

A cognitive linguistic approach to Dholuo sexual euphemisms and dysphemisms

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Abstract

Cognitive linguistics as a disciplinary school of thought concerns itself with investigating the relationship between human language, the mind and socio-physical experience. It sees language as embedded in the overall cognitive capacities of man, places special emphasis on topics such as the structural characteristics of natural language categorization including, but not limited to, prototypicality, systematic polysemy, cognitive models, mental imagery, and metaphor. This study examined sexual euphemisms and dysphemisms in the Kenyan Dholuo within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics, specifically anchoring itself on Conceptual Integration Theory (Fauconnier and Turner 2002). The study had two objectives: to identify and explain the sex-related dysphemistic words and phrases in Dholuo and to account for the cognitive processes in the creation of sex-related euphemisms. To achieve its objectives, the study used a descriptive design in which the researcher identified the sex-related dysphemisms by asking native Dholuo speakers to name the male and female sexual organs and sex-related physiological processes associated with both males and females. In addition, the respondents were asked to give the alternative terms that were used to refer to the sex-related dysphemistic terms mentioned. The euphemisms collected were analyzed using Conceptual Integration Theory. They were mapped into the different kinds of conceptual mappings (also known as the mental spaces). The study found out that Conceptual Integration Theory adequately and appropriately accounted for the euphemisms in Dholuo in terms of their interpretation. It provides solid tools for understanding, interpreting and accounting for the euphemisms in Dholuo. It is also demonstrated that not only is there a gendered usage of both euphemisms and dysphemisms, but also that their use is socially and culturally constrained. It is concluded that, just like in other languages, Dholuo euphemisms and dysphemisms are analyzable from a cognitive linguistics perspective

Keywords: cognitive linguistics, euphemisms, dysphemisms, Dholuo, conceptual integration theory.

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