

The Effect Of Discourses Of Essentialism In Ekegusii Gendered Proverbs On Social Order

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Abstract

Gender essentialism propagates stereotypical habit about men and women among the Abagusii community. This contributes to gender inequality or gender bias within the community. Women are seen as subordinates to men. The research used qualitative analysis because gender discourse is best studied within a given context. Purposive sampling technique was applied in collecting twenty seven (27) proverbs relating to gender. The study found out that discourse in Ekegusii gendered proverbs describes gender inequalities as natural phenomenon

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I. Introduction

This study focuses on the effect of discourses of essentialism in Ekegusii proverbs on social order. Essentialism aims to sort groups of people into permanent categories under the belief nature has assigned them unchangeable characteristics. Gender essentialism is responsible for gender stereotypes about men and women, such as the idea that men should be aggressive while women should be caretakers, and is used to justify social issues like sexism and the gender wage gap. This study therefore focuses on how discourses of essentialism in Ekegusii proverbs are used to justify what is presented as conventional gender order and the effects of these perceptions on the social order. Sanauddin (2015) observes that the investigation of gender and language does not just deal with description of men's and women's linguistic structures but also surfaces how language acts as a symbolic means to construct and control personal, communal, and cultural aspects and identities. The study is pegged on the hypothesis that as much as Ekegusii proverbs are perceived to be wise and accurate they are ideologically sexist.

The analysis applies the concepts in CDA such as power abuse, ideology and dominance. These tenets are principally used 'to analyze opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language (Wodak, 2001). Van Dijk (2001) claims that CDA focuses on social problems, especially on the role of discourse in the production and reproduction of power abuse or domination. Thus, CDA aims at making visible and transparent the instrument of power, which is of increasing importance in the contemporary world. The effect of discourses of essentialism in Ekegusii gendered proverbs on social order are also explained within Fairclough's (1989) third dimension of his three dimensional framework which is discourse as social practice. According to Fairclough (1995), in the analysis of a text, such as proverbs, there is need to pay attention to the 'socio-cultural practice' or 'the social and cultural goings-on which the communicative event is part of'. Utilizing this level of analysis involves the immediate situational context, the wider context of institutional practices that the event is embedded within or taking into consideration the wider frame of society or culture of which the communicative event is part. The analysis focuses on the link between language and gender in proverbial discourse and how proverbs play, an important role in manifestation of gender stereotypes in Ekegusii Proverbs, Sex, gender roles and gender inequality in Ekegusii proverbs and the ideologies that justify them.

II. Theoretical framework

Critical Discourse Analysis(CDA) was used as a major theoretical framework

The applicable CDA tenet that was applicable to the proposed study is Discursive Practice. Fairclough in his CDA model links text to sociocultural practice. Discursive practice involves receiving and producing messages. Fairclough (1992b) maintains that discursive practice is constitutive in both conventional and creative ways: it contributes to reproducing social society (social identity, social relationships, systems of knowledge and belief) as it is, yet also contributes to transforming society. Discursive practice signifies the context which ultimately means the very shape, meaning, and effect of the social world – the various social roles people play, the socially and culturally situated identities they take on, the social and cultural activities they engage in, as well as the material, cognitive, social, cultural, and political effects of these (Gee, 2005). It is at this level where ideologies and sociocultural patterns are shaped and also shape these sociocultural practices.

The Discursive practice also emphasizes on the contextual analysis that involves the situational context (questions about time and place) and the intertextual context (looking for additional texts/information about or from producers and their product) as central for the process of interpretation (Janks, 1997). The analysis of Ekegusii proverbs will be conceptualized as a discursive practice. Thus, the analysis will involve a precise focus on how the text is produced, who are the participants, what are the circumstances and what linguistic devices have been used. In other words, the focus will be on linguistic analysis, using some sort of framing for interpretation

In summary, the study applies CDA as an approach for explaining social and cultural aspects of proverbs since CDA treats discursive as "a form of social practice" (Wodak, 2001, cited in Wang, 2006).

Moreover, CDA is in particular interested in figuring out the relationship between power and language (Wang, 2006) which was applied in analyzing the power relationships depicted in proverbs through multiple identities of men and women.

III. Findings

Gender Stereotypes in Ekegusii Proverbs

The first effect of discourses of essentialism in Ekegusii gendered proverbs that impacts on social order is gender stereotypes. According to Watson and Hill (2006) to stereotype means to pigeonhole, to thrust into tight slots of definition which allow little adjustments or change. Gender stereotypes are thus seen as static, taken-for-granted, culture-specific, simplistic, and impressionistic generalizations about gender attributes, differences, and roles of individuals and groups based on distinctions of biological sex. A close analysis of the data collected reveal that Ekegusii Proverbs reflect gender stereotypes that polarize female-male attributes along subordinate-dominant binaries. For instance, the analyzed data reveals the pillar-Support/appendage stereotype in family sphere as shown in the examples below:

Example 1

Omosachakarebwoyeneritirorireenyasi

(A man who is in his home is a pillar on a wall)

Example 2

Mosachakaremoyonigoangaritirorireenyasi

(When the husband is alive, he is like wall pillar)

Example 3

Momurakaresobo,nigoangerirubinyamong'ento

(When a young man is in their homestead, he is like a cobra)

Example 4

Mokungutarimokungugotatigakanyuomire

(A woman is not compete unless married)

Example 5

Mokunguotabwatimosachatarigotegererwa

(A woman without a husband has no voice)

Proverbs 1 to 4 shows how language in proverbs is used to discriminate one gender over another. In proverbs 1 and 2 language is used to overtly prejudice women. The pillar attribute in a family set up is directly given to a man. The generic-level knowledge schema of 'pillar' and 'support' relate to the semantic domain of building and construction where buildings are propped up by pillars and beams. This metaphor reveals the male as the stronghold of the family, the physical and spiritual pillar without whom the family lacks morale and falls apart. This is in spite of women playing this role in some families. The proverbs imply that a woman must have a man to be complete. The above proverbs insinuate that men have the potential power and traits necessary to govern and lead the social institution such as family while women need them to be compete as shown in proverbs 4 and 5. They demonstrate total biases as denial of women's social existence outside men. Male children are perceived to be the potential leaders in the future as depicted in proverb 3. The analyses demonstrate that proverbs express attitudes and ideologies and influence the society deeply. They are full of acuteness in structure and sense and draw widely from culture and family.

The second stereotype is where men are perceived as the breadwinners and women as the consumers and caretakers as shown:

Example 6

Omosachaomuyanoyokoringankundikagosoamochiemogokoosoanyomba

(A good man is the one who hides something in his fist as he gets his home and there is joy)

Example 7

Omosacha ore nomogokonoyokogendagotwarachimbebaonyoraoitirechinchogu

(A happy husband is the one who goes to hunt for rats but ends up killing elephants)

The above proverbs show that the expectation of the society is that man is the caretaker and breadwinner of the family while the woman should be the caregiver and the consumer of the husband's wealth. The study observes that in traditional Gusii society it is the obligation of men to construct and fund their families. Such gendered proverbial discourse sustains and amplifies such viewpoints, which have a noteworthy influence on individuals. The view is that even in the changing circumstances, where women contribute to family upkeep, these expressions still remain static and constant. The study observes that such masculine identity for men may make them to be aggressive in order to meet societal expectations.

Another stereotype is pegged on the belief that women are imprudent, frail, jealous, wicked, and dependent while men are construed as rational, independent, and superior. Moreover, a woman is stereotypically a gossip and a talkative. She is also taken to be inherently wicked. Such descriptions reveal that women are devalued in Ekegusii gendered proverbs. Such misogynistic ideologies in proverbs permeate a kind of permanence to this negative image construction but are silent on how to subvert it. Women are denied leadership positions because they are perceived as irrational and untrustworthy. Therefore, the persistent, tenacious and devious nature of gender ideologies and stereotypes have contributed to maintaining the prevailing gender status quo and have subsequently, propagated gender discrimination in Gusii culture and across several generations. The negative representation of women through the gendered language in proverbs shows that the traditional Gusii society has great gender stereotypical.

The data also depict that men are stereotypically action oriented while women are stereotypically chatter boxes and gossips as shown:

Example 8

Omokungukamoeomonwa, omosachakamoeebikoro

(A woman is for gossiping while a man is for development)

Example 9

Ekerochingokochingochichaamokoriaendageratobaisagochirutaobori

(Where hens gather to feed do not throw millet)

Example 10

Omokungunyamang'ana mange omoerioyenigoagwesambaomonwa

(A gossiping woman burns her mouth in the end)

Example 11

Abakungunabayako' nemenwayabasaririe

(Women are good but gossiping has made them wicked)

The above proverbs show that a woman is stereotypically a gossip and a talkative. She is also taken to be intrinsically wicked. The study observes that Ekegusii gendered proverbs advocate passive, subordinate and domesticated role into which gender stereotypes have positioned women which may create personality crisis especially among the educated ones who may want to aspire beyond the artificial limits set by gender categories.

The analysis shows that the discourse of gender essentialism justifies and reinforces gender stereotypes. The analysis reveals that Ekegusii gendered proverbs are used to negatively present all women. The discourse of gender essentialism also reinforces specific beliefs about the masculine and female identity that legitimizes social systems in which people are treated differently.

Sex, gender roles and gender inequality in Ekegusii proverbs

Gender equality means equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities for women and men, girls and boys. That is, women's and men's opportunities, rights and responsibility do not and shall not depend on whether they are born female or male. The study establishes that gender essentialism reinforces social inequalities related to gender. The data reveals that proverbs regarding leadership, headship and management rights seem to uphold the positive-male and negative-female operational spaces for the sexes shown:

Example 12

Eisekonyarekanaagentogiokoagachagiachireaseomokungu, nigoakogesaria

(If you give a woman anything important, she will misuse it)

Example 13

Omokungunigoangeomwana

(A woman is like a child)

Example 14

Eero n' eyabagaka

(The sitting room is for men)

Example 15

Aseabagaka bare ng' anatirianyagosareka

(Where men are, things will never go wrong)

Example 12 and 13 creates a negative schema of women's capability handle any important roles in spheres such as leadership. The two proverbs represent women as foolish and irrational to legitimize this stereotype. Example 14 and 15 represent men as rational, intelligent and action oriented. The proverbs reveal that man is designated for power, dominance, and decision-making so that every action he takes can be rationally justified. The analysis reveals that the ideological structure of Ekegusii gendered proverbs designate a man in higher structure as leadership and women in inferior positions such as shown in the proverbs below:

Example 16

Omosachaasacheomokunguakunge

(Let the husband look for wealth and let the woman take care of them)

Example 17

Abasachambaniberaninaabakungumbaiborerani

(Men help one another to beget wealth while women help one another to beget children)

Example 16 and 17 represent man aggressive and ambitious to acquire wealth. The data shows that women are held in low esteem in the society. Women are given secondary positions. They are treated as objects whose purpose is to give birth and work at home. The structure of the above proverbs is evidently instituted on the interaction between what is socially anchored and the proverbial indication. This shows that gender inequality ideological structure is both produced and reproduced via the discourse of the proverb. It worth noting that in Gusii contemporary as much as women have shown their prospective to function meritoriously in governance spheres—albeit excluded by the prevailing patriarchal social orders from some leadership positions—Ekegusii proverbs still maintain their original fixed formats. Therefore, the study observes that endorsement of gender essentialist ideas in proverbs forecast support for gender discrimination and lack of support for gender equality. Another consequence may be that both men and women may accept gender inequality and that this leads to men's increased support for gender discrimination. These findings demonstrate the existence of the male-as-norm ideology in Gusii culture and system of representation and also show the high esteem attached to male roles and expectations while relegating those of females.

The analysis reveals that gender differentiation is based on men's and women's social positions. The ideological structure in Ekegusii gendered proverbs show's that men's domination and women's subjugation frames each gender's identities and acts based on their social practice, where males are ascribed to be in public and women are attributed to be in the domestic zone as shown:

Example 18

Omokungusiomiiasiomiang'aiakomanyabwarugeirwegosembokegosembwamwana?

(How will a wife /woman who roams from place to place know where the ugali has been cooked and whether it is just a little meant for the child?)

Example 19

Moiseketaribogeni

(A lady is never a visitor)

Example 20

Omokunguomweanyimotarereekerogie'toigo

(Visit a proud woman during the rainy season)

The data above shows that culturally, a man and a woman have been assigned different social roles. A man's role is outside the house as a breadwinner; a woman's role is inside the house where she deals with household chores and in the homestead. The data depicts family and household as a principal site for gender construction and gender discrimination. While at home a woman carries out reproductive roles that include child bearing, care giving and mentorship in the home. The force of proverbial discourse, and preserve and family and household institution strengthen such beliefs, which have a considerable influence on society if

people tolerate them. These proverbs create ideologies that marginalize women in Gusii community where women are relegated into secondary positions. They are nurtured as depends who hold second place in community do not hold the opportunity to venture outside their homes due to restrictive culture. The analysis above reveals men's and women's social positions. The ethical structure given to men's domination and women's subjugation frames each gender's identities and acts based on their social practice, where males are ascribed to be in public and women are attributed to be in the domestic zone.

Gusii culture being a highly patriarchal society the value and position accorded to men in the society devalues women and girls. The proverbs demonstrate that men are accorded privileged position in the society and female prejudice is a common practice in such society. Such proverbs contribute to gender inequality as shown:

Example 21

Omokungunigo are esesicha, omosachaoyenorobayororigeterete
(A wife is like a flower and the husband is like a fence around it)

Example 22

Omoisekeomuya, omonyenechiombenamoroch
(A good lady is always seen by owners of cows)

Proverb 21 above reveals men as having the potential power and traits necessary to govern and lead the social institution such as family. Yet, this is not a base that can be always relied on. Example 22 marriage is beyond being in love with somebody whom you want to get married to, but it is a matter of how to construct a family and support that family financially in terms of being capable of perpetuating a prosperous life. Hence, the need to pay the bride price before marriage.

The analysis further reveals that women are assisted by their beauty and age while men are judged by their physical strength and the traits of governing and leading social institutions as shown below:

Example 23

Ensinyomakwanwabobembamuraetabwati
(A despised neighbourhood has no brave men)

Example 24

Nguru cha momuranchoguegwatiambara
(A man's strength is like an elephant splitting wood)

Example 25

Ekieniki 'omokungumbosaonyeondetaiyookomotonera
(A beauty of woman becomes useless if no one admires her)

Example 26

Buyabwa 'mosubati/ ekienikia 'mosubatinsigitiataratwa
(The beauty of a woman is like an ewe that has not had a young one)

Example 27

Omokunguomuyambokanobotingirebogaika
(A good wife is like a well-tuned harp)

The above proverbs show that the ideological structure of Ekegusii proverbs is restored through the social practices that allocate each gender to his/her social role. Proverb 23 to 26 shows the intricacy of gender and power relations in which men are powerful and physically strong whereas women are dominated and judged by appearance, since age matters for them to be attractive. Schipper (2003) observe that the superior physical strength of men have had far reaching consequences for the gender history of mankind. In many ways the male sex has made use of its physical size and power for its own gain and benefit. This ideology and socialization reinforce the confinement of women to domestic chores.

IV. Summary

This study focused on the effect of discourses of essentialism in Ekegusii gendered proverbs on social order. The findings of the study reveal that discourse in Ekegusii gendered proverbs demonstrates the ideological framework of gender. The findings reveal that gender ideologies and latent structures make a significant contribution to gender discrimination, especially when they are accepted as entirely legitimate and normal. The analysis also proves the discourse function in the (de)construction of the binary gender when critically analyzed in the lens of CDA. The results reveal that discourse in Ekegusii gendered proverbs describes gender inequalities as a natural phenomenon. Ekegusii proverbs depict social practices that are a matter of social construction and these constructions are being evolved and practiced based on certain values, norms, tradition and customs of the society. However these constructions of social practices in Ekegusii proverbs do not always value neutral since they relate to power relations in society and usually these serve the social, economic and political interests of dominant groups in it. The Ekegusii gendered proverbs also reveal that gender roles are socially constructed and since they are linked to Gusii culture they are ingrained in the ideological and institutional arrangements of the society.

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