



Linguistic Patriarchy in Sexual Discourse among University Students in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The present paper analyses words and phrases in sexual discourse among university students in Kenya in order to determine men's patriarchal language attitudes. Using Foucault's (1978) Theory of Discourse Analysis and Feminist Theory, the study shows power interplay in male and female language use. Results revealed that males use powerful language which promotes patriarchal tendencies. This paper may help reduce exploitation and discrimination of women in society. It may also inform future studies on linguistics and gender issues.

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Introduction

The present paper analyzes words and phrases in the sexual discourse to determine patriarchal language attitudes of men towards women. Throughout the struggle for women liberation from an all powerful and oppressive man, studies the world over have been guided by Marxist, radical and social feminist orientations (Olesen, 1994). According to Maguire (1996), the intent of feminist principle is to encourage women to take action to develop new structures or reshape existing forces so that they can live out new ways of being in a relationship with the world.

A number of these studies describe patriarchy as a 'catch' word that illustrates the different ways in which society discriminates against women (Chinn & Wheeler, 1985; Freire, 1970 & Lindsey *et al.*, 1997). In such differential treatment, women are denied access to resources of society and to positions of power and authority both in family and community (Lindsey *et al.*, 1997). According to Speedy (1991), women are barely reduced to mothers and woman to tender for their husbands and children.

Even though the many women in the contemporary world are near disentangling themselves from the shackles of patriarchy owing to access to education and increased awareness of their rights, most of them are still bound by strict cultural norms particularly in Africa. This is probably due to the common belief that men (Particularly in African communities) are supposed to be aggressive and assume animal-like-tendencies (Moto, 2004; Grob *et al.*, 1997). For example, Moto (2004) notes that an African man is supposed to have the demeanor of a wild animal (Chilombo), who by virtue of being perceived strong and all powerful than women are supposed to hunt their game (Women) and drag them home. Grob *et al.* (1997), attributes that behavior to their sheer need to gain identity or to be seen and be respected for their masculinity.

Such culturally embedded perceptions are quite evident in their language use and are likely to predispose women to discrimination and violence socially, economically and

culturally. Documented studies show that inherent power differences between men and women are reflected in their language use. For example, Mutunda (2009) argues that use of swear words is a sign of power and dominance for men while at the same time it is a sign of failure, disobedience and a source of despondency for women. The author, further, notes that more men than women use taboo words and phrases related to sex, probably due to society's cultural construction of gender in which the women fork were tailored to use polite language. In fact, a study by Maya (2002) revealed that women who used insulting language in African contexts faced serious consequences such as being disapproved as suitors for marriage and at worst ostracized. On the other hand, promiscuous, single and infertile women who used swear words were labeled and looked down upon. This strict linguistic code compelled women to use of standard, straight forward language which is not offending (Marche, 1993; Propp, 1995; Grob *et al.*, 1996 & Mbaya, 2002). Therefore, many an African woman adopted language use which enabled her maintain a good face and be seen as being obedient, diligent, respectful, loving and subordinate to men (Freire, 1970).

According to Tamale (2005), sexuality is intricately linked to practically every aspect of our lives: to pleasure, power, politics and procreation, but also to language, violence, war, religion, kinship structures, identity, creativity among others. In most African societies, sex is still a taboo topic which is never discussed overtly (Ayiro *et al.*, 2013; Chinyanganya & Muguti, 2013). However, studying the language young people use while talking about sex can provide valuable insights into the ways in which they understand sex, sexual behavior and sexual relationships (Selikow, 2004). It is important to study language university students use to express sexual desires and feelings because most of them are young adults at a prime sexual stage which is usually characterized by heightened sexual relationships and risky behavior.

The present paper analyses words and phrases male students of Moi University use to project patriarchy. It attempts to answer the following questions: What is patriarchy? How do university students portray patriarchal attitudes in their language use? Which words and phrases are used to portray university student's patriarchal attitudes?

Method

Questionnaires and Focus Group Discussion Guide formed part of data collecting instruments. The study population was sampled purposefully from second year students of Moi University who were in session at the time of the research. Data was analyzed based on research objectives and theories outlined above. The results were organized thematically and presented in prose.

Result and Discussion

This paper analyzed 15 examples. A word or a phrase's literal meaning is given followed by an in depth analysis of power reflected by the word or phrase.

Team mafisi

The above example exemplifies men's appetite for women. *Fisi* is a Kiswahili word for hyena, an animal which is known for lust and greed in fairy tales. The term Team *masifi* therefore refers to a group of men who exhibit rowdy and reckless sexual behavior, for example, harassing women for sexual exploits. In this context, men are portrayed as powerful sex scavengers who do everything possible within their means to lay women. Women on the other hand are depicted as sex objects who are at the mercy of men.

Kuingiza Box

The example shows how men drive women into sexual relationships. *Kuingiza* is a Kiswahili word which refers to 'take in someone or something'. So *kuingiza* box means taking someone (Woman) inside a box (Relationship/sex). The phrase shows power imbalance between men and women, men's power deriving from their ability to approach women and initiate sex while women are rendered powerless and helpless as they are whisked into a box and locked in.

Kumwaga mistari

Kumwaga mistari literally translated from Kiswahili means 'to pour lines' which is in itself an ambiguous phrase. However, in the context of this study, the phrase means to seduce a lady or making a sexual advance. During seduction, a man ought to sound as convincing as possible. Some even go to the length of lying to win the heart of women who fall in their trap. This act is referred to as *kumwaga mistari*. It portrays the man as being courageous, clever or witty. The woman on the other hand is relegated and portrayed as being shy, timid and lacking courage to initiate a sexual relationship or sex, for that matter. This is a gender role that the society so constructed for men. It should be noted that sexual advance and initiation in most African communities is a preserve for men rather than women.

Kugonga nyundo

Kugonga-nyundo is a combination of two words- '*kugonga*' and '*nyundo*' which are both amorphous. The phrase has underlying deep sexual meaning. It refers to the act of a man 'hammering' (Fucking) a woman during sex. It is the penis which does the 'hammering' during sexual intercourse. Men in the African context are expected to display power even during sex by engaging a woman in very rigorous sex. Women are relegated because they do not have 'hammers'. They are left on the receiving end yet sex is supposed to be a joint venture between a man and a woman.

Campus Diva

The above example is used to refer to campus ladies known for dressing in a trendy fashion particularly to impress males. Most have a figure 8 and their dressing ranges from tight, transparent cloths to miniskirts and tight trousers.

They may also improve their beauty by applying a lot of makeup. To be called a campus diva is relegating because, such women do everything possible to catch attention of men for sexual favors. It is relegating because it assumes that the only way a woman can earn livelihood through sexual exploitation.

Ndume

Ndume in normal usage is a Kiswahili word for a bull. The word in the context of the study refers to an energetic man or one who is rich or has exceptional abilities. The word can also refer to a man who has ability to lay many women with great agility. Many African societies construct the male gender as being strong and domineering. For example, Malawians expect men just like wild animals (*Chilombo*) to hunt for women and drag them home (Moto, 2004). So a real man should in this sense display strength, power, terror and rigor over women least he is undermined. Women on the other hand are perceived as weaklings.

Sponsor

Sponsor literally refers to a donor. However in the context of the study it refers to a wealthy man who is in a love relationship with a female university student. A sponsor should display the power of the pocket- foot bills, gives handouts, and preferably driving a posh car in order to accord the sponsored some status. University female students are known to host such men friends: for company, sex and for leisure. So this example clearly demonstrates economic power imbalance with men seemingly wielding a lot of power as women are subordinated to paupers, beggars and sex objects.

Backup

Backup is data or power saved as a reserve in new communication technology hardware. In the realm of sex, it is used to refer to a married man's woman friend or a woman friend of one who has a fiancée. Referring to a woman friend as a *backup* is really relegating. It portrays the woman as a second rate citizen who enters in a relationship with very loose ties. In fact, such relationships are short-lived just like power in a backup power bank. Most African men can have one or more backups in their lifetime. Power imbalance is clearly demonstrated here in the sense that men have power to court many women on the one hand and on the other, women stand out as sex objects for men.

Laptop

The word is used literally to refer to someone's girlfriend who has a small gait and can be easily lifted or placed on laps. Similarly, it brings the connotation of a lady who is easily lured into sex. When we look at a laptop- a machine which operates on the basis of commands from the user in this context, then there are other sexual connotations that can be inferred. The small gait and weight of the girlfriend is comparable to the small size of a laptop. If a man is said to have a laptop then it means he has a small woman friend. In most societies in Africa, men are encouraged to marry plumb women who are able to work and give birth to children. Small-sized women are believed to have birth problems and are likely to give birth to small children. For this reason, they are looked down upon.

Hotty

The word hotty is a derivative of the English word *hot* which refers to the aspect of something having high temperature. In the context of this study, it is used to refer to a woman with a great appetite for sex. Such a woman is considered to have loose morals.

The Kiswahili terms for hotty are *Malaya* or *kirukanjia* which sound very disgusting if used blatantly in conversation. Use of the term *hotty*, therefore, introduces an element of politeness which again tones down the power of the taboo words. However, considering that promiscuous women are deemed dirty by society, calling woman (married or not) *hotty* is insulting and amounts to contempt of the highest order. Ironically, men who have a great appetite for women are not treated with equal measure.

X

X is a modification of the English prefix {ex-} which denotes former. In the context of the study, the morpheme {ex-} which may be used with other morphemes for example ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend is substituted with x to conceal the relationship. Mention of x alone brings out the meaning of separation and does not require any further elaboration. The letter x is also a common letter which has been used variously to show condemnation, rejection or a defect of some sort. For example, it may be used to show a condemned building which has cracks and is dangerous for human habitation. In the context of a relationship, it may emphasize separation, hatred or lack of love between people who were once good friends. Use of X in the presence of a woman who has been rejected, arouses feelings of anger and must be avoided at all costs. In most African societies, a man rejecting a woman is extremely painful but ironically, a woman's rejection of a man is non consequential. In fact, it is a source of pride to a man.

Migingi

Migingi is a name of an island in Lake Victoria with a few hills. The island has been at the centre of a controversy between Kenya and Uganda for some time. In the context of the study, the word refers to large protruding buttocks of some women. The word is commonly used in men talk when discussing a woman with large protruding and attractive buttocks that give her a sexy look. In many African societies, women with large buttocks of women are deemed beautiful (Ogechi, 2005). Note that it would be embarrassing to make direct reference to buttocks as they are considered sacred just like the female genitals. On the same note, the use of the word portrays women with large protruding buttocks as sex objects which is demeaning.

Conclusion

Words and phrases used by students of Moi University within the context of sex shows schewed power relations with men seemingly standing out as being powerful than women. The words and phrases reveal men's lust for women parts of the body such as buttocks, their strength, sexual relationships

and sexual urge. The examples analyzed demonstrate taboo avoiding tendencies in men's use of language within the sexual discourse.

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