

Euphemisms on Body Effluvia in Kikuyu

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Abstract: *The present paper on euphemisms on body effluvia in Kikuyu language aims at identifying the semantic and lexical processes involved in euphemism formation from taboo words on body effluvia in Kikuyu. This aim of study is necessitated by the fact that Kikuyu is a language characterized by linguistic taboos. For this reason, taboo words in Kikuyu have to be euphemized by use of emotional colourings that are different from what the words literally refer to. This study paper concludes that taboo words and their euphemized versions on body effluvia in Kikuyu provoke different responses among the Kikuyu language speakers. Using Politeness theory, the paper is significant in that its findings is of great importance to parents, teachers, court interpreters, media practitioners, counselors and sex educators using Kikuyu language. Data for the study was obtained from archival records, the internet and through interviews.*

Keywords: *Euphemisms, Body effluvia, Kikuyu, Taboo words, Excretion.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we discuss taboo words and euphemisms on body effluvia in Kikuyu language. Terms such as shit, bloody and piss refer to bodily effluvia and acts of excretion that are generally regarded as expletives. Although completely natural and ever present in our lives, these bodily emissions are an unwanted topic to openly discuss.

As Pinker (2007) tries to explain why, the most disgusting substances are also the most dangerous vector for diseases. For instance faeces are a route to transmission of viruses, bacteria and protozoa that cause at least twenty intestinal diseases (Ibid, 2007:345). In addition, blood, vomit, mucus, pus and sexual fluid are carriers of diseases from one body to another. There is a strong opposition to drinking or eating bodily effluvia among human kind; even just thinking about it generates disgust which might explain why the terms are seen as taboo.

Allan and Burridge (2006:144) state that the language one uses when referring to tabooed parts and functions of the effluvia is usually figurative. For instance in English we say, lose your lunch instead of vomiting. This is a sweet talking idiom and figuratively used to avoid mentioning the bodily effluvia that goes with vomiting.

Allan and Burridge (Ibid) argue that there is a strong connection between magic and bodily effluvia. For instance, in many cultures, Kikuyu being one of them, there are many instructions for women on how to use tabooed bodily effluvia such as menstrual blood to capture the sexual attention of a man by adding it to his food or drink.

Thus the aim of this paper is to identify, analyze, interpret and discuss taboo words and euphemisms on body effluvia in Kikuyu. As we fulfill this aim, the study will also find out word formation processes that are involved in euphemized taboo words in Kikuyu.

The topic of Body Effluvia is wide and varied. For the purpose of the present paper, the researchers purposively decided to use 10 out of the many effluvia. The reason for this is that these are probably the most common and the most distasteful body effluvia among the Kikuyu people as to be euphemized by the speakers of Kikuyu language.

2. THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

The present study utilizes traditional theories of Politeness as proposed by Lakoff (1973), Brown and Levinson (1978/1987) and Leech (1983). These theories of Politeness emphasize an individual's rationality and face as he/she uses language in communication. These theories also hold it that different cultures agree on what to them politeness is. All these traditional theories on Politeness differ from later approaches informed by social theory by Eelen (2001), Mills (2003) and Watts (2003).

3. METHODOLOGY

Data for the present paper was collected from the Kikuyu language by use of both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was obtained from one of the researcher's native knowledge of the usage of Kikuyu euphemisms. This particular researcher has ability and capacity of speaking, writing and reading the Kikuyu language fluently. In conducting research about this paper, the researchers used qualitative research techniques due to the fact that the approach taken involved discussions and analysis for the research was not a controlled phenomenon (see Mukhwana, A and Kabiru, D.W 2014). As the above researchers observe, qualitative inquiry deals with data which is in form of words like this one rather than numbers and statistics.

The methods of identifying and locating resources also involved accessing the University of Nairobi library's online cataloging system. Information related to the topic of body effluvia was discovered in related books besides using Google Scholar to locate online database in order to find related scholarly articles. The internet was used as a source because of its limitless networking of resources. Sources from the internet were written by professionals in Linguistics, Socio-linguistics, Anthropological Linguistics, Pragmatics, Communication, Stylistics, Discourse and Culture.

In searching for applicable articles and papers on body effluvia, the search engines were limited to searching peer-reviewed journals. This was done in order to uphold credibility, validity, and reliability of the material used in the research. Noting that anyone can publish information online and that the information can be false or misleading, the researchers sought for background information on the authors of the online resources to determine if the information was credible.

The data obtained was analyzed within the framework of Politeness theory in order to ensure that the paper's aims are achieved.

4. ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF TABOO WORDS AND EUPHEMISMS ON BODY EFFLUVIA IN KIKUYU.

There are various bodily functions which result in the emission of matter from the human bodies. Kikuyu cultural beliefs cause us to regard these functions with varying degree of disgust. Below is a discussion of the various bodily fluids/ excretions that are seen as taboo and how they are euphemised in Kikuyu language.

4.1. Menstruation

Menstruation is the shading of blood by mature female human beings every month with an average periodicity of twenty eight days and this is done through the vagina. The process is somewhat messy and many cultures have absorber material that are worn externally or internally to limit the spread of the menstrual flow. If the blood happens to be seen by the public, it is an act of embarrassment to the woman and she is seen as being careless and irresponsible. This is a **face** threatening act.

There is the virtually universal belief that women in their periods are unclean and consequently dangerous to themselves and to others (see the book of Leviticus 15:19 in the Bible). On the other hand, their menstruation is associated with the great mystery of fertility and life itself and is thus seen as being an important body process.

The researchers found out that among the Kikuyu people, it was taboo traditionally to have intercourse with a woman in her menses. If a man found out that a woman's menses had just started and that the blood has just touched his body, the two had to go to a traditional doctor to be purified. If they failed to do so, it was believed that one of them would surely die.

There are various terms in Kikuyu that are used to refer to the act of a woman having her menses.

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Consider the following euphemisms:

Euphemism	Gloss
<i>Kuona mweri</i>	To see the moon
<i>Machiru</i>	Name of a woman (Wanjiru)
<i>Kahinda ka mweri</i>	The time of the month
<i>Gukira red sea</i>	Crossing the red sea
<i>Kuura thakame</i>	Bleeding
<i>Mithenya ya atumia</i>	Ladies days
<i>Mweri-ini</i>	In the moon
<i>Kirumi kia mweri</i>	Monthly visitors
<i>Ageni a mweri</i>	Monthly visitors
<i>Arata</i>	Friends
<i>Guita</i>	Leaking
<i>Gukorwo wina matangari</i>	Being on the rags
<i>Kuura</i>	Raining
<i>Mweri mutune</i>	Red moon
<i>Kuona utune</i>	Seeing red
<i>Ihinda ria mweri</i>	That time of the moon
<i>Murimu wa mweri</i>	Monthly sickness
<i>Kugenerwo</i>	Visitation
<i>Kironda gitahonaga</i>	The wound that never heals
<i>Gutinia kara</i>	Cut ones finger
<i>Kuigwa uru</i>	Being Unwell

Among the Kikuyu, different euphemisms are used by different groups of people to describe menstruation. For instance, in male to male talk they tend to use euphemisms like;

1. *Guita* meaning "leaking"
2. *Kuura* meaning "bleeding"

If it is in women to men talk and vice versa, the euphemisms below are used;

1. *Ndiraigwa wega* meaning "I am not well."
2. *Gukira iria itune* meaning "Crossing the Red Sea."

If it is in women to women talk, such euphemisms are used;

1. *Mashiru* meaning "that that belongs to Wanjiru-Wanjiru (Shiro) being a popular female Kikuyu name."
2. *Kuona* meaning "to see."

Some euphemisms on menstruation in Kikuyu are restricted to some areas. For instance, when girls are being taught about their sexuality, the following euphemisms are used;

1. *Kugimara* meaning to grow up.
2. *Ageni a mweri* meaning monthly visitors.
3. *Ihinda ria mweri* meaning that time of the month.

The above euphemisms are very polite as not to scare the young girls on what awaits them in the future, which is their menstruation. The researchers found out that some euphemisms in Kikuyu language are historical. Before the advent of present day sanitary towels, girls traditionally used rags and skins but because of the technological changes that have brought sanitary towels, the concepts of skins and rags are used as euphemisms for the period that a woman has her menstruation. Only elderly Kikuyu women use these terms to describe the menstruation period. On the other hand the use of the term "the wound that never heals" is a metaphorical euphemism to mean that menstruation is an endless process in young women and, the same applies to the term "*kuona*" meaning "to see."

Some Kikuyu women use bizarre euphemisms and coded words when talking about their menses. For example when they use "*Mashiru*" meaning "the things that belong to woman," anybody who is not a woman would not understand what they are talking about.

The researchers also found that some terms are frankly used by respondents because they simply mean what they say. For instance if a person says "am bleeding", this is exactly what is happening. The researchers found out that euphemisms to do with menstruation like "kuona" meaning "seeing" are so used to hearing them that respondents did not think of them as euphemisms anymore. Generally speaking however, euphemisms on menstruation are used because, as a lot of women respondents put it, they are not comfortable with being direct about such things as menstruation.

Kikuyu women while in this state of menstruation, also use euphemisms like "I am sick" in order not to disappoint their husbands and make them uncomfortable about the subject. From the study, the researchers found out that male respondents are uncomfortable with the entire concept of menstruation whether tabooed or euphemized despite their having girlfriends, wives, sisters and even mothers.

Some euphemisms to do with menstruation in Kikuyu are derived from the Bible. In the Kikuyu Bible version especially in the book of Leviticus 15:19, the following statement is found:-

In Kikuyu

"Ningi mundu wa nja angikoruo niekuura, na gukoruo ni thakame ya ihinda riake ria mweriri, agaikara e mugiro mithenya mugwanja na mundu o wothe uria ukamuhutia agatinda e na thahu ngunya o hwai-ini. Nakio kindu o giothe kiria agakomera ihinda riu e na mugiro nigikagwatwo ni thahu, o nakio kindu o giothe kiria agaikarira nigikagwatwo ni thahu."

Gloss

If a woman has an issue and her issue is in the flesh be blood, she shall be apart seven days, and whatever toucheth her shall be unclean until in the evening.

From the statement on menstruation above, we can find the euphemism, "a woman has an issue" used to replace the tabooed phrase "menstruating woman." It is used figuratively to keep the reference of tabooed bodily effluvia away. The euphemism of a woman having an issue in Kikuyu is 'kuona mweri' and is literally translated back to English to mean "seeing the moon."

4.2. Defecation

Defecation is the process of eliminating solid or semi-solid waste from the body through the anus. The act is generally regarded with a cultural distaste among the Kikuyu, and people in this community are fastidious about defecation and generally wish to perform the act in seclusion and in a designated location known as "Kioro" meaning "toilet." When in polite company, the word is avoided as it is considered as a face threatening act and instead one would excuse himself or herself and say; "Ndathii gwiteithia literary meaning; "I am going to help myself".

Among the Kikuyu, as the researchers found out, the community treats as taboo an act of an adult passing stool inside the house or at the doorstep. In such a case a fat goat known as "ngoima" is to be slaughtered and eaten by old men who are past the reproductive age to revoke the taboo created and the wrath of the gods led by Ngai the supreme Kikuyu God.

It is also taboo to defecate in water. The Kikuyu saying "uyu ananite akamia rui na iguru," meaning, this one is so naughty that he excretes in the river obtains. The above saying expresses two truths; first the saying expresses an extremely mischievous person who excretes in water. Secondly, it shows that the Kikuyu people possess hygienic knowledge on the disastrous effect that could befall anybody who makes use of polluted water. For instance, Kikuyu people are aware of the fact that polluted water can lead to waterborne diseases.

There are various terms used to refer to defecation in Kikuyu language. Consider the following;

Taboo	Gloss
Kumia	Defecation

Euphemism	Gloss
Gwiteithia	To help oneself
Kahinda kanene	Long call

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As can be seen from the euphemisms for defecation, Kikuyu language tries and tends to be polite in the use of terms like going to help ones self simply put as “*Guthii guiteithia*”. However, it should be noted that it is only the aged and cultured among the Kikuyu who use the euphemisms above for defecation. Children and medical practitioners call things the way they literally are.

4.3. Urination

Urine is a clear amber solution of the waste product resulting from the filtration process that takes place in the kidney and it is the act of passing it out that constitutes urination. Thus, this is a very important body process. The researchers found out that urination is not a process that one can talk about openly, especially in polite company, and if need arises to use it, one must get a euphemism for it, so as not to annoy or irritate those who are listening. In many cultures, Kikuyu being one of them, men urinate while standing and women urinate while squatting down, thus the difference of urinals and toilet seats for men and women respectively. This must be in a secluded place away from the public, as urination in public is treated as a **face** threatening act which can result in punishment.

Consider the following lexicon on urination:

Taboo	Gloss
Guthuguma	Urinate

Euphemism	Gloss
Kahinda Kanini	Short call
Gutua mata	Spitting
Kururta munyororo	Removing a chain
Kurugama(men)	To stand
Guiteithia	Helping oneself
Thondeka karui	Create a river

As can be seen from the euphemisms on urination above, there are general euphemisms for both sexes while there are also male specific euphemisms for urination. An example is *kurugama* (to stand). Like defecation, urination as a taboo topic is treated differently by medical practitioners and euphemisms for it are age and gender specific.

4.4. Ejaculation

Ejaculation happens when the male genitalia are stimulated or excited and the seminal fluid is forced to flow down in the urinary tract and out of the body. From the study, the researchers found out that among the body effluvia processes the only one known to give consistent pleasure is ejaculation. In the Kikuyu community the main aim of ejaculation is reproduction but it has a secondary function too of a recreation session with a cooperative partner.

In the Kikuyu Version of the Bible, and in the Old Testament, documents in Leviticus 15:16-18 say, "na riri, mundu ona uriku angiumwo ni hinya wa urume-ri, no muhaka ethambe mwiri wothe na mai, nake atinde ena thahu nginya o hwaini. Nayo nguo iria yothe, kana ruua ruothe, haria hangikoruo hagiite hinya ucio wa urume, no muhaka hathambio na ,mai, nayo nguo io itinde iri na thahu nginya o hwai-ini. Ningi mundu murume angikorwo akomanitie na mundu wa nja akoimwo ni hinya wa urume no muhaka acio eri methambe na mai nao matinde me na thahu nginya o hwai-iini. "

Gloss

“When a man has an emission of seed, he must bath his whole body in water and he will be unclean till evening. Any clothing or leather that has semen on it must be washed with water, and it will be unclean till evening. When a man lies with a woman and there is emission of semen, both must bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening.

In this Bible verse, there is use of euphemism where instead of ejaculation the Kikuyu version Bible uses “emission of seed” and it advices that the emission of seed should be followed by a bath regardless of how it came about. The Bible says that the one who comes in contact with somebody's fluids then, the person should regard himself/herself as unclean and seek cleansing.

Consider the following terms as used in Kikuyu language for ejaculation and the related actions.

Taboo	Gloss
Ubai	Semen
Euphemism	Gloss
<i>Murigo</i>	<i>Load</i>
<i>Oiro</i>	<i>Oil</i>
<i>Mbegu</i>	<i>Seeds</i>
<i>Rangi</i>	<i>Ink</i>
<i>Ciunguyu</i>	<i>Tadpole</i>
<i>Iria ria mucuthi</i>	<i>Penis milk</i>

This study found out that during sexual intercourse, both men and women do come (ejaculate). However, Kikuyu being a male dominated community despite being matrilineal, ejaculation is regarded a male affair and the above euphemisms for it are male inclined.

4.5. Lactation

New born human babies receive nourishment in the form of fluid secreted by the lactatory duct within their mother's breasts. Human milk is highly nutritious but the Kikuyu regard lactation with distaste and are bothered about public breast feeding. In the course of the present research, the researchers noted that some women regard their breasts as sexual organs only and find the idea of breastfeeding repellent.

The term "*iria*" in Kikuyu is used to refer to breast milk while lactation is referred to as *kuongithia mwana* meaning to make a child suckle. The euphemism used for breasts in Kikuyu is borrowed from Swahili and is *shakura ya mtoto* meaning a child's food.

4.6. Sternutation

Sneezing is caused by irritation of mucous membranes of the nose. Despite the health aspect, the Kikuyu community does not seem to be uncomfortable about sternutation provided one uses a handkerchief to cover him/herself when sneezing. The researchers found out that when one sneezes, one is expected to name someone who he blesses, and sneezing once is seen as a sign of bad luck. The following term is used for sneezing in Kikuyu:

Euphemism	Gloss
Althimura	Sneeze

It is not clear whether the above term for sneezing in Kikuyu is taboo or an ordinary word that can be used anywhere any time. From the research, it clearly comes out that there are not many euphemisms for sneezing as body effluvia among the Kikuyu people and the one used frequently is "*athimura*"

4.7. Flatulation

Flatulation is the release of gaseous material from the lower intestinal tract through the anus. It is often accompanied by some noise.

Among the Kikuyus, it is socially unacceptable to flatulate in public and it is considered a face threatening act. This is due to the foul smell of the discharged gases.

The researchers found out that Kikuyu children are taught from a young age, through songs, that it is wrong to flatulate in public and if they do it, they are mocked through songs. Although it sometimes becomes hard to control flatulation, the noisy discharge is often heard causing embarrassment; and among polite company it is considered lack of respect and lack of good morals. Mostly, those who use euphemisms on this topic of flatulation are Kikuyu people with substantial amount of Western education and the euphemisms are therefore universal in nature.

Consider the following terms used for flatulation in Kikuyu

Taboo	Gloss
<i>Guthuria</i>	Flatulation
<i>Guthukia riera</i>	To spoil the air
<i>Kuhura ndore</i>	To produce sound that spoils the air
Euphemism	Gloss
<i>Kuhuhuka</i>	Inflate
<i>Riera riuru</i>	Bad air

It should also be noted that besides education, age is an important factor in the use of euphemisms for flactulation in Kikuyu. Children simply put it as it is supposed to be.

4.8. Salivation

This is the emission of a fluid from the mouth.

From the present study, the researchers found out that if one happens to leave the mouth open, for instance during sleeping, excess saliva can drool out. This drooling of excess saliva is a face threatening act and can cause embarrassment to the person and amusement to onlookers. This has therefore to be avoided. Public spitting is generally regarded as being disgusting and Kikuyu people are highly discouraged from doing it as the saliva may have some disease causing germs which may be passed on to other people.

In Kikuyu culture, it is wrong to spit on someone. This is considered an assault and thus the act is punishable; that is, the person who is spat on can cause a fight. Although spitting in public is a face threatening act among the Kikuyu, it is a contentious issue. The researchers found out that if one gave an old person a present, as a way of blessing the giver, the old person would spit just a little saliva on his/her chest. The researchers also found out that the Muslims among the Kikuyu and elsewhere in the world are forbidden by the religion from swallowing anything during daylight hours in the month of Ramadan. So if they have excess saliva, the customary way to dispose of it is by spitting it out, and in order to reduce the face threatening act, they are advised to have a piece of cloth on which to spit. The Kikuyu word for saliva is "mata". The term "mata" is also euphemized to mean urinate in the phrase "gutua mata"

Saliva may also come out, unconsciously when normal adults are a sleep and this is referred to as "ruta".

Being considered taboo "ruta" is highly forbidden and ridiculed among the Kikuyu as was reported by the respondents in this study because of the tabooeness associated with "ruta". A person with "ruta" around the mouth is discouraged from cooking for anybody among the Kikuyu people unless he or she washes the "ruta" from the face. However, it is interesting to note that there are no euphemisms in Kikuyu language currently for "mata" and "ruta"

4.9. Lacrimation

Human eyes are capable of moving within their socket. For this to happen smoothly, they have to be kept constantly lubricated by the secretion of the tears. Humans lacrimate excessively in response to pain, sadness or extreme mirth. This appears to be partly a voluntary response. All healthy babies do it but the researchers found out that in the Kikuyu community this function is often suppressed in male humans from a relatively early age.

Men are not expected to cry or shed tears as this is seen as a way of being weak or being a coward which is against the norm in the Kikuyu society. Such a man cannot be respected by the people in the Kikuyu society. On the other hand, the researchers gathered that Kikuyu women are able to use crying as a diversionary tactic during an argument. They also use tears to gain attention, like it happens in copulation.

"Maithori" is the Kikuyu term for tears. Just like *mata* and *ruta*, *maithori* does not have synonyms or euphemisms in Kikuyu language.

4.10. Regurgitations

What goes down the human body may come up; and this is particularly true with digested food that may on occasion be discharged, vigorously upwards through oesophagus and mouth. Babies also regurgitate milk frequently, but this is generally considered to be normal and convenient among the Kikuyu.

Among the Kikuyu, there is distaste for vomit especially by mature people when in public and people tend to react in disgust once it happens. The person vomiting, though, is generally accorded sympathy for being a sufferer of a disease. In Kikuyu language the term for vomit is "gutahika". However the language has euphemisms for this act so as not to hurt the audience which may turn out to be offended or even be over sympathetic. The terms used as euphemism in Kikuyu language are as put below:

Kuruta kiria ngurite	Remove what I had eaten
Kuruta kiria kiuma nda	Remove what was in the stomach

As can be seen those two terms above for vomiting are comparatively a polite way of saying the actual thing, which is considered as a face saving act. This is the essence of euphemisms.

5. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion on body effluvia in Kikuyu, it is clear that body effluvia words bring on emotion of disgust and repulsion. This is a natural defense mechanism since epidemiologists teach us to stay away from these liquids as most of them are abundant in parasitic organisms and bacteria. However, their roles in the human body are very important. That is why the study sought euphemisms for them. The study has found out that although offensive in nature, body effluvia is an important topic that we cannot do without.

Not all body effluvia have negative or face threatening connotations in Kikuyu. Examples of body effluvia that appear not to cause face threatening include lactation, lacrimation and salivation. Thus, for a body effluvia to be a face threatening act that warrants euphemization the concept of culture must be considered. In the Kikuyu community, the use of euphemisms for taboo words regarding body effluvia is welcomed as it is seen as a face saving act.

In all, figurative language that needs interpretation is used in euphemizing taboo words in Kikuyu. In some instances, loan translation, especially from English is used in euphemizing taboo terms for body effluvia in Kikuyu; and this is done especially by people with substantial Western type of education.

Some topics on body effluvia have more euphemisms than others and this probably explains the degree with which the terms are distasteful.

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