A Lexical Pragmatic Interpretation Of Selected Bukusu Circumcision Songs

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Abstract

This study presents a lexical pragmatic interpretation of the selected Bukusu circumcision songs. Most Bukusu circumcision songs use lexical items that are coached in figurative language. These lexical items portray men and women differently and are of necessity realized at the linguistic level; they exist in and derive their meaning from a linguistic context and are sometimes realized at the extra linguistic level. The figurative languages used in selected Bukusu circumcision songs include the use of symbols, metaphors and irony. The study therefore aimed at demonstrating that the lexical items used in selected Bukusu circumcision songs which have a single stable meaning in the linguistic system can nevertheless be used to express a wide range of distinct concepts on different occasions of utterance. This was done by carefully and selectively discussing a whole range of the symbols and metaphors used in selected songs. The study established that lexical comprehension of the selected Bukusu circumcision songs involves a process of ad hoc concept construction, based on information readily accessible from the encyclopedic entries of the encoded concepts and constrained by expectations of relevancy. Thus, our study made use of the lexical pragmatic processes of narrowing and broadening rounded in relevancy theory. The most suitable instruments for collecting data for the study was observation schedules, interviews, questionnaire and focus group discussions. The instruments were used to clarify how the way men and women are portrayed in Bukusu circumcision songs and expressed in the society is actually reflected during an active participation in the songs. From the songs we came to realization that all the lexical items discussed for instance those that exalt men and those that demean women suggest the infantile stereotypes that have long been a pre occupation for the Bukusu society. The figurative language used represents a complex relationship between men and women among the Bukusu. Our discussion led us to the conclusion that in order to interpret the lexical items used in selected Bukusu circumcision songs, there must be something about the word that facilitates the transfer of meaning in such a manner that we understand the song. That is, the hearer’s background information helps him/her to make correct inferences of the message. Effective communication depends on the shared knowledge between the speaker and the hearer, and the lexical pragmatic process of narrowing and broadening reveal this intention. The context in which the lexical items have been used helps in understanding the singers’ message. Context is therefore of a great importance in the analysis of selected Bukusu circumcision songs.

KEY WORDS: Bukusu, Circumcision Songs, Lexical Pragmatics: Narrowing And Broadening, Women, Men.