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Analysis of the Forms and Functions of Conversational Implicature in Dowry Negotiations among the Maragoli of Western Kenya

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Abstract

This paper examines the Conversational Implicature (CI) evident in dowry negotiations among the Maragoli people of Western Kenya. The Maragoli is one of the sixteen Luhya subtribes in the Western Part of Kenya. The Maragoli, who speak Lulogooli language, form the dominant inhabitants of Vihiga County. The Maragoli community is steeped in traditional practices which control human relations and ways of life. One of the societal institutions that is controlled by tradition is marriage. The process of marriage among the Maragoli has several stages key among them is dowry negotiation which is the penultimate stage to a bride leaving her family to join another family through marriage. Dowry negotiation is a rigorous and often a delicate exercise that seeks to bind two families hence it is conducted in language that is meant to foster unity and understanding besides achieving the goal of a dowry settlement. Towards this end, participants in Maragoli dowry negotiations have mastered the art of indirectness in the use of Lulogooli language to achieve their purpose; the lexical items used and utterances made on this occasion have a hidden meaning. This study delves into this with specific focus on dowry negotiations in Sabatia Sub County in Vihiga County. The paper will analyze how CI manifested in Lulogooli, the forms of the CI and linguistic functions of performed by the CI.

Keywords: *Conversational Implicature, Negotiation, Dowry, Participant, and Lulogooli*

Background of the Study

This paper analyses Conversational Implicature in Lulogooli as brought out through dowry negotiations. Negotiation is a valued art among African communities (Kimani 2021). It is therefore carried out in a language that effectively delivers the message and in a creative manner. According to Kimani (2021), marriage negotiation is an aspect of culture; therefore, language is used as a form of expressing it. This then means that dowry negotiation is a speech event much as it is a cultural event. Culture plays a pivotal role in the linguistic choices made during the negotiation process. A negotiation is meant to achieve a desired goal. According to Kimani (2021), a negotiation occurs between parties because both have something to offer and gain; the parties are willing to invest in the relationship and would like to use negotiation as a means to maintain a long-lasting relationship. Johnson (1993) says negotiation is a process in which individuals or groups seek to reach goals by making agreements with others. This means that a negotiation is a transactional exercise in which the two parties involved expect to benefit in one way or the other. This is the veiled purpose of a negotiation even among the Maragoli. In as much as there is a form of business-like transaction that occurs in during the exercise, language is used as a tool to disguise this underlying business-like purpose so that it does not appear as if the groom's side is buying the bride and that the bride's side is selling their girl. The utterances and the lexical items used in the negotiation are therefore indirect hence need to be understood within that cultural context; their meaning goes beyond the words used. As a speech event, a dowry negotiation exercise is meant to create a lasting bond between the negotiating parties and often some of the lexical items used may assume daily usage.

A number of studies on the Conversational Implicature around negotiation have been done. Gachara (2012) in his study of metaphors used in marriage negotiations among the Agikuyu argues that the art of communication is very important in marriage negotiations among the Agikuyu. He notes that those negotiators who use language effectively will have an edge over the others during the negotiations. Chelangat (2013), looked at a lexico-pragmatic analysis of Kipsigis marriage dowry negotiations; a study that sought to find out the lexical items used by the Kipsigis Marriage negotiations and their meaning. Kimani (2021) generally looked into the Conversational Implicature in marriage negotiations in African communities. However, attention has not been given to the ways in which CI is realized in these dowry negotiations and the functions that the CI performs. This is the gap that this study seeks to fill. While Gachara (2012) focused on metaphors as a form of CI among the Agikuyu, his study does not focus on other forms of CI and the various functions they play in dowry negotiations among other African communities. This study is however limited to the Maragoli dowry negotiations and does not involve other aspects of indirect language like proverbs and sayings. The research will yield useful linguistic data on the use of Conversational Implicature in Lulogooli which it is hoped that it will be used by linguistics students, researchers and scholars.

Literature Review

Paul Grice's concept of *Conversational Implicature* examines meaning beyond the words that are used by speakers (Grice 1975) According to this theory, participants in a communicative exchange

are guided by a principle—the Cooperative Principle (CP)—that determines the way in which language is used to achieve a desired communication outcome. The principle requires participants to *'make your contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged'* (Grice 1991). This principle has four basic maxims. The Maxim of Quality extols truthfulness; the Maxim of Quantity demands participants to make contributions that are informative; the Maxim of Relation requires participants in conversation to be relevant and the Maxim of Manner requires participants to be clear when making their contributions. According to Grice, participants may choose to do four things with relation to the maxim. The participants may choose to observe the maxims. That means they don't break any of them.

The participants may choose to opt out of the maxims. This means that a participant is conscious of his/her eminent violation of a maxim but offers to mitigate its effect. This involves the use of hedges such as *'I am not sure about this...'* this means a speaker opts out of the quality maxim or *'Sorry to digress...'* to mean the speaker is about to opt out of the maxim of relation. The speaker may flout the maxims. This means that the speaker fails to abide by the maxim, something that the addressee or hearer recognizes. This is often used in sarcastic remarks. For example, as grooms' people are gathering to embark on the journey to the bride's home and it happens that one of the men has not arrived and therefore Kilasi asks:

Amuriodo avee hai? Kucherevaa vaya. (Where is Amuriodo? We are running late.)

Esendi responds:

Omanye avee nende mukari wakaviri wayareti mugorova yigu (You should know he just recently married a second wife).

Kilasi simply wants to know what is happening that Amuriodo is late but the response he gets violates the Maxim of Relevance but comes out as a joke that perhaps Amuriodo is held up as he could still be enjoying the romantic company of his newly married wife. Finally, a speaker may choose to violate the maxim and therefore lie, without the knowledge of the hearer. Grice says opting out of a maxim, flouting a maxim or violating a maxim often leads to an implied meaning which then is referred as Conversational Implicature. A conversational implicature is realized when a maxim is violated (Davis, 2000). Thus, for example Lulogooli speakers violate maxims to bring about conversational implicature as seen in the conversation below.

Nakeva: *Avandu vara vareti Tsing'ombe thsiang'a?*:(how many heads of cattle did those people pay as dowry)

Miyinzi: *oh, nivandu vokwidinya vuzwa* (Oh, they are people who just struggle)

In responding to Nakeva, Miyinzi violates the maxim of relevance. Instead of giving the exact number of cattle paid for dowry, he says that the groom's family is a struggling one. However, since the two interlocutors are cooperating, Nakeva understands that the groom paid few heads of cattle because they are from a family that is not well off financially. This is the implicature in the

violation of the maxim of relevance. Allott (2018) maintains that Conversational Implicatures are implied by the speaker in making an utterance, are part of the content of the utterance, do not contribute to direct utterance content and are not encoded by the linguistic meaning of what has been uttered. Yule (1996) states that the expectations of cooperative principle does not have an appropriate what is being uttered. This statement describes the implicature that the speaker flouts the Grice's maxim in an utterance. Conversational implicature is the basic assumption in conversation is that, unless otherwise indicated, the participants are adhering to the cooperative principle and the maxims (Yule, 1996). When the speakers are giving the message to the interlocutor, the listeners can conclude what the speakers said. Conversational implicatures have two kinds; generalized conversational implicature and particularized conversational implicature.

Yule (1996) explains that “a generalized conversational implicature occurs when no special knowledge is required in the context to calculate the additional conveyed meaning” (p. 45). In this kind of implicature, the speaker gives the utterance, but the listener just responds a part of the utterance. In addition, Yule (1996) states such inferences are required to work out of the delivering meanings which result from particularized conversational implicature. The inference of utterance totally is not going on the context. Dr Manar Almania (2021) carried out a study on conversational implicature in Najdi Arabic in Saudi Arabia. Anastasia Kavetska (2020) carried out a study on the understanding of Conversational implicature by native and Non-native speakers of English. Mohamed K Bahia and Rahab Elsheikh (2022) did a study on the role of conversational implicature in daily conversations. Kimani (2021) carried out a pragmatic analysis of marriage dowry negotiations in local communities Africa. This study sought to examine how the CI is used in Maragoli dowry negotiations in a bid to foster understanding and agreement. The question the study attempts to answer is: Does CI play key functions in dowry negotiations among the Maragoli?

Method

The study was carried out in Vihiga County, Western Kenya. The county borders Nandi County to the east, Kisumu County to the west and Kakamega County to the north. Vihiga has four sub counties: Luanda, Hamisi, Sabatia, Emuhaya and Vihiga. (Vihiga.go.ke. 2022) The rationale for choosing Vihiga County for the study was the fact that the Maragoli, who speak Lulogooli, form the biggest Luhya subtribe in the county. However, the study narrowed the focus on Sabatia Sub County. Besides, the practice of dowry payment in its traditional sense is largely practiced in the region, making the region most ideal for the study. The Maragolis living in other parts of the country have largely embraced modern methods of dowry payment; use of money and the negotiations are not as rigorous and cultural as they are done in Vihiga County. The target population of the study was the Lulogooli speakers in Vihiga County, specifically Sabatia Sub County. The male adults, who form part of the group that participates in dowry negotiations, were specifically targeted during the study.

The study relied on observation as method of data collection. This involved the researcher attending the dowry negotiation exercises among the Maragoli and recording the verbal exchanges on a digital audio recorder. The observation was a passive one in that the researcher observed and

recorded without actively participating in the exercise. Observation was ideal for this research as it largely relied on spontaneous use of language in a cultural context. The rationale for participant observation, according to O'Connor (2005), is embedded in the belief that natural behaviours are more likely to be representative of certain traits within the group, such as shared perceptions or beliefs. The study also used interviews to collect data. Interview schedules were prepared by the researcher guided in the process of the interviews. Participants in the dowry negotiations were interviewed on whether there was implicit use of language in the negotiation process and whether it achieved the intended purpose. The interviews guided the research in describing the effectiveness of Conversational Implicatures use in the negotiation.

The researcher identified one member of the community (resource person) within the area of the study who is well versed with the Lulogooli language to consult for expert interpretation and translation of the utterances that were made in Lulogooli. At the end of the proceedings, the researcher produced the recording device and let the participants know that he had been recording proceedings. The researcher asked the group leaders for permission to use the recorded information while explaining that this would enable the researcher to rely on the data that was from a naturally occurring conversation and that the data would be used anonymously and strictly for academic reasons. The data gathered was analyzed using the descriptive qualitative analysis.

Results

The study found out that Conversational Implicature in Lulogooli used during dowry negotiations is realized through metaphorical expressions, fake praise and irony.

Metaphors and Metaphorical Expressions

Visara (sticks): used to metaphorically refer to 'cattle' to avoid appearing business-minded. The cattle would be counted as sticks, for example, the groom's spokesperson would say: 'we have five sticks.'

Mahiga (cooking stones): refers to the bride. Among the Maragoli, a wife has various roles that she is expected to perform. Key among them is taking care of the home and cooking for the husband and the entire faming. By referring to the bride as cooking stones, this figuratively means that the groom's people are about to get someone who will provide stability and help their lineage grow to eternity.

Mahiga, alternatively used with *Mmbinaji* or *omudechi*, loosely translates to a cook. One of the tests the bride is traditionally subjected to when she finally arrives at the groom's home is prepare ugali for the family. Ugali is the staple food among the Maragoli and a woman who cooks it well is said to be qualified for marriage. The mother-in-law has several ways of confirming whether the ugali is well-cooked including sending someone outside the compound to smell the cooking ugali.

Kovee nende muhini kuzi kehenza rigembe (we have a handle we have come to look for a hoe)
Zimbunu/migoye (cow leashes)

The money that is given to the bride's family as part of the bride price.

Mmanyage mkana witu yaduka (That our girl is well raised)

This was said by one of the negotiators from the bride's side. The inferred meaning is that the bride's team will not settle for less as their girl is well-raised hence will be a good wife to the family. It has to be noted that the phrase 'good wife' among the Maragoli does not simply mean the bride will be a good wife to the groom but to the entire family and village the groom belongs to.

In one of the negotiations, one of the elders from the groom's side in his plea to the bride's group to accept their offer, used the metaphor *enzori* (seed) in this utterance: *Mmanyage enzori yakutaga karunu yiyi genyeka emere erete matunda* (You should keep in mind that the seed we are sowing now in this meeting should sprout and bring forth fruits). The intended meaning of this utterance is that the negotiation should foster cordial relationship which should bind the two families together for greater good. It was hoped that with this reminder, the bride's side will soften their demands and agree to what the groom's side was giving.

It is worth noting that the negotiators from both sides of the negotiation exercise caution with the language they use in this process bearing in mind that this will determine the future relationship between the two families. Therefore, whatever the agreement, the negotiators know that this should be the beginning of relationship that should stand the test of time.

Riauwa (Flower)

The bride was metaphorically referred to as *riauwa llahi* (a beautiful flower). The leader of the groom's side used this utterance at the beginning of the negotiation process: *Mwikura witu yari nagenda narora riauwa llahi shimbi nimugizi gunu, ku yari anyara kuvuna riauwa zana da chigira rivee navene. Ku kuzi kumanya kuri anyara kuvugura riauwa zana* (Our son saw a beautiful flower near this home while on a walk and desired to pluck it but because it belonged to someone, he could not just pluck it. He decided to come and ask whether he could pluck it).

The elder avoided to directly tell the bride's side that they have come to pay dowry and take their daughter as a wife to their son. By use of a flower in reference to the bride, the elder sought to impress the bride's side so as they may have it easy during the negotiation for the bride price.

The phrase *Koromba Vwinamilu* was used by the groom's party. This meant that the bride's part has no intention of clearing the entire bride price agreed upon; they have part of the dowry to mark the beginning. Maragoli community practices farming as its economic mainstay. Before a farmer cultivates his land for a new season of planting, he cultivates a small part of the land to mark the beginning of a rigorous cultivation exercise. It is believed that the farmer uses this small part to summon more energy for the entire cultivation exercise. This is what is referred to as *vwinamilu*. This metaphoric expression is used dowry negotiations to mean the bride's family will give part of the dowry to mark the beginning of more to come.

Dowry payment among the Maragoli is not meant to be conclusive (Kabaji, 2005). The groom is expected to keep taking some dowry to the bride's home after some years as a way of keeping in touch with the bride's people. It is an exercise that is meant to cement strong ties between the two families.

Flattery

The utterance *Hamoni hinyu hang'ereng'ana, garorekaa wamuturi ni indahi rigari anoho ni kuri kumurindi hano?* (your faces are shining, an indication that where you have come from is a really good place or is it the food, we have fed you today?) was used in one of the negotiations. The intended meaning of this utterance was that judging from the way the groom's people are healthy (with shining faces), they are economically able people who should not find it hard to give the bride price required. The utterance was used by the elder from the bride's side as part of the flattery, a negotiation skill, meant to soften the stance of the groom's side and make them give in to their demands.

A similar utterance was used by one of the elders from the bride's side: *kuri muvee, mwivichi vurahi munyi navandu ve heshima* (The way you are well-dressed, you are respectable people.) The intended meaning was being well-dressed is a sign that the groom's people are economically well off. Besides, the elder who used the utterance implied that as respectable people, the groom's side should not have a problem giving in to their demand.

Kwamanya kivara chinyu ni chimbura na marova marahi. (We know you come from land that has adequate rain and fertile soil. This utterance, as used by the spokesperson from the bride's side, is implied that the groom's home is endowed with resources owing to good weather. As an agricultural community, the Maragoli believe that land is the ultimate source of wealth. Fertile soils that support the growth of many crops and keeping of animals means that people are economically able. Therefore, the elders used this utterance to convince that the groom's side to give in to their demand as they are economically well-endowed back home.

Irony

Korora mwenya Mbinaji kvahe vuza (is as if you want us to give you the bride for free) This utterance as used by the ironically to downplay the 'token' they have received from the groom's side. It was part of the negotiation strategy by the bride's side.

One of the participants used the utterance *Korora kuragona yinu* (We will spend the night here) after a protracted haggling and near impasse. The utterance ironically means they need to reach an agreement in order to let the groom go back home lest the evening falls when they are still at the bride's home.

Summary

The various metaphors and metaphoric expressions, aspects of flattery and irony are manifestations of the CI in Lulogooli. The analysis of these forms, using the lexico-pragmatic theoretical

framework and Grice's maxims, reveals that the ultimate purpose of the negotiations is reached when there is a mutual understanding of the intended meaning of the linguistic forms used.

Discussion

In this study, it was found out that Conversational Implicature in dowry negotiations among the Maragoli is used in four main ways which include impressing, convincing, face saving and creating friendly/ relaxed atmosphere during the negotiation process. Both parties in the dowry negotiations attended by the researcher used language in a way to impress each other. According to the elders the researcher interviewed, indirectness in language is a sign of wisdom. By use of such indirect language, the groom's people were keen on convincing the other party that their girl is getting into a family of wise people. On the other hand, the bride's side were keen on showing the groom's side that they are a family of wise people and that it is not a privilege to have their daughter.

This utterance made by the groom's side is meant to impress: *Mwikura witu yari nagenda narora riauwa llahi shimbi nimugizi gunu, ku yari anyara kuvuna riauwa zana da chigira rivee nu mwene. Ku kuzi kumanya kuri anyara kuvugura riauwa zana.* (Our son saw a beautiful flower near this home while on a walk and desired to pluck it but because it belonged to someone, he could not just pluck it. He had to come and ask whether he could pluck it, that is why we are here)

The bride's spokesperson responded with figurative language equally meant to impress. He used the utterance: *utarora inya vukana, dada yata vuza zing'ombe, giragari mukaitu ni mgasu* (he who never saw his mother when she was young may think his father wasted his dowry. Indeed, our girl is beautiful) Besides impressing, this response was also meant to prepare the groom's party for the dowry demand that they may place for the bride. The popular notion in marriage negotiations in Maragoli is that when the bride is a stunning beauty and well-educated, the groom pays any amount of dowry without bargaining. This explains why the bride's negotiators will mention the beauty and the education level of the bride in order to raise the stakes in the negotiation.

The study established that the main purpose of the negotiation is for both parties to convince each other to accept their proposal for the bride price. While the bride's party would try to convince the groom's party to accept their dowry demands, the groom's party nudged the bride's party to lower the bride price. The resource person the researcher talked to said that it is always the case that the bride's negotiators would start the negotiation with the highest possible amount of bride price with the hope that it will be negotiated to a particular amount acceptable to them. However, there is a particular price that they cannot go below. On the other hand, the groom's side quote the lowest amount they can with the hope that they will negotiate and raise it to an agreed upon price. Just like the bride's side, the groom's side come to the negotiation with a particular price which they cannot go beyond.

In one of the negotiations for example, the researcher noted that the bride's side started with the price *visara hamsini ni zimbunu ishirini* (fifty cows and Ksh 20000 for cow leashes) The spokesperson revealed that their expected price was twenty-five cows and Ksh 10,000. The researcher established that the groom's target was twenty cows and at Ksh 10,000 each. In the end,

it was agreed upon that bride price would be twenty-five cows and fifteen thousand shillings. The bride's side offered to pay four cows and five thousand shillings for as a start. The language that was used was meant to convince the other side to agree to their demands. The fake flattery and the metaphorical expressions were meant to make the other side see the sense in accepting a particular price.

The utterance *Mmoni mwinyu mung'ereng'ana, wamuturi nindahi rigari* (your faces are shining, an indication that where you have come from is a really good place), was used by the bride's side in an attempt to convince the groom's side not to bargain further. The groom used the utterance *Mmanyage enzori yakutaga karunu yiyi genyeka emere erete matunda* (You should keep in mind that the seed we are sowing now in this meeting should sprout and bring forth fruits) in an attempt to emotionally appeal to the bride's side to soften their demands. The researcher established that the side that has elders who have the ability to use language convincingly would have their side achieve the best price during the negotiation. This explains why each side would carefully select elders who are renowned for their impressive speaking and negotiation skills.

The main purpose of dowry negotiation among the Maragoli is to determine the amount of dowry to be paid to the bride's family by the groom. It is believed among the Maragoli that dowry is meant to be a token of appreciation given by the groom to the bride's family. It is not supposed to be viewed as material gain. (Kabaji, 2005) This is the reason participants in a negotiation exercise do not mention the bride price directly in order not to appear as if they are transacting a business. The indirect use of language is meant to hide the intention of the whole process. The participants in the negotiation events that the researcher attended used Conversational Implicature in order to save their face to avoid appearing as if there were led my desire for material wealth. Even when the negotiation became heated, the real reason for the exercise was not mentioned. This indirectness of language was manifested through the metaphorical expressions, fake praises and exaggerations used by the participants.

The metaphorical expression *Mwikura witu yari nagenda narora riauwa llahi shimbi nimugizi gunu, ku yari anyara kuvuna riauwa zana da chigira rivee nu mwene. Ku kuzi kumanya kuri anyara kuvugura riauwa zana* (Our son saw a beautiful flower near this home while on a walk and desired to pluck it but because it belonged to someone, he could not just pluck it. He decided to come and ask whether he could pluck it) was used to avoid directly stating that the groom had come to seek a hand in marriage of the bride. The participants did not mention the subject of the negotiation, bride price, by name. The names *visara* (sticks), *zimbunu or Migoye* (money) were used figuratively to refer to the bride price. This, as was found out from some of the participants interviewed, was a face-saving act that was meant to show that the occasion was not just about the money but the union of two families.

Dowry payment among the Maragoli, as was established by this study, is meant to serve the purpose of uniting the groom and bride's family and foster a cordial relationship. A dowry negotiation therefore is expected to be a friendly exercise that should reflect how the two families should relate in future. The language that was used in the negotiations that the researcher attended was calm and

cordial even when communicating firm positions during the process. The use of utterance *Mmanyage enzori yakutaga karunu yiyi genyeka emere erete matunda* (You should keep in mind that the seed we are sowing now in this meeting should sprout and bring forth fruits) was meant make the negotiation relaxed and friendly. The utterance *Hamoni hinyu hang'ereng'ana, garorekaa wamuturi nindahi rigari anoho kuri kumurindi hano?* (your faces are shining, an indication that where you have come from is a really good place or is it the food, we have fed you today?) elicited laughter in the room during the negotiation hence relieving the tension evident in the room.

Conclusion

This study sought to analyze the various forms of Conversational Implicature in dowry negotiations among the Maragoli. The study also analyzed what the CI is used to achieve in the marriage context. The data gathered in the paper reveals that the CI in Maragoli dowry negotiations take the form of metaphorical expressions, flattery, irony and imagery. The CI is by the participants to impress, convince, save face and to create friendly and relaxed atmosphere during the negotiation process.

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