Sociolinguistics Stance of Language as the Pedestal for Gender Inequality in the Kurya of Tanzania

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Abstract: This study was about sociolinguistics stance of language as the pedestal for gender inequality in the Kurya of Tanzania. The study employed the case study design using the Kurya speech community from Kitenga Village of Bumera Ward in Tarime District as a case. The study used the qualitative approach in which words and sentences are being applied in determining inequality between men and women apart from their natural biological sexes. Purposive sampling was applied in selecting the Kurya speech community because it is one of communities in Tanzania whereby gender inequality seems to be normal life styles. The study employed random sampling in which only 10 children of 10 to 20 years and 10 adults of 40 to 60 years were sampled. The study applied two instruments of data collection namely unstructured observation and focus group discussion. The study found that the Kurya speech community provided evidences on how language is a benchmark sign of gender disparity among men and women. Based on the findings, the study recommended that gender inequality and inequity should be demystified out in the globalized world so that such practices should be mitigated. Women and men should be considered equal as human beings.

Keywords: Gender; sociolinguistic stance; Kurya; language; cognitive; inequality.

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Introduction

Language and gender refers to the relationship between the language of male and female. Gender difference is not only a reflection of speeches between male and female, but also a reflection of their different living styles and attitudes. In most research, it has been observed that males language vocabularies are more concerned with power while females are satisfied with their subordinate status; males speak directly and take transferring information as the first thing but females speak indirectly, implicitly and mildly(Gu, 2013).

Investigation pertinent to language and gender began around 1970s broadly from feminist researchers (Sunderland & Swann, 2016; Sunderland (1992). From the research angle, linguists and psychologists (Cf. Lakoff, 1975; Thorne & Nancy 1975) began to attach great importance to differences between the languages of male and female. The way communities behave in relation to men and women are of increasing interest to many scholars and researchers due to their bi-directional relationship in thinking, beliefs and behaviors which

are expressed through language. Bi-directional relationship is the symbiotic relations of two different sexes for the current study namely male and female. From this base, Aydinoğlu (2014) argued that gender is reflected by language and language helps to shape gender. Gender itself is natural and is organized around the partition of biological sex into binaries of man and woman (Gannon & Ward, 2014). With this regard, while sex is biological, gender is socially and psychologically constructed following the given roles, behaviors and characteristics between men and women being determined by social norms of human animate (Ryan et al., 2007). Since some people consider gender to be beyond biological sex, human beings use their tongue or/and language for gender inequality. Here it is the language and thinking or beliefs that human being emanates in their societies.

This study evaluates the way language is the mirror for gender inequality drawing attention from the large Kurya speech communities found in the western part of the United Republic of Tanzania. This study is scoped within gender cognitive theories of development in which Kurya societies agree that there is no way of having equality among men and women (Wambura, 2018). This is evidenced through language as the mirror and tool for communication.

Within the fields of linguistics, research into gender differences began early with Lakoff (1973) who emphasized on "female language" in her book entitled ''*Language and Women's Place'.* In the book, she emphasized on female language as in specialized vocabulary (concrete color), milder expletives (milder tone vs strong tone of men), empty adjectives such as adjectives (charming, divine) and cute feelings. Other differences include tag questions, intonation (rising tone even in a declarative sentence), super polite forms, Hypercorrect grammar e.g. females usually speak in a formal manner not only in grammar, but also in pronunciation and Joke-telling and humor in the sense that the language of female lacks humor; they speak less humorously than males. This publication aroused the linguists' interests in researching language and gender difference topics.

Gender inequality through language has been investigated worldwide. Janeth et al. (2021) examined male and female representation in three EFL textbooks used in early elementary grades in public schools in Mexico. The aim was to explore the distribution of males and females in terms of visibility in illustration and photos, and display of male and female occupational roles in the visuals. It was found that there was no balance representation of characters in the three textbooks. Males were significantly more frequent than female characters in the illustrations. In other words, female gender persons were frequently used in the textbook's characterization than the male gender persons. In terms of photos, it was found that both genders were allotted a similar number of appearances. Similarly, occupational gender stereotypes occurred in three textbooks. The study informed readers how written language represents gender inequality in text books. The current study goes beyond by examining how language initiates gender inequalities in speech, drawing attention from Kurya communities of Mara Region found in the United Republic of Tanzania.

Another study in Mexico was done by Aguilar et al. (2013). The study focused on gender roles among Mexican students and adults. It was revealed that men defined themselves with the role of protector and provider, professional, secure and loving while women described themselves as professionals, independent and wives or housewives whose main roles are sharing and educating. The same thinking can be observed in Hietanen and Pick (2015) who argued that gender inequalities in Mexico are not only significant and reflected in numerous aspects of life but are also perceived as a normal phenomenon, which causes psychological barriers in human, economic and social development. Therefore, this study informs academicians and other social scientists the power of words that create gender gaps pertinent to inequality in speech. This would be inculcated within the scope of speech act theoretical apparatus (Austin, 1962) and cognitive development theories (West, 2015).

Some scholars associated gender differences with social and biological neutrality. This cannot leave behind Ayisi and Krisztina (2022) whose study centered on gender roles and gender differences dilemma within the frameworks of Social and Biological Theories. The major purpose of the authors was to answer the question on why gender differences exist. It was postulated that the social theory through its social structures, create gender difference as a way of ensuring the division of labor between men and women. Similarly, the biological theory triggers gender differences under natural

orders created by biological processes to maintain a balance within the natural ecosystem. It was concluded that biological theorists propose that there is no difference between sex and gender. Therefore, the biological traits that segregate males and females sexually also serve as the primary cause of gender difference; that is, these biological traits possess special characteristics that naturally trigger feminine and masculine behaviors in humans.

Gender difference is not a significant problem; rather, they are a natural process of maintaining natural order. On the other hand social theorists are on the opinion that men and women are not born the same; therefore, they deserve different treatments and this different treatment given by society is an effective way to ensure the division of labor among men and women. The division of labor also contributes to cultural and social cohesion (Ayisi and Krisztina (2022). However, the current study evaluates how language people use to create gender inequality despite the fact that biological and social theories trigger such inequality. Note that language is a tool for communication as whether verbal or nonverbal; its use can result into inequality pertinent to gender either intentionally or unintentionally. The current study desires to show how language is the mirror for gender construction inequality drawing attention from Kurya speech communities found in East Africa and Tanzania in specific.

Some documented data have been observed in Tanzania. One of the literatures is by Mhewa (2020) whose investigation centered on gender responsive Language use and Students' participation in Learning in Tanzanian Secondary Schools. The study revealed that secondary school teachers had limited knowledge on gender responsive language which constrained their ability to use gender responsive language in classroom. On the other hand, teachers were observed to use gender neutral language and sometime they used phrases which perpetuate superiority and inferiority between boys and girls respectively. The question here is that if teachers are aware pertinent to gender language or neutrality, why do they use language of superiority among female and male students?

Theoretical Framework
The study was guided by three theories: Gender Schema Theory, The Speech act Theory and Cognitive Grammar Theory. Each of these theories has practical function pertinent to behavior and action influenced by language use in a given society. The choice of these theories depended on the debate available pertinent to gender inequality and equity through language use.

Gender Schema Theory
This theory was propounded by Bem (1981). It focuses on activeness of schema, facilitating a relationship between the child's thoughts, behavior and in turn shaping the development of their gender and attitudes towards the self. The author added that the gender schema theory is "a theory of process, not content." The theory's promise is that the manner in which children become sex-typed is through gender-based schematic processing. This is due to the self-concept assimilating into the gender schema (cognitive categorization of gender related information relevant to one self, e.g., attitudes, lifestyles, sexuality) as a consequence of learning from society. Bem (1981) reasoned that self-esteem (i.e., self-evaluation) is implicated with gender schemas because children learn to compare themselves against their gender schema, evaluating their preferences, attitudes, behaviors, and personal attributes (West, 2015). Despite the Gender Schema theory which indicates people's experiences through gender roles, it does not show explicitly how words articulated by either female gender or male gender are actions. In other words, the theory fails to indicate the power of words through articulation, functions and results. This made the choice of Speech Act Theory because it addresses how words are actions and actions are roles we obey as human being.

The Speech act Theory
This theory was propounded by Austin (1962) in his influential publication 'how to do things with words,' meaning that words are actions. Such language actions through words are evidenced in our social context together with activities whose actions are triggered by words in various contexts such as religious activities (wedding), court activities (judging), academic activities (instructing) and other social interactions. The speech act theory has three practical and theoretical apparatuses. The first is Locutionary act that refers to the basic act of speaking, which itself consists of three related sub acts namely: phonic act of producing an utterance inscription, phatic act of composing a particular linguistics expression in a particular language and a rhetic act of contextualizing the utterance – inscription. The second is illocutionary act which refers to the type of function the speakers intends

to accomplish in the course of producing an utterance. It is an act accomplished in speaking examples of illocutionary acts including accusing, apologizing promising, ordering, refusing, swearing and thanking.

The function or actions just mentioned are also commonly referred to as the illocutionary force or point what Searle (1969) called an illocutionary force indicating device. The third is Perlocutionary speech act, the act that concerns with the effect an utterance may have on the addressee. Put slightly more technically, a perlocution is the act by which the illocution produces a certain effect in or exerts a certain influence on the addressee. In other words, Perlocutionary act represents a consequence or by-product of speaking, whether intentional or not, the product or results can be positive or negative depending on the topic under practice. It is therefore an act performed by speaking. The speech act theory solves the problem for the current study by envisioning the power of words and their action in the Kurya speech community because words are actions and actions are like principles and roles in this community.

Despite the fact that both Schema and the Speech Act Theories handle meaning of words and phrases in speech, they face challenges in accounting words which are applied metaphorically or periphery in speech. This made researchers apply the Cognitive Grammar Theory which stands for conceptualizations.

Cognitive Grammar Theory
This theory was propounded by Langacker (1982, 1987, 2000) and later on was applied by other linguists like Taylor (1990, 2000; Cruse, 1992; Kövecses, 2002). The theory refers to the manifestations of lexemes in conceptualizations. In other words, the theory articulates that words or categories are conceptualized and understood prototypically having a core (monosemy) and periphery (polysemy) senses (Rosch, 1978). However, this study has applied metaphor and metonym as part of theoretical apparatus in analyzing the Kurya language pertinent to gender and inequality through language. Metaphor and metonym are powerful tools in understanding abstract categories in either single domain or different domains. For instance, Kurya people use lexeme *Iritimo* to mean protector or man the protector. Therefore, the Cognitive Grammar Theory accounts explicitly words which are

metaphorical but carries power and that power determines gender inequality

Methodology
Design
This study employed the case study design using the Kurya speech community from Kitenga Village of Bumera Word In Tarime District as a case. The study used the qualitative approach in which words and sentences are being applied in determining inequality between men and women apart from their natural biological sexes.

Population and Sampling
Purposive sampling was applied in selecting the Kurya speech community because it is the community in Tanzania whereby gender inequality seems to be normal life styles (Wambura, 2018). The study employed random sampling in which only 10 children of 10 to 20 years and 10 adults of 40 to 60 years were gathered for discussion where there were 5 males and 5 females to each group among children and adults. When discussing researchers recorded short notes on the matter of facts for the reasons of using different words and phrases in two sexes.

Instruments
The research applied two instruments of data collection namely unstructured observation and focus group discussion. The researchers used the unstructured participant observation to see how Kurya people interact through language and how the language they use has a sign of gender inequality. The major target was to observe the language in contexts of use in relation to cognitive beliefs and emboldens. Focus group discussion was applied to prove the statements observed using the former technique.

Validity and Reliability
The researchers ensured that the content in the tools was relevant and appropriate to the Kurya cultural context, accurately capturing the participants' experiences and perspective actions pertinent to gender inequality. This was ensured through discussion checklists which were subjected to thorough examination through discussion with 10 Kurya adults to how language is used to determine the level gender inequality of which the outcome reflected the study. Reliability was established through data triangulation and meaningfulness in that more than one tool was used to collect data from the field. Therefore the study had relevance

and correct degree of reliability and validity which made clear conclusion under the topic of discussion.

Ethical Considerations
The researchers had informants' informed consent. They explained to respondents the fundamental purpose and aim of conducting the study. Respondents were informed to be free in the discussion and were assured with privacy, dignity, confidentiality, trust and the right to withdraw at any stage if one wished to do so as advised by Creswell (2008).

Results and Discussion
This section presents the results of the study based on the research questions that guided the study:

Research Question 1: How does language use reflect gender inequality in the Kurya birth context?

This research question sought to establish how language use reflects gender inequality in the Kurya birth context. The context of birth was one among the environment where evidences were observed showing the sign of inequality and inequity among male and female. During birth, Kurya people use words, phrases and sentences in nominating gender roles. The following are samples of words articulated in birth of male persons:

1. **Kikurya**: Aibhora Omosirikale *Iritimo*'
   English: She has beard a soldier

2. **Kikurya:** A rentere Iritimo
   English: She has a fighter

The sentence in 1 shows that there are words whose representation is female gender roles against male roles. The lexeme '*Omosirikale*' which means 'soldier' in English language is nominated to the male gender roles. In other words, when a male child is born, the child is baptized with words against a female child who cannot be baptized with those gendered roles. This is within the scope of activeness schema as one among the apparatus of gender schema theory (Bem, 1981). The Gender Schema Theory informs us that the manner in which children become sex-typed is through gender-based schematic processing. In other words, people or parents assimilate children into cognitive categorization of gender related information relevant to attitudes, lifestyles and sexuality within the community. From this base, male children grow while understanding that their roles are not the roles of female children in their state or communities they live.

The information drawn from data 2 shows that the word '*Iritimo*' who's denotative sense is 'spear' in English has been associated with male gender persons or children. When Kurya people say she has brought a spear, they mean she has brought a male child who is a fighter and protector of peace, harmony and belongings to the society. This is in accordance to cognitive grammar theoretical apparatus which expresses metaphorical expressions of words (Taylor, 2015). For instance, the word '*Iritimo*' implies 'spear' denotatively but it has been associated with metaphorical or metonymical multiple semantic scopes to mean 'fighter' by Kurya speech communities. Therefore, language, through its words shape gender inequality in human being. Routed from the institution or families they belong, individuals grow cognitively understanding that certain roles belong to certain gender. That is why Mhewa (2020) in her study on teachers' responsive language use in teaching observed that some of teachers used superiority words for a male gender against female gender like the pronoun 'she' was related to typist and not 'he'. This proves that some educated individuals' understanding on gender roles have been affected and routed from the families they were brought up.

The results in the previous pair bring contrasts compared to words nominated to the new born female in the next pair:

3. **Kikurya**: Waa! Karibhu Omohinchiri
   English: Waoo! Welcome cooks

4. **Kikurya:** Engerya A bhakurighukiriyo
   English: She has added funeral cries

The thematic information relevance in data 3 shows that some words denote gender inequity among male and females. From the data available, cooking activities have been associated to female gender persons. That is why when a female child is born, words like 'welcome cooks' are normal used in the Kurya speech community. The community believes that cooking is for female sex gender and not for male sex gender individuals.

It is the society that creates such nominations which in turn affects the altitude, emotion, knowledge and understanding of the human life circle. This belief of Kurya people agrees with the scope of Marxists (De Souza, 2018; Gary, 2018) who argued that social structures within society have predefined the roles men and women play in society. It posits that the division of roles among men and women is not

meant to discriminate one gender from the other but rather, to maintain social cohesion. While this is true to Marxists, it is untrue to socialists or functionalist theory (which is also the position of the paper) which beliefs that gender differences prevail in the society as effective ways of creating a division of labor among men and women. Thus, men perform the 'instrumental role' (breadwinner role) and women perform the expressive role of "nurturing and housework" (Thompson, 2014). However, despite the debate on these theories, women can as perform instrumental role as men.

The data in 4 shows the characteristics of female genders quite different from the characteristics of male genders in the Kurya speech community's beliefs and practices. The community holds that women are weak to the extent that they cannot tolerate the death events. This means that they cry more and louder rather men who are always calm and strong in the same events. From this base, the community is constructed to believe that women are weak from birth. In other words, Kurya people line with the biological approach which argues that biological attributes (such as genes and hormones) determine the sexuality of individuals and are responsible for the different behavioral differences among males and females in our society. Thus, the weakness female genders have delineates the notion that males and females are uniquely made by nature and possess distinctive biological characteristics without any external influence; thus, socio-culture and environment have no hand in female and male behaviors (Burke &Embrick, 2020). This is untrue because according to the review from the group discussion, men cry more though note loudly. This was observed from one among the native speakers who was on the opinion that men do not cry loudly fearing to crop their identity in front of women, but they cry quietly and they are mostly affected by blood pressure because of not exposing their feelings out (Personal communication

Research Question 3: How does language use reflect gender inequality in the Kurya education environment?

Education context is another context in which language has been a mirror for perpetuating gender inequality quo. It has been believed that women's work is to give birth and care children at homes. Furthermore, when women are married, they go off from their original homes to be owned to other families as opposite to men who create families.

Therefore, some words came out as signs of gender inequality in relation to rights of education. Consider the sample of the following strings of word:

5. **Kikurya**:
   Omokariataghoaomeka….Ghotetwa are nakhobhaowabhande
   English: a woman can't be schooled… married and be other's property

6. **Kikurya**: Ngosomya ole Omokariwabhoraeghasihanoaghatetwaa?
   English: Don't you have anything to do in schooling females, how if married?

The themes found in 5 and 6 structures show the sense of inequity and inequity between male and female genders. From this base, when female genders are born, they are associated with marriage as well as home workers in Kurya people's tacit cognitive knowledge and understandings. Thus, it is the process (not one day event) that is captured within the framework of cognitive-developmental conjecture that focuses on how children socialize once they understand themselves as belonging either to the category of male or female (Bem, 1981).

Therefore gender cognitions take precedence in this theory. What is in mind is what is practiced as the result of gender inequality through speeches. The argument compromises with speech act theoretical apparatus of illocutionary and Perlocutionary, the former referring to the functions of words and the later referring to the effects of those words. In turn, many females are not schooled and other abscond studies due to marriage practices being triggered by not only themselves but also the community's gender bias and segregation in large. This is the practical function of the speech act theory in which words are actions (Austin, 1962).

This has affected textbook writers who are in favor of masculinity rather than femininity. This can be observed in the English textbooks written from Lampung (Rodiah, 2023) with an over-representation of males. In the analysis, women are often being caricatured and assigned stereotypical roles and reactions. On the other hand, men tend to occupy more powerful positions and have a greater range of occupational roles in the society. The same line of thinking is observed in Mexico among Mexican students (Aguilar et al 2013). It was argued that men defined themselves with the role of

protector and provider, professional, secure and loving unlike women. This shows that language plays fundamental roles in mirroring inequality among men and women in a given community.

Research Question 4: How does language use mirror gender inequality in the Kurya marriage milieu?

This research question sought to establish how language use mirrors gender inequality in the Kurya marriage milieu. Marriage milieu is another area of observation where the researchers observed different statements among the Kurya speech community. This was operated in Kurya weeding ceremonies. In the weddings, there are stages where parents provide advises to both the married persons. The two ceremonial events were recorded having the statements in 7 and 8.

7. **Kikurya:** Torakhoha Omona Umuya, atanaharama, omohenchere, omoswarinakomorenda…'

   English: We give you beautiful, woundless girl, make her eat, wear and secure her…'

8. **Kikurya:'…**Otakhabha…Omororonahanootak amuchibhubhobhebhe…Mosachawao…om oheaighoteayighotaramotaani.

   English: '…Don't be arrogant to your … husband; satisfy him for ….surveying in streets…'

The information from the language used in 7 shows advises provided by a male parent and the thematic information provided in 8 was given by female a parent. Item 7 indicates that the male gender is given the girl and his role in the family is to ensure there is enough food and security for the married girl. This means that the woman is there to be protected and secured by the male gender. Number 8 information is for the female gender, advised that her role is to satisfy her husband biologically so that when surveying in streets he cannot have desire for other girls. Note that, metaphorically, they used the lexeme 'cook' but they meant sexual intercourse.

With reference to number 7 and 8, it is evident that women are being claimed to have special roles against men. This is reflected within Locutionary and Perlocutionary acts (Searle, 1969) and functionalism approach (Rodman, 1965). Within the speech act theory, it can be evidenced that the imperative sentences given in 7 and 8 have the meaning of instruction and direction (Locutionary) depending on the society's beliefs on the roles of women and men in the society. These words are actions and their effect or result (Perlocutionary) in the family triggers gender inequality and conflicts. For instance, a man is not asked where he has been surveying because his work is to survey and see what is going on. This proves that words do actions (Austin, 1962) and these actions are social constructions in the scope of functionalism or social theory whose belief is the division of labor in the society among male and women, thus, men perform the 'instrumental role as protectors, leading and women perform the expressive role of "nurturing and housework" (Thompson, 2014).

Conclusions and Recommendations
Conclusions
Kurya speech community has provided evidences on how language is a benchmark sign of gender disparity among men and women. In birth context, it has been observed that the Kurya people speech communities use words like *Omosirikale*' which means 'soldier' and '*Iritimo*' whose denotative sense is 'spear' to nominate male gender roles against female gender roles just as it appears in other words like *Omohinchiri* 'cooks' and *bhakurighukiriyo* 'cries.' In education context, women are subordinates compared to men in schooling. Females are not allowed to be schooled as parents fear in loosing time and wealth rather than schooling males who at the end have positive return to their families. In marriage environment, Kurya people have words that do not provide equality when spoken. They sometimes believe that women are care givers to their husbands and providers of biological satisfaction.

Recommendations
The study recommends that gender inequality and inequity should be demystified out in the globalized world so that such practices should be mitigated. Women and men are equal as human beings and everybody has the role to play in his or her community. From this base, biases of men being more (strong, intelligence and leaders) than women in terms of education, culture and status quo should be avoided in communities like that of the Kurya who seem to undermine women' right.

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