kumuliango kukwikale	Kwabene okhengilamo ta

English	
An open door	Is yours so enter
A closed door	For others do not enter

In the song about *khukhwalukha* quoted above, a woman is equated to a door. If a door is open, the initiates who are men are free to enter. This statement means men are encouraged to engage in love affairs with single women. This kind of encouragement explains why Bukusu men are notoriously polygamous. Such use of language is what constitutes euphemisms for taboo words.

Taboo words can be defined as lexical items which refer to subjects or experiences or parts of the human body which are not supposed to be talked about in public or in polite company. The commonest are the ones which refer to intimate areas of our bodies. Taboo words are characteristically emotionally charged; they arouse feelings of anger, revulsion, and excitement (Akmajian et al 2001). Some common tabooed words in Bukusu circumcision songs are:

Tabooed words	Euphemisms
Endene (penis)	Esimbo/kimukilingili
Omukhasi (A woman)	Omukhaye (one who harvests)
Kamatakho (buttocks)	Kamekhalilo (bottom)
Khunda (fuck)	Khupa kamechi (make love)

In the selected Bukusu circumcision songs, the lexical items that are tabooed are used to expose the behavior of women. Tabooed words are employed by these songs so as to humiliate women and arouse the feelings of excitement in them. This is a common feature in selected Bukusu circumcision songs. For example:

Song Code 2

Soloist	Response
Sainapu	Hoo-ho, Sainapu
	Sabona endene kesenda

English	
Soloist	Response
Zainabu	Hoo-ho, Zainabu
	Cannot move on seeing a penis

Song Code 9

Soloist	Response
Mayi omukhwe kumunie kwasimula	Tisia

English

Soloist	Response
Mother in -law's vagina sneezes	Feel it

The following words as used in the selected Bukusu circumcision songs are tabooed for their corresponding euphemisms:

Tabooed word	Euphemism
(i) Endene (Penis)	Esimbo/kumukilingili (A walking stick)
(ii) Kumunie (Vagina)	Bibindu (Things/Wealth)

The mission of these songs employing the tabooed words is to ironically expose women's moral lives. Euphemistic words have also been used widely in the songs. Euphemisms are those words which soften the effect of taboo words. According to O' Grady (1996), euphemism is the avoidance of words which may be seen as offensive, obscene, or somehow disturbing to the listeners or readers. We encounter euphemisms in socio-political sphere. For instance, homosexuals would prefer to be called "gay" people, in order to negate the image of 'unhappy' group of social 'deviants' (Indangasi 1988). The word mwenye mimba (pregnant) in Kiswahili has negative connotations, and the reference is made to mjamzito (expectant).

In selected Bukusu circumcision songs, men's sexual organs, their promiscuous behavior and other vices are referred to by lexical items that are used figuratively in euphemistic ways to conceal the intended meaning. Euphemism is used in Bukusu circumcision songs to protect the face of men and show respect to them. Sexual organs and sex issues are taboo subjects among the Bukus, and words describing them are mostly unmentionable. The selected Bukusu circumcision songs use lexical choices that are not seen as taboo when referring to men and their sexuality. This is well illustrated in the data below where the words "okupata" a duck, aumbula, 'he separates', Omulindi "security guard" and khuchanja "to vaccinate" have been used instead of endene (penis), and akhunda (he fucks) in the selected Bukusu circumcision songs. Consider this data:

Song Code 14

Soloist	Response
Okendanga polepole endi	
Okupata kwakhusocha	Mung'ati

English

Soloist	Response
You walk slowly because you	
Have been pierced by a duck	In your private parts

Song Code 12

Soloist	Response
Chemiatu aumbula bakhana	Chemiatu aumbula bakhana
English	
Soloist	Response
Chemiatu separates girls	Chemiatu separates girls

Song Code 11

Soloist	Response
Khwenya khumanya nanu	
Owachanja likhese!	Patrick
English	

Soloist**Response**

We want to know	
He who vaccinated a sheep!	Patrick

Therefore, in the above selected Bukusu circumcision songs lexical items are such that euphemism is highly concealed, metaphorical, allusive and symbolical. The lexical items used are relevant in the sense that figurative use of these objects are understood by those who belong to the community. Cultural outsiders who do not belong to the group might not easily understand the underlying meaning of the songs referred to above.

6.2 Figurative Language in Selected Bukusu Circumcision Songs

Language is a semiological system, a system of signs. A linguistic sign designates something in the external world, an object or a relationship between objects. By comparing phenomenon in nature, it becomes easier for us to cognize reality which is cognized in its fullness (Indangasi et al 2013). Figures of speech help us in concretizing abstract ideas; we see something in terms of another. Indangasi et al (2013) note that when dealing with figures of speech, there must be grounds for comparison. According to them, it works when you say, 'Barney is as fat as a goat'. This therefore points out to the fact that figurative language is transfer of meaning which must be acquired through encyclopedic entries. In this section therefore, we discuss the figures of speech that have been effectively used in the selected Bukusu circumcision songs.

6.2.1 Metaphor

This is a figure of speech which makes a comparison between two unlike things without using "like" "as" "resemble" or "similar to". It compares two things to be the same i.e. having the same characteristics or attributes. From pragmatic point of view, what happens in metaphor is that the meaning communicated by use of a particular word or phrase differs from the linguistically encoded literal meaning assigned by the grammar. There is generally a gap between the sentence meaning assigned by the grammar and the speakers meaning conveyed on particular occasion of use (Wilson and Sperber 2004). This is true not only at the level of whole utterances but also at the level of individual words. One way to put this is to say that there is a gap between the concept encoded by a word and the concept expressed (or communicated) by use of that word on a particular occasion. In this paper we focus on metaphors as a process of broadening and how the hearer bridges the gap using lexical pragmatics.

Consider the song Code 7 that has been referred to again below

Soloist	Response
Kumuliango kukwikukhe	Kukwoo
Kukuliango kwikale	Kwabene

Soloist	Response
An opened door	Is your
A closed door	Belongs to others

In the above quoted song, a woman is equated to a door without the use of such words like equals, is like or any other direct synonym of the same. The song is thus left to interpretation.

Basically speaking, most selected Bukusu circumcision songs have metaphors that are left to interpretation.

6.2.2 Symbolism

A symbol is a person, a place, an event or a thing that is used to stand for or represent something beyond itself such as an idea or a feeling (Indangasi et al 2013).

Robert (1994) explains that a symbol is any object that means more than itself, any object that represents something beyond itself. According to this author, the meaning of any symbol whether an object, an action or a gesture, is controlled by its context.

Symbolism in our research plays a crucial role as the songs use different lexical items to either exaggerate or conceal its meaning. Thus concepts that portray men and women in Bukusu circumcision songs are presented using symbolism. When a song wants to expose and offend the vices done by women and at the same time conceal and exalt the behaviors of men they use symbolic words. Consider the following:

Song Code 17

Soloist	Response
Hoo – ho	Hoo-ho-ho sumba
	Khumabuli

English

Soloist	Response
Hoo – ho	Hoo – ho – ho an unmarried
	Energetic man on termites.

In the above song, Kamabuli (termites) symbolically refers to women. This symbol is used to mock a man (Sumba) and downgrade the position of a woman. Animal images are used to symbolize certain aspects. For example: Lipata (a duck), Nanjusi (wild cat), Kipoko (hippopotamus), and so on are used to downgrade women in the Bukusu community. A duck symbolizes good health and peace, a wild cat symbolizes untrustworthiness and a hippopotamus symbolizes strength.

6.2.3 Irony

Something is ironic when it goes against our expectations. An expression is said to be ironic when the meaning of words appear to say the opposite of what is intended (Indangasi et al 2013). Irony involves the use of words which are not intended to be taken at their face value. If the words are spoken, the tone may give a clue as to whether they are intended to be ironic or not. Irony also occurs when a situation is odd or amusing because it involves two factors that you

would normally expect to be connected or related as has already been observed above. In almost all Bukusu circumcision songs used in our study, the concept of irony is noticed by way of vocabulary used and the tone employed in the songs and by both the male and female members of the Bukusu community.

6.0 Conclusion

This paper examined the lexical items used in the selected Bukusu circumcision songs to pass message to the hearers effectively. The intention of the song determines the lexical choices used. Direct reference to the matters concerning women are exposed or accorded denigrating lexical items. The lexical items used to portray men are concealed. The images used to portray both men and women communicate the songs' intention in different ways. The paper generally gives an overview on lexical items and strategies like tabooed words, euphemism, and figurative language that employs the use of metaphors, symbolism and iron in the selected Bukusu circumcision songs.

In the line with the aim of the paper, we can conclude that it is not clear which lexical choices are used most in the Bukusu circumcision songs because the intention of the song is what determines the lexical choices to be employed. Most Bukusu circumcision songs favour men and ridicule women through their selection of lexical items.

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