

Sexism in Language: A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective

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ABSTRACT:

Language plays a crucial role in perpetuating sexism and gender inequality. The research draws on the critical discourse analysis, an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse that views language as a social practice, to explore the existence and nature of sexist language in Kamba Popular Songs. Specifically, this study anchored itself on Grice's second theory of conversational implicature (1991). The research had two objectives: to investigate sexist implicatures in Kamba Popular Songs and describe sexist inferences in the lyrics. The study used the descriptive research design and purposively sampled eight songs from the ten most Kamba Popular Song bands with the youths. Besides, the research used content analysis to identify the possible sexist expressions classified into implicatures and inferences. Further, the researcher categorized the two linguistic items into negative and positive sexism, and the number of each type was counted up and described. The study concludes that Kamba Popular Songs project a sexist perception of women. This research recommends eliminating sexist language in both written and spoken discourse because it contains a lexicon and grammatical structure that trivializes and perpetuates biases against women.

Key Terms: Sexism, Kamba Popular Songs, Critical Discourse Analysis Theory.

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INTRODUCTION

Language has a powerful influence on societal attitudes, thoughts, and perceptions, including gender consciousness and awareness. Despite decades of robust scholarly, societal, and policy efforts, sexist language, which perpetuates and reinforces gender inequality, has persisted across many languages/cultures and even at the highest societal levels. As a case in point, a high-ranking official of the Tokyo Olympics Organizing Committee was recently forced to resign over sexist remarks ('Tokyo Olympics boss resigns but successor unclear,' 2021). In yet another incident in 2019, campaigners, academicians, and upwards of 32,000 online petitioners called on the Oxford University Press to change sexist definitions of the word "woman" and linguistic connotations of male dominance/ownership (Thwaites, 2019). While anecdotal, these incidences point to the fact that sexism remains a significant challenge to achieving gender parity and social development but perhaps most importantly, to the instrumental role of language in sustaining it.

Sexism manifests in three primary forms: blatant, covert, and subtle. Blatant sexism refers to the explicitly prejudicial, discriminatory, and antagonistic treatment of others based on their gender, mainly related to marginalized genders (such as females). On the other hand, Covert sexism refers to the implicitly unequal and unjust treatment of marginalized genders (Banaji and Hardin, 1996). Subtle sexism represents the unequal or unfair treatment of women often embedded through laws, culture, and social discourses. It is unrecognizable for its inherent bias because of its systemic and normative nature (Benokraitis and Feagin, 1999).

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis acknowledges a relationship between language and thought and that all people are affected equally by their language confines. Language is the very thing that shapes those ideas and not a way of

voicing thoughts. Whorf fully believed in linguistic determinism, that what one thinks is entirely determined by one's language (Jaszczolt, 2000). However, from the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, it is unclear whether specific languages cause sexism or sexism causes certain languages. Therefore, sexist language perpetuated in Kamba pop songs may be a widespread cultural element in contemporary Kamba society.

The use of gender-sensitive language is advocated globally in the 21st century, both in written and spoken discourses where equal opportunity is given to all genders. Contemporary society calls for an end to patriarchal power structures that encourage male supremacy, subjugation of women, and biased terminologies. More so, gendered language hinders clear communication, and some style manuals such as American Psychological Association (APA) are now urging for careful editing of sexist terminology. However, Kamba Popular Songs which are played in the media, seem to project a sexist perception of women, which goes against feminist movements that strive, amongst other things, for the elimination of gender discrimination. Feminists argue that changing linguistic and discourse practices are an essential element in women's liberation. This paper notes that sexist language is cultural in Kamba society, as reflected in the Kamba Pop songs. Thus, the current study studies the use of sexist language in Kamba Popular Songs within a Critical Discourse Analysis framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Kamba language belongs to the central Bantu linguistic group found in South Eastern Kenya. According to Greenberg's classification, Kikamba is grouped among the Niger-Congo language families (Whiteley, 1974). Kamba Popular Songs date at least as far as the mid-20th century.

These are songs that are danced to and appeal to a reasonably large group of people based on gender in the Kamba community. In the last ten years, the songs have appealed to the Kamba speakers and a relatively large group of people in other ethnic groups in Kenya. The songs are accessible to the general public and disseminated by the mass media. Vivian (2002) postulates that popular songs are a potent form of human expression that can mobilise hearts and minds. In Africa, musicians are frequently among the public figures who can convey their ideologies through their verbal pronouncements and lyrical. Many popular songs depict women as sex objects and dispatch misogynistic constructions of women.

Studies on sexism in songs reveal that women are depicted as sexual objects (Sara, 2008). Other scholars posit that pop songs are associated with sexist attitudes and beliefs, regardless of the actual lyrical content (Cobb, & Bottcher, 2007; Lutwama, 2008). Also, Parks and Robertson (1998) posit that people use sexist language because it is cultural; they do not believe in the sexiest language or even protects established social hierarchies. These studies have examined sexism using feminist theories. However, little research has been done within Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA), which is the focus of this study.

Fairclough (1995) postulates that CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse that focuses on the ways political and social domination is reproduced by text and talk. It is founded on the premise that there is unequal access to linguistic and social resources. It aims at raising consciousness on exploitative social relations through focusing upon language. In CDA,

the socio-cultural context plays a vital role in the interpretation of discourse. This study examines sexist language in Kamba Popular Songs through a Critical Discourse Analysis window. Using Grice's Second Theory of Conversational Implicature (1991), the study investigates sexist implicatures in Kamba Popular Songs and describes sexist inferences in Kamba Popular Songs.

According to Grice (1991), in any communicative discourse, for example, in the current study Kamba Popular Songs, the speaker's intended message is divided into two parts; what he or she says and what is implied by the utterances. One tries to comprehend the speaker's intended meaning through inferencing guided by the cooperative principle that states: 'Make your conversational contribution such as required, at the level at which it appears by the accepted reason or direction of the exchange you are engaged' (Grice, 1989 p.26). The cooperative principle is made up of four maxims: Maxim of quantity that urges speakers to give enough information in conversations, the maxim of quality that advocates for the truthfulness of utterances, maxim of relation that focuses on the relevance of shared data, and maxim of manner that ensures conversations are brief and orderly. Grice (Ibid) further argues that utterances have deeper meanings, especially when it comes to flouting or violating maxims, forcing communicators to draw implicatures and inferences. This paper attempts to demonstrate that sexism is still prevalent in contemporary Kamba society from the Critical Discourse Analysis lens, specifically anchoring itself on Grice's (1991) Second Theory of Conversational Implicature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A Description of Sexist Inferences in Selected Kamba Popular Songs

This study sought to investigate sexist inferences in selected Kamba Popular Songs. Prezler (2006) defines inference as a mental process through which listeners draw conclusions based on given premises. Thus, listeners have no direct access to the speaker's intended meaning, therefore, relying on clues to conclude.

Table 1: Occurrences of Sexist Inferences

Gender	Positive sexism		Negative sexism	
	Number of occurrences		Number of occurrences	Perc (%)
Female	1	12.5%	6	75%
Male	-	-	1	12.5%

Table 1 shows that negative sexism in women outnumbered negative sexism among men by the ratio of 75:12.5. The KPS artists have concentrated so much on the negative portrayal of women. According to Adrian Hodges Advisory Ltd (2017), there are still a significant number of societies in the world where cultural and social norms perpetuate discrimination against women. Male patriarchy is still maintained in many cultures, including the Kamba community.

In the study, the researcher identified sexist inferences in the Kamba Popular Songs and discussed their sexist connotations. The inferences were categorised as women are proud, women are dirty, women are promiscuous, women are for the sole

purpose of giving men pleasure, men are cruel, and women should not be single.

Women are Proud

In the selected Kamba songs, women were depicted as proud of men who wished to woo them. The following utterances extracted from the data exemplify this.

'Ung'endwanikatimbawainako' _ Boasting of 'the behind' you had

'Ndetoyamuthya' _ the last word

'We wambiienyendiwakilasikyakumwa' _ you told me, I was not really of your class.

In the above utterances, clues such as 'boasting of the behind' and 'I was not really of your class' make us conclude that the artist suggests that the woman is proud. The speaker assumes the listener knows what has been left out of the utterance is the woman's pride. Thus, the Kamba Popular Songs artists portray women as proud of their physical aspects, such as the 'behind.' More so, women are represented as choosy when establishing a relationship. It must be someone of the same class as them. According to Grice (1975), communicators intentionally violate one maxim in their discourse for listeners to infer the implied meaning. Therefore, the artist has intentionally disregarded the maxim of quality that advocates for the truthfulness of utterances by depicting women as proud. The flouting of this maxim can be considered a generalisation since not all women are proud.

Women are Dirty

In the song entitled 'Mary Mali' by Kativui, women are portrayed as being dirty. The data below demonstrates this inference.

'... Na ngasare aka,' _ ... I no longer date women
'Meuthambanusutaku' _ who do not clean all their body parts

'Meukiakiw'u' _ because they are scared of water
The receiver and the speaker have the same common ground of having been friends before. Clues such as women not 'cleaning all their body parts because they are scared of the water' allow the listener to conclude that the KPS artist suggests that women are dirty. The artist doesn't suggest that the men are dirty in the entire song, bringing out his bias towards the women. Cleanliness is something that both young girls and boys are socialised as they grow up. As the saying goes, 'cleanliness is next to godliness'; everybody strives to be clean irrespective of their gender. This finding agrees with Spender's (1985) observation that there is a lot of documented research in which derogatory terms refer to women, their bodies, and, in particular, their genitalia. Women have thus been depicted negatively by men in their works for a very long time.

Women are Promiscuous

In some of the selected KPS, the artists portrayed women as being promiscuous. The examples below drawn from the data capture the inferences.

'Niukulya mama Sisilia' _ I am asking you mother Sisilia
'Nikyau kweli kyaukwatie?' _ what happened to you?
'...Iveti sya aume syiuluma' _ other men's wives cannot manage their homes

'Nundu waku usomethya' _ because you have been training them on prostitution.

From the utterances, we can use clues such as 'other men's wives being trained on prostitution' by mother Sisilia; to infer that women are portrayed as being promiscuous. In many cultures, women's promiscuity is condemned since they are expected to be morally upright by being faithful in their marriages. The KPS artist thus propagates the biblical Jezebel stereotype of women having loose morals. This observation concurs with Goldman and Waymer's (2015) position that black women have always been represented as pervert human beings in the media.

Women lose their Beauty as they age.

In some of the KPS, the artist depicted women as losing their Beauty as they age. The is shown in the examples below. In the song entitled 'Joyce wa Nduku,' the KPS artist sings,
'Joyce Nduku niwathelile' _ Joyce Nduku, you are worn out.
'Utiele sula na ngua' _ What has remained is your face and clothes.

From the above utterances, we can use clues such as the girl being 'worn out' and being told to go back to the village (Mwingi) to infer that she has grown old. Aging is a process for both men and women. However, the above utterances by KPS artists suggest that it is only women and not men who lose their Beauty. There is a close relationship for women between appearance and identity. The signs of aging trigger worries about loss of social esteem. Macdonald (1995) posits women look at aging as a

process to be feared and avoided as long as possible, while for men, it often enhances status and prestige. Therefore, we can argue that society attaches a lot of value to women's age but not their male counterparts.

Women are there for the Sole Purpose of Giving Men Pleasure.

In some of the KPS, women were portrayed as having the sole purpose of giving men pleasure. The examples below drawn from the data illustrate this inference.

'Muthini we kana kaa nonaa wiokwo' _ Muthini baby, I still find you attractive.

'... Nikwendea twindu twili' _ I love you because of two things.

'... Tusuli tu ngwataa ngew'a kawu ketika' _ That hair I normally touch until I sweat.

'... Mbithe, nikwoona mwa ngewa homo' _ '... Mbithe, I normally see you and have lust.'

'... Rose, niwa muyo nye ngwene' _ Rose, I feel happy when I see you.

From the above utterances by the KPS artists, we can use clues such as 'touching the girl's hair until he sweats,' 'seeing her and being lustful' and 'being happy to see the girl' to infer that women are there for the sole purpose of giving men pleasure. The Kamba Popular Song artist focuses on the woman's physical appearance by the Mbithe when he argues that he suffers from lust when he sees her. The woman is thus depicted as a sexual object whose sole purpose is to satisfy men sexually. Bartky (1990) posits that sexual objectification occurs in women when their body parts are detached from them as people

and are only perceived as physical objects of men's sexual desire.

Men are Cruel.

In some of the KPS, the artists portray men as being cruel. The data below drawn from the songs demonstrate the inference.

'... Ndimina Rosalia' _ ... As I conclude Rosalia,

'Namo aume ni nyamu' _ ... men are animals

'Maitungaa nzele' _ they do not take back a calabash.

'Matia ovala maiya' _ they leave it at the place they used it.

Also, in the song entitled 'Mary Mali', the artist sings, '... Aume meeka usama ti kuya'... Men just taste; they do not eat.

'Na maitwekya katimba ndumanya' _ when they loosen your buttocks, you cannot know.

In the above utterances, we can use clues such as 'men are animals, they taste but do not eat' and 'loosen women's buttocks without their knowledge' to infer that men are cruel. The source domain of animals is used to conceptualise human beings, highlighting their attributes in common with animals (Kövecses, 2010). In the song, negative features of animals are thus transferred to men. Men are therefore perceived as being brutal and insensitive since they use women and dump them after use.

Women should not be Single

In the song Rosalia by Kalamba Superstars, women are questioned as to why they are still single. The examples are below drawn from the data.

'Nikulya Rosalia' _ let me ask you Rosalia

'We natiikulyo ithuku' _ and it is not a bad question

‘Kitumi tene kyo nikyau’ _ what is the reason
‘Kyatumisye utatwawa’ _ for you not being married?
‘Nikulya mwa nikuowa’ _ I am asking are you
bewitched
‘Kana nikuwaa’ _ or sick?

From the statement, ‘What is the reason for you not being married?’ we can infer that women should be married. Society expects every woman to be married at a certain age. For a woman who is not married, questions are raised about whether she is bewitched or sick. The artist suggests that marriage is a crucial component of life for all women. Fowers (1998) postulates that marital satisfaction is more significant than a successful career, housing or finances.

An Investigation of Sexist Implicatures in Selected Kamba Popular Songs

This study also sought to investigate sexist implicatures in selected Kamba Popular Songs. The term ‘implicature’ is used by Grice (1991), accounting for what a speaker can suggest, imply, or mean as unique from what the speaker says. There are two kinds of implicature; conversational and conventional. According to Grice (1991), conventional implicatures are determined by the traditional meaning of words used. For example, the man is bald. He is, therefore, wise. On the other hand, conversational implicature is derived from a general principle of the conversation plus several maxims that speakers will generally obey.

Table 2: sexist implicature in selected Kamba Popular Songs

Gender	Positive Sexism		Negative sexism	
	No of occurrences	%	No of occurrences	%
Male	-		1	25
Female	-		3	75

From the table above, it was evident that negative sexism among women outnumbered negative sexism among men by 75: 25. The ratio shows that the KPS artists use language that is mostly biased against women. Wango (2000) argues that people must pay particular attention to the words they use in common day language and social relations since language is used to establish and maintain strong positive relations, values, beliefs and attitudes. Language thus plays a crucial role in passing across a message. The KPS artists should use language that empowers both women and men. In the study, the researcher studied the songs critically, identified implicatures, and examined their sexist connotations. Conversational implicatures were categorised as: women are evil, women are not intelligent, women are sexual objects, and men talk a lot of unimportant stuff.

Women are Evil

In the song ‘Aume’ by ‘Wote Boys Band,’ the artist sings ‘Aka ni maimu’ (Women are ghosts), implying that women are evil. Here, the artist has flouted the maxim of quality that emphasises uttering truthful sentences and avoiding producing statements without

sufficient evidence (Grice, 1975). The artist tends to assume that all women are evil, and this may not be true. More so, he does not give evidence to prove that women are wicked.

Women are Considered Less Intelligent. For example;

In the song entitled 'WakatimbaPumbavu' by Ken wa Maria, he sings,

'Wakatimbanyekweliningusen'a _ 'The behind' I am astonished.

'Nitaviasyaku' _ of your behaviour

'... Wi akilindogo' _ You are unwise.

'... Wakatimbawimana, _ '...The behind' you are useless.

'... Nionawindia' _ I can see you are foolish.

'Wakatimbapumbavu' _ 'the behind' you are stupid

In the above utterances, the artist is lying about women being less intelligent than men, thus violating the quality maxim. Moreso, the artist, keeps repeating the lines'...I can see you are foolish, the behind you are stupid and useless. He lacks brevity in the song, thus violating the maxim of manner.

Women are Sexual Objects

In the song 'Zubeta Mueni' by Nguuni Lovers, the artist sings,

'Ve kana akikeuthiny'akyongo' _ A girl is disturbing my mind

'... Kavyanamalaika' ... She is like an angel.

'... Body smart sana' _ A very nice body

'Na kiungamokiseo' _ and an excellent height

'... Ke hips nomasya letter eiti' _ ... she has lovely hips forming letter eight.

'Na ngelesyashapuilanendete' _ and thighs of the shape that I like.

The above utterances imply that women are sexual objects. The artist has flouted the maxim of quantity by giving unnecessary details of the woman such as nice body, hips, and height, bringing out sexual objectification of women. A woman being reduced to their body parts is dehumanising and thus propagates sexism in language. Langton (2009) argues that women are portrayed as sexual objects due to men's beliefs and desires. Therefore, we can say that patriarchy in the Kamba society has contributed to women being treated as sexual objects. In such cultures, men have power and thus only focus on their desires.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study concluded that most Kamba Popular Songs are sexist and seem to project a sexist perception of women. Also, the problem of sexism in society cannot be solved on the level of language alone. Sexism is a reflection of the thoughts and attitudes of human beings. It is in the change of attitude and in the dynamism of language that changes in the language used by KPS artists should be directed. Moreover, sexism in language is a social problem since it reflects the thoughts of human beings. Language is a comparatively stable system, and much of its depletion in the sexist language is an unintended reflection of attitudinal and social changes.

Recommendations: Kamba Popular Songs artists need to eliminate sexist language in their songs by doing away with the concept of prejudice in their thoughts.

Only in this way can we be free of sexism both in speech and society, including the Kamba community. Owing to the Women's Liberation Movement in Western Countries, women's social status has been bettered, and feminists have made attempts to reduce sexual discrimination and sex-role stereotyping by using several conscious attempts to influence and change languages and linguistic behaviour. The Kamba Popular Songs artists should also emulate this

and portray both men and women positively. In the selected Kamba Popular Songs, the artists seemed to concentrate so much on the negative portrayal of women. Therefore, the Kamba Popular Songs artist needs to positively portray both women and men with few negative traits to bring out a realistic perception of the sexes.

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