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Discursive Strategies Contributing to Stigma towards Involuntary Childless Women in the Gikùyù Community

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Positioning women in a situation where motherhood is associated with womanhood has led to stigma towards those who do not have children. They are perceived as outsiders in their communities, and language is used to advance the ideologies that support their discrimination. The use of discursive techniques has been essential in stigmatising and categorising childlessness. Linguistic stigma has been created by language and other ideas. Degrading discourse strategies that are language-based have a significant impact on how childless women are viewed. The paper's discursive approaches were centred on the stigma that involuntarily childless women in the Gikùyù community experience. The study was informed by Fairclough and Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Different elements like vocabulary, grammatical structure, and semantics ought not to be examined individually, according to CDA and their functions should not be disregarded. The purpose of the study was to assess the discursive techniques stigmatising involuntarily childless women. The study used purposive sampling to choose the villages in the Tetu sub-county, Nyeri County. They were Kĩandu, Ndũgamano and Kĩgogoinĩ. The researcher used focus group discussions (FGDs) in order to collect data. Twelve involuntarily childless women participated in the FGD as respondents, four in each FGD. The data was then audio recorded, analysed, and categorised into themes. The study will benefit linguists since it will educate them on the extent to which language may be used to stigmatise social groups and prepare them to advocate for language change when needed. This discussion will highlight the connection between language and gender and motivate curriculum designers to include discussions on linguistic stigma, which will benefit researchers who focus on gender issues. Involuntary childless women are stigmatised linguistically according to the study, and these women should rebrand themselves by accepting their situation and reclaiming their identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Both men and women can have infertility, which is a problem that is experienced worldwide. Since specialists always define infertility to serve their purposes, infertility definitions may differ (Locke, 2014). The WHO definition, however, is the one that is most frequently used. The difficulty of a sexually active couple to become pregnant after two years of unprotected intercourse is discussed in the paper. The two types of infertility are primary infertility and secondary infertility. A couple's inability to conceive is known as primary infertility, but failure to conceive after having a prior pregnancy is known as secondary infertility (WHO, 2011). Infertility is seen as a global problem that affects 8–10% of couples worldwide, according to Roberge et al. (2018). Men make up about a third of individuals affected, women make up another third, and the remaining third is made up of cases where both partners are affected (rarely) or where the cause is unknown (Sophanna, 2016). However, because society blames them for the issue, women carry the most shame.

The Gikùyù proverb "Uthaka wa mũtunia wonekaga a ciara" which translates to "The crowning moment of a woman's beauty is motherhood". It is a well-known saying that

encourages Gikùyù women to consciously show their womanhood via parenthood. According to Mbiti (2018), divorce was acceptable if there were no children from the union. When a man had a problem, his family, including his wife, would strive to cover it up at all costs, and the woman was allowed to sleep with a close relative of her husband in order to hide the humiliation (Kimathi, 2004). However, a woman who could not bear children could be divorced. In the Gikùyù community, a woman who was unable to have children was even beaten up (Kimathi, 2004). This simply served to further stigmatise her.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Linguistic Strategies of Discourse

The paper highlighted stigma-producing stereotypical discourses by utilising linguistic strategies previously employed by other researchers. Semantic derogation, negation, argumentation, double speak, and finally, the obligation strategy were among the techniques. The study argued that the Gikùyù involuntarily childless women were stigmatised linguistically as a result of these discursive techniques.

Semantic Derogation

Semantic derogation refers to the purposeful use of words, phrases, or clauses to denigrate another person in order to negatively affect how they are seen. It is the degradation of terms used to describe a particular group of people within a community (Fryer & Levitt, 2004). According to Schulz (1975), there are more favourable terms for men and many unfavourable words for women. She also suggests that women who fail to live up to social expectations have it harder. She goes on to say that this phenomenon is referred to as the semantic denigration of “special” women because every time a term is used to describe these childless women, it gets “pejorated.” She places special emphasis on the link between sex, language, and society. She claims that each and every woman in this specific category is referred to in quotation marks. Allport’s (1954) view claims that categorising is an aversion based on false and undetectable generalisations that may be either felt or voiced. All lexicons that allude to involuntarily childless women in relation to the study have been noted. The stigmatising lexicons are created in deficit discourses that stigmatise, divide, and label involuntary childless women in a way that gives the stigmatising elements room to grow. Therefore, the focus of this study was on the linguistic techniques that played a role in the stigma towards involuntary childless women.

Argumentation Strategies

By researching the extensive history of argumentation theories and working to establish a knowledge of argumentation strategies based on that reliable background, some researchers perform a crucial role. The canons of rhetoric, strategic manoeuvring, and persuasion techniques were crucial to our study since they highlighted the question of how society comes to stigmatise involuntarily childless women (Aristotle, 2013 & Foucault, 2009). Aristotle proposed four basic methods of persuasion in his study: logos, ethos, pathos, and kairos. According to him, one must use reasoning (logos), establish the speaker’s authority

(ethos), and arouse powerful emotions in the listeners (pathos) in order to persuade. Additionally, the right time and place should be utilised (kairos). However, compared to other modes, the kairos mode receives less attention.

Negation Strategies

According to Nahejec (2021), as human cognition increased, affirmation and negation were incorporated into Aristotle’s categories of existence and non-existence. Contrary to negation, which is founded on ideas of absence, affirmation was given the status of a logical category. According to Aristotle (2013), negation is a logical technique that demonstrates that an object lacks a property that it would ordinarily have. He continues to maintain that affirmation asserts that an object possesses a number of good qualities, whereas denial contends that the opposite is true. In order to help people generate and organise their knowledge of the social environment and navigate its complexity, society is classified into many categories (Allport, 1954). This is important to this research because society thinks that women who are involuntarily childless are less feminine.

Obligation Strategies

A sense of duty underlines the necessity or significance of something in one’s life using the grammatical components that makeup modality. These modalities are examined by critical discourse analysis in addition to the modal auxiliary scope because they lend some degree of assurance to the declaration of what the writer (or speaker) believes and expresses in a specific attitude. According to Halliday’s approach, modality is most frequently used in interpersonal grammar interactions (Hoey, 1988). Obligations must be communicated using modal auxiliary words. Examples include the auxiliary verbs should, must, and have to. When these obligations are directed towards a receiver, they always have an unquestionable obedience meaning. This study, however, did not restrict itself to modal auxiliaries; it also considered other

lexicons that denote a comparable idea, such as “responsible for,” “suited to,” and “supposed to,” which strongly pressure the recipient to obey. The aim was to investigate the role played by the obligation strategy in the stigmatisation of involuntarily childless women.

Implicature

The verbs imply, suggest, and meaning are connected to implicature, according to Grice (1999). The speaker may not have intended for the listener to understand the message from the words used in the implicature. This explains why there are many connections between languages and the things we do every day. In order to signal, infer, and mean that all women of reproductive age should have children, the Gikùyù community employs the language strategy of implication. Because of the skilful construction of words, they sometimes transmit meanings that are distinct from those intended by the speaker—in this case, the community members to whom the involuntarily childless woman belongs. Because these societal ideals are spread and ingrained in our daily lives, this is made feasible.

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Fairclough’s (2001) and Van Dijk’s (2006), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theories. The CDA theory was crucial to the study because it described how power relations are established and maintained in the Gikùyù society as well as how stigmatising views about women are spread through discursive strategies.

According to critical discourse analysis, a text’s form and purpose must be analysed in order for the reader to fully understand what the text is saying. Additionally, it demonstrates how that writing is created, digested, and connected to the rest of society. In light of this, CDA sees the text as an all-encompassing process in which social practices are intertwined with it and create a symbiotic relationship in which they are dependent on one

another (Richardson, 2007). Fairclough (2010) contends that analysis should always begin with the text before gradually incorporating further, more complex discursive practises that are also socially acceptable.

According to Fairclough (2010), while attempting to analyse discourse, its process and its social context are all crucial. He advises the researcher to continually consider the situation’s social and institutional structures in addition to the current circumstances. Grammar, lexicons, and semantics should not be particularly important on their own, according to CDA. This is due to the fact that in any analysis, their functionalities constantly stand out. Since it was examined in the context of phrase usage in the stigma against involuntarily childless women, this idea was extremely important to this study. According to Richardson (2007), it is crucial to focus on the traditional methods of language analysis and to critically evaluate how they either reproduce or contest social beliefs and structures of power. He further asserts that one should take other options that the society had available into account before interpreting the text’s employed features. To determine the intensity of the stigma in the Gikùyù community, the grammatical choices and lexicons were looked at to evaluate the strategies. The study’s goal was to identify the discursive techniques used in involuntary childlessness.

Furthermore, Van Dijk’s (2006) socio-cognitive approach to CDA proved extremely pertinent to the study. Language users, such as members of organisations, groups, or ethnicities, adopt social beliefs that have been ingrained in them. This ideological cognitive component is frequently referred to as “the communal mental representation of language.” All social cognitions are divided into three main groups Van Dijk (2006). The first is understanding from a cultural perspective. It is the information that members of the concerned community regularly exchange. The knowledge that is shared across cultures is frequently viewed as a

public discourse because it is shared on an equal basis. Attitudes are the second. They can be seen as the impressions people have of other people, and the social and cultural realities shape their discourse. Ideology is the most important and last one. Ideologies are essential principles that shape the views of the entire public, claims Van Dijk (2006). These concepts are utilised by the dominant group, who then propagate and legitimise the stigma in order to rule over others. The theory revealed social attitudes that were in line with the study's goal of establishing the discursive strategies of stigmatising the forcibly childless women within the Gikũyũ community. In Fairclough's (2001) final point of research and analysis, this ideological notion was integrated. All expressive in this paper were treated as ideologies to guarantee that the linguistic stigma was accurately conveyed.

It was believed that every piece of information gathered for the study contained cultural concepts that had evolved through generations and through language learning and had subsequently been preserved in cognitive processes. The information was carefully examined for any signs of an imbalance in power between the dominant and marginalised groups. Any attempts to maintain and sustain particular discursive practices that place focus on ideologies that are viewed as dominant against others that are perceived as inferior are seen as dominances in power, according to this study (Fairclough, 2010). This study aimed to analyse the discursive mechanisms that contribute to the stigma of involuntary childless women.

METHODOLOGY

To explore the discursive strategies toward involuntary childless women, the research employed the qualitative research method (Takyi, 2022). Twelve women between the ages of 45 and 65 who had either experienced or were experiencing involuntary childlessness were the target population. Age 45 was picked to accommodate women's reproductive age, while 65 years was picked as the upper limit because it was expected

that, at that age, a woman was expected to have made peace with the fact that she would never bear children biologically. The study's respondents were chosen through purposeful sampling. The study was restricted to Nyeri County's Tetu Sub-County. Nyeri County is thought to have the greatest rate of infertility when compared to other counties in Kenya. Eight hundred sixty-six cases of infertility, affecting both men and women, were reported in the county between the years 2012 and 2019, according to (KDHS, 2020). Tetu sub-county had the highest percentage of infertility cases, at 328 people or 38% of the infertility rate in the county. Of these, 260 were women, and 68 were men. The three villages of Kĩandu, Ndũgamano and Kĩgogoinĩ in the Tetu sub-county were purposefully sampled because the researcher had noted that infertility was rife there. Eight FGD questions served as the study's guiding principles, and the researcher picked special situations that were instructive. The childless women were organised into Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). To ensure that no data was lost, the data was then tape-recorded. The data was then translated after being transcribed.

RESULTS

The study critically examined the linguistic strategies that were crucial in stigmatising childless women. The study therefore examined the relationship between meaning and function, which allows for the expression of various meanings. It also placed a strong emphasis on how certain linguistic decisions—such as words, phrases, or grammatical constructions—affect the enslavement of involuntary childless women. The study focused on how language exchange procedures can create ideologies, which are groups of beliefs that make up a wider body of views that stigmatise involuntary childless women. The linguistic techniques that were emphasised were implicature, argumentation techniques, negation techniques, obligation techniques, and syntactic-level structures.

Semantic Derogation

The choice of words reflects the underlying ideologies explored in language and gender literature. Nouns like “woman” are reified, in the words of Eckert and Mc Connell-Ginet (2013), by “...standard maps of social reality” (p. 2). This implies that stereotypes might exist simply because someone is a woman. If one cannot live up to society’s expectations, it gets worse (Schulz, 1975). Since ideologies are fundamental beliefs that shape the actions that all members of a group share, involuntary childless women are constructed in insufficient ideological discourses (Van Dijk, 2006). To emphasise the language stigma, derogatory expressions, various figures of speech, and adjectives—some of which are mentioned in the second objective—were used. For instance, (Respondent 1, 51 years) said:

Andũ othe mehũgũrĩre makĩndora rĩrĩa mũtungatĩrĩ etire andũ othe arũaru mbere amahoere - Nginya arĩa mena ndaa thũku [Everyone turned to look at me when the pastor one day invited all the sick people—including those with rotting wombs—to the front so he could pray for them] (Respondent 1: 51 years).

The insulting noun phrase “a rotten womb” portrays childless women as irresponsible and careless, infantilising them in the process. This is the authoritarian personality (Allport, 1954), wherein some social groupings yearn for rulers who uphold order and create hierarchies based on strict social groups. In order to make his point that childlessness was unacceptable, the pastor used an authoritarian strategy in the study. These lexicons are connected to those who failed in a morally upright society and to those who contributed to their misfortune. The degree of irritation is demonstrated by the juxtaposition of her womb with something repulsive. As a result, society tends to avoid childless women, treating them as curious bystanders and ‘others’. The idea of conceptual baggage, introduced by Eckert and Mc Connell-Ginet (2013), is a theoretical framework for describing those who are perceived as the “other.”

This theory postulates that spoken words can include additional semantic information that could imply meanings the speaker wasn’t intending (Eckert & Mc Connell-Ginet (2013:513). Along with what traditional lexicographers and others have referred to as connotations, it may also include encyclopaedic knowledge, stereotypes or prototypes, fundamental presumptions, and comprehension of the social practises used in the word (Eckert & Mc Connell-Ginet (2013:513). For instance, the preacher did not consciously attempt to stereotype the respondent. However, social interactions in everyday discourse, which are crucial for the development of gendered identities and relationships, indirectly contribute to the stigma. In the long run, the involuntarily childless woman develops low self-esteem and feels like a failure due to these pervasive emotions of inadequacy. In this instance, language is being used as a weapon to make sexual comments about the childless woman against her will. Her sense of herself and her self-worth will be damaged by this. Additionally, it is supposed to embarrass and stigmatise her.

An involuntarily childless woman is referred to by the independent sentence “You are unfruitful.” (Respondent 4:46 years) and claims that people in society consider her to be fruitless, which is a societal term for a tree that fails to produce anything and is hence useless. Naturally, a tree that fails to bear any fruit gets taken down because it has little to no value. The tree is compared to the woman who is involuntarily childless and is perceived negatively by the Gikũyũ community. This occurs as a result of the idealisation of childbirth as the sole criterion for real womanhood and the systematic exclusion and devaluation of women who do not meet this standard (Schultz, 1975). Since independent clauses are fully understandable on their own, there should not be any disagreement because the statement feels definitive. Thus, because such clauses make unfavourable information available to the public, linguistic stigma is highlighted. Favourable information, on the other

hand, is projected far less and with an aura of finality.

Ndǔgìciara [You are fruitless] (Respondent 4: 46 years)

She asserts that society was interested in learning why, in contrast to other women, she had no children at her age. This supports Sophanna's (2016) assertion that concepts profoundly ingrained in men's and women's awareness from conception have a significant impact on their notions of self and identity, which transcend boundaries of class and social standing. The societal conceptions surrounding childlessness in the Gikùyù community stipulated that every woman's primary role should be mothering, and these ideologies were deeply ingrained (Siwila, 2022). Involuntary childless women are stigmatised by the disparaging discourses. Since language is the means by which ideologies are created, maintained, and challenged, it is intentionally used in derogatory terms to perpetuate the stigma.

Through the use of certain words, phrases, or sentences, semantic derogation stigmatises those who do not adhere to societal norms (Eckert & Mc Connell-Ginet (2013). Their main objective is to harm an individual or even a group of people. Language is weaponised when cleverly created sentences or words persuade society that motherhood and women are equivalent. As a result, those who are classified as "others" are undervalued because they are thought to be abnormal. All these things are done using language, which is a medium through which people's conceptions of the social world are formed.

Feminist linguistics has generally investigated the problems with language, ideologies, and prejudices towards involuntarily childless women. The goal of this study was to help prevent individuals from using language as a weapon by overcoming the preconceptions that it fosters. Speaking about how social groups ought to behave, communicate, and interact with other groups and the outside world,

discourse is a potent tool in the semantic denigration of involuntarily childless women.

Argumentative Strategy

Interactions between actors aiming to convince each other to change their aims culminate in argumentation, a systematic process (Gehman, 2022). Reflection and the re-organisation of knowledge are potential outcomes of the semiotic and epistemic process of argumentation (Aristotle, 2013). The term "argumentative strategy" in this study refers to linguistic techniques employed to affirm and sustain ideas towards childless women. A respondent's mother-in-law claims:

Ngai athanite atì twagìrèrè nì gǔciara ciana nyingì o-ǔria kwa hoteka [Even the Bible agrees that we should have children and increase our population] (Respondent 2:62 years)

A quotation from the Bible is used to back up the idea that no woman who is of reproductive age should be childless. The aforementioned statement complies with two of the five canons of persuasive discourse put forth by Aristotle in 2013. It initially falls under the *Dispositio* (arrangement) and *Invento* (innovation) canons. The first canon states that one should select arguments that are acceptable to the audience, accept the evidence that supports their position, and employ the most powerful persuasion strategies. This canon is very crucial since it sets the stage for the succeeding canons. Given that they are Christians, the audience is supposed to succumb to the Biblical teachings because they are so persuasive. The second canon (arrangement) primarily addresses how to organise the first canon's chosen arguments in a way that will make them more compelling. The aforementioned justification uses biblical allusion to persuade the involuntarily childless woman—a Christian who adheres to its teachings—to abide by the social norms that are demanded of all women.

The respondent is stigmatised by this statement because she attempted numerous methods to

conceive but to no avail. Her mother-in-law uses the Bible, a Holy book that is revered and believed in by everyone, to try to convince her. Therefore, dominant discourses that oppress and stigmatise the involuntarily childless woman force her to comply with societal expectations.

Another respondent claimed that she was routinely made fun of by her peers by saying:

Tondõ niwaciariroo nawe wagiriere ũciare [Due to the fact that you were born, you must also bear children] (Respondent 6:48 years)

The purpose of this persuasive statement is to persuade the childless woman using the four main persuasion techniques (Aristotle, 2013). To properly persuade someone, he contends that the four main persuasion modalities of logos, ethos, pathos, and kairos should be used. In the scenario above, the involuntary childless woman was persuaded that she needed to have children using ethos (speaker credibility), logos (logical arguments should be followed), and pathos (evoking the target's emotions). "You were born" employs the logos mode of persuasion since it is rational. In this case, the respondent was persuaded using the ethos strategy since the persons who regularly made fun of her were her close friends and family, whom she thus trusted. When the pathos form of persuasion took hold, the stigma entered because the respondent started to withdraw and avoid her acquaintances. She felt stigmatised since she believed she would not be accepted into the "exclusive club of motherhood" (Kress, 1990), which would have isolated her from other people.

She discovered that society could not accept her since childless women also have a responsibility to fulfil—bearing children, as all other women did—just as debt must be paid. This puts the woman who is involuntarily childless in a very hard position and makes her feel as though her body has failed her. Linguistic influence is used to deliberately disseminate this kind of stigma (Marsen, 2008). As a result of society's presumption that she does not

wish to "pay" the debt, she is perceived as being egotistical. The development of all stigmatising features is enabled by the frequent categorisation, stigmatisation, segregation, and discrimination of involuntarily childless women through linguistic stigma (Locke, 2014). The only factor driving this type of stigma is social forces. Such ideas are frequently spread throughout communities and taken to be universal truths. After fourteen years of trying, (Respondent 8:56) who only had one child and was unable to have any more, stated that she would always get advice from her friends:

Mwana waku ena ihoru riringi mũno. Ciara ga kerì agie wa gũthaka nake [Your child feels awfully detached. To give her a playmate, deliver a second child] (Respondent 8:56 years)

The involuntary childless woman is convinced by the argumentation strategy that pregnancy was her only choice though against her choice. It is a calculated strategy for reaching a specific goal in the face of uncertainty (Kvint, 2009). A set of guidelines must be defined for the plan to be successful. The five canons of rhetoric, which Aristotle (2013) established, are essential for developing persuading arguments. By stating that the respondent's child was an only child and that; as a result, something needed to be done, the second canon, disposition (arrangement), helped develop arguments to raise the possibility of convincing. This helped persuade the unwilling childless mother. This canon had an effect since it addressed how the assertion was presented to increase its persuasiveness. The parameters that regulated the selection and organisation of the arguments and contextual facts that were available were established using this argumentation technique (Aristotle, 2013). The rules specify how selection and order are determined by arguments along with contextual information. The three types of these characteristics are pragmatic, stylistic, and dialectical. The technique's objective is to present an argumentative discourse that will persuade the target audience to support your position or to achieve some other

objective. The study claims that this strategy persuades women who are involuntarily childless to conform to social norms and have children. The woman was ‘refusing’ to have another child because she already had one, not recognising that time was rapidly running out.

The argumentative discourse’s arguing strategies have a significant impact on the discussion’s direction and persuasive power. It is essential to pay systematic attention to reasoning strategies in order to obtain a complete, accurate, and adequate reconstructive analysis as well as a suitable evaluation of arguing linguistically neutral discourse that does not stigmatise the involuntary childless woman.

Negation

In this study, “negation” refers to the rejection of the claim that the negation contradicts. To understand the assertion being refuted, the reader must be able to picture the affirmative thought being rejected (Siwila, 2022). The study found that childless women frequently hear derogatory comments. Some respondents heard statements said about them such as;

Atumia othe makinyitie miaka na maticiarite ni aganu [Women without children are not morally good] (Respondent 6:50 years)

Atumia othe makinyitie miaka na maticiarite matikinyitie ikìro cia v̄tumia [Women without children are incomplete] (Respondent 12:64 years)

M̄utumia ũcio ndarì na irathimo [She is not favoured] (Respondent 8:49 years)

These unfavourable impressions were purposefully chosen in order to persuade and pressure society into perceiving the involuntary childless women as outsiders simply because they did not follow social norms (Thornborrow, 2014). The women feel stigmatised by this and like outsiders as a result. (Respondent 6:50 years) is trying to place blame on

the woman and denigrate her for being immoral when he claims that childless women lack morality. Discourse in this case, acted as a crucial tool of power (Kress, 1990) by depicting her as a person with questionable morality. This claim carries a lot of implications because it raises a lot of problematic concerns that might have contributed to her infertility. She was unjustly accused by the society of having extramarital affairs, having abortions, and abusing contraception (Aristotle, 2013), which badly impacted her sexuality and further stigmatised her. According to Irinyenikan (2020), people thought that women’s infertility was caused by their promiscuity and that they “misused” themselves as teenagers. The stigmatised women who are involuntarily childless are required to walk around with this badge on.

By demonstrating what something is not, the negation technique clarifies what something is. When (Respondent 8: 49 years) says that women who are childless involuntarily are not favourably treated, he argues that children are a source of happiness, and when one does not have them, they are not favourably treated. The fact that the childless women were cursed also implies that they committed a sin. Thus, the reply alludes to a scenario in which these women are solely responsible for their misfortune. According to the Old Testament, infertility is a sign of God’s wrath for disobedience. According to some, infertility is God’s punishment for previous sins (Chapman, 2013). Siwila (2022:63) claims that Hannah’s story in 1 Samuel 1:1–20 serves as an example of how language during the patriarchal era portrayed and mocked childless women. When the topic of childlessness in the Christian faith surfaces, the realisation that Hannah was ridiculed by other religious sisters brings religion into the spotlight. In the name of Christianity, this mocking has been deeply ingrained in many African communities.

Society views a childless woman as a “morality suspect” in an effort to uncover the cause of infertility (Goke-Pariola, 2013). In the Gikùyù

culture, not having children was seen as a sin and a source of shame (Njuguna, 2019). Gehman (2022: 173) holds a similar perspective, claiming that childlessness is frequently employed as a kind of retaliation for any anti-social action, including hostility, rage, and other similar behaviours. This mentality makes it challenging to overcome the shame attached to childlessness in religious societies. Through discursive societal beliefs, Christianity and traditional African faiths adversely represented infertility, promoting the stereotyping of childless women. The majority of respondents questioned God, asking Him to explain their mistakes. For instance, (Respondent 3:49 years) declares:

Ndari mūriri mōno githaithaga ngai ndakandiganirie. Ndatōraga maru-ini [I would weep a lot and beseech God to not leave me] (Respondent 3:49 years)

This pertains to a circumstance in which involuntary childless women felt guilty for not having children of their own due to widely disseminated discursive social beliefs and wondered where they had gone wrong. As language is never employed accidentally, this merely serves to reinforce the stigma (Marsen, 2008). This happens without apology since socially created ideals frequently have an impact on both the lives of women and men around the world. (Respondent 12:64 years) asserts that her friends thought she was lacking something and said she was not enough as a woman.

In this subject, a negation is any rejection of a specific idea. One needs to be able to visualise the affirmative claim being disproved in order to comprehend a statement that has been disputed (Nahejec, 2021). Aristotle (2013) suggested that the two ideas exist in regard to contradiction by citing the concept of mother compared to motherless as the source of these negative and affirmative statements. Insofar as mothering is something that women are forced to do by society rather than something they

choose to do, motherhood and womanhood are consequently seen as equivalent identities.

Obligation Strategies

Ordinarily, modal verbs are employed to denote duties, which might support accepted social norms that bind a person ethically (Kvint, 2009). It is best to examine how individuals' motivations are discursively constructed in social and interactive contexts because, according to Lotman (1994), modality is the semantic domain related to the elements of meaning that language expresses, such as the interpersonal definitions of a speaker's statements and the validity of the utterance. As a result, modalities help to shape social constructs that stigmatise involuntarily childless women. With regard to the ideational function of language, Halliday's (2005) functional approach classifies modals according to likelihood and predictability and examines the speakers' "permission," "compulsion," "capacity," "duty," and "propensity." So, as a result of her infertility, the involuntary childless woman is at the mercy of society.

Additionally, techniques based on obligations were applied as a type of stigma. One of the sorts of obligation modalities that Phiri (2021) describes, instead of only the existence of overt modal auxiliaries. The term CDA describes the writer's (or speaker's) perspective on and confidence in the idea being put forth. To illustrate several modal categories, Phiri (2021) offers a brief overview;

The modal auxiliary verbs may, shall, must, require, and others are the most popular methods to convey modalities in English. Modality is also expressed by the adverbs probably, definitely, and regrettably, as well as by the adjectives essential, regrettable, and certain. Permission, foreseeability, duty, demonstration, likelihood, desire, and power are other words that communicate modality. Some verbs and a significant number of

nominalisations are also modal (Phiri, 2021, p. 73).

Obligations are grammatical constructions that convey the recipient's demand (Kvint, 2009). It usually indicates an obligation when modal auxiliaries like "should," "must," and "have to" are used. In this study, the modal auxiliaries were not used; instead, phrases that express a comparable notion, such as "suited," "supposed to," and "responsible," were used. There were such statements;

Igetha m̄t̄umia akinyanire, no nginya akor̄o na ciana [In order for a woman to be whole, she is supposed to have children] (Respondent 5:57 years)

Atumia othe makinyit̄ie mīaka n̄i magir̄iire n̄i k̄oḡia ciana [All women are suited to have children] (Respondent 10:52 years)

N̄i wira wa atumia othe kuhe athuri ao ciana cia k̄oḡiana [It is the responsibility of a woman to ensure that her husband has "enough" children] (Respondent 11:46 years)

While sentences that represent an obligation beg the listener to obey, verbs that imply an obligation emphasise the necessity of the sentence topic (Hoey, 1998). The Gik̄ȳu society places a strong value on pronatalist doctrines, which are the foundation of many conventional ideas and behaviours surrounding gender roles and parenthood. The result is that the childless woman gets excluded against her will. In the opinion of (Respondent 5:57 years), a woman is supposed to have children in order to be complete. The verb "supposed to," which in this context indicates the modal auxiliary "must," demonstrates the predominance of social norms that all women should have children as soon as they reach the age of reproduction. Depending on the sense of connection between the speaker and the hearer, the term "have to" in deeds can also be understood as intensifying non-aggravating face-threatening activities. In order to govern FTAs,

interactants use this knowledge while choosing an utterance from a list of super ways (Brown et al., 1987). Ideologies are portrayed in the Gik̄ȳu community on a "us" against "them" basis with individuals from a particular category conveying a favourable perception of themselves or the group they belong to whilst individuals of the opposing group—in this case, the involuntarily childless woman—tend to be portrayed in an adverse image and hence, the society distances itself from her childlessness. Because of this, traditions put stress on women who are involuntarily childless to take substantial steps to have children. Cultural expectations state that giving birth is the height of a woman's magnificence. According to these ideologies, involuntary childless women should actively comply with the ideology's society has created and made available to them.

A woman should have "enough" children to appease her spouse, according to (Respondent 11:46 years). The decline in the illocutionary directing authority dependent on the usage of "should" is due to the deontic meaning of the modal, which indicates moral responsibility (advice). Therefore, it lacks the same level of certainty as "must" (Kvint, 2009). By releasing illocutionary force in the aforementioned statement, the FTA aggravates the situation. Because the locutor turns society against them, it stigmatises the interlocutors. The assertion is under heavy hegemonic strain, and the mechanisms of social power and inequality are in operation (Connell, 2005). In order for men to maintain their dominance, they subjugate women, and it is expected of women to keep their husbands content. According to Connell, being a man requires assuming and managing hegemonic masculinity. That is why culture permits a husband to remarry, file for divorce, or enter a polygamous marriage when a woman fails to "make her husband happy" by bearing children (Chew, 2001). This idea fosters the idea that motherhood is what makes a woman a real woman. All women are connected through motherhood as a result of these sexist distinctions in mothering (Adams, 2009). Since "woman" and

“mother” are frequently used interchangeably, women are forced into becoming mothers rather than being given the option to do so. As a result, responsibility gives rise to ideas that are social constructs and have an impact on both men and women.

Despite the fact that FTAs are illocutionary by nature, the study’s usage of modal verbs improved their effectiveness. Given the social ideals associated with motherhood, the rhetoric used towards involuntary childless women is radical and has persuasive power. This results in more instances of absolute modals on a semantic and pragmatic level—deontic and epistemic—in terms of language. When employed to indicate obligation, the absolute prescriptive ‘must,’ which is the strongest on the deontic scale, might draw attention to the unmistakable demands of the modal verbs that stigmatise women who are involuntarily childless. Other milder modal verbs, such as “should” and “need to,” that have symbolic connotations and prevail over other modal verb occurrences, are also used to communicate obligation. As a result, involuntarily childless women are stigmatised since they are compelled to comply with cultural expectations.

Doublespeak

Implicature is a linguistic device used to consciously alter word meaning in an effort to deceive or perplex listeners. Between one’s words and deeds, it bridges the gap (Grice, 1999). Multiple interpretations may be applied to statements used in implicature. To create and justify their dominance, dominant groups establish discursive ideologies that are generalised. According to Chapman (2013), it goes against the Grice Cooperative Principle’s principles, which claim that when negative opinions are given a good spin, society does not appear to give them much thought. One respondent, for example, was silenced when she attempted to address the crowd while campaigning for the position of Member of the County Assembly in the Wamagana ward in order to discuss her plans and

objectives. Instead of seeing the wider picture of why she was speaking to them, the crowd started yelling at her, saying:

Nyōngũ ya mwana yaga, uge ndwagiriire
[Absent uterus, no voice] (Respondent 9: 65 Years)

The speech is affected by both the Particularised and the Generalised Conversational implicatures. Generalised conversational implicature occurs when a statement may be deduced without mentioning a context-specific attribute (Grice, 1999). It implies that conversational implicature typically brings up more significant topics, particularly when talking about logic. Gehman (2022) claims that generic conversational implicatures happen without specifically accounting for context-specific elements. In other words, the speaker makes the speech, and the listener simply responds to a portion of it without requiring any further context or suppositions to fully comprehend the meaning. In other words, the speaker delivers the speech, and the listener just responds to a piece of it without needing any special background information or assumptions to understand the remainder of the message. Generalised Conversational implicature is used when the respondent is told, “Absent uterus, no voice.” The expression might imply that a childless woman has no opinions at all. The sentence’s typical meaning is as stated. Depending on the context, the phrase could also imply that a woman without children should not speak in public because her opinion does not matter. The aforementioned statement may serve to stereotype the involuntarily childless woman depending on the context in which it is used because the goal of implicature is to conceal or prevent thoughts by making the desirable seem undesirable, the bearable seem intolerable, or the positive appear negative. The audience strays from the primary topic by highlighting her weaknesses to imply that she is unable to lead or even engage them since she is defective, which opposes the reason why she engages them.

According to Yule (2006), the Particularised Conversational Implicature necessitates inferences to establish the meanings being communicated and includes the second meaning. It suggests that for the meaning of what is said to be significant, a certain context is required. The effective usage of the informative statement is demonstrated by a number of specialised conversational implicatures. The expression was always calculated by this implicature with precise information about the surroundings. However, the majority of the time, the discussion takes place in a constrained setting with presumptions regarding widely acknowledged findings. Usually, the circumstances match the intended meaning. The intentional wording distortion in this claim silences the alleged childless woman, but society does not appear to notice and seems to support this claim.

Since words have been carefully chosen to deceive the audience, their meanings are also reversed to stigmatise involuntary childless women. They become social outcasts in their cultures and feel like the “other” woman as a result (Njuguna, 2019). When implicature purports to communicate but, in fact, does not, this occurs. Reality is warped, and people are deceived. Language provides the dominant group in society with the opportunity to deceive others by instilling stereotypes about them. They believe that the childless woman “does not fit in” and is “lost,” which prevents her from ever joining the “exclusive club of motherhood” (Kress, 1990). Therefore, involuntary childless women are voiceless in their societies. Gehman (2022) claims that this tactic tends to alter people’s consciousness by making them less willing to reflect extensively on their problems while also keeping an eye out for untrue claims made in public. Either the notion that childless women are inadequate as a result is shown to be untrue, or it is disproven.

The inference that the listener fully justifies in the particular context of the statement is the implicature of a given dialogue. Implicatures are made up of words that may not be understood by the audience

in the same way that the speaker intended. The researcher was able to critically evaluate how the Gikùyù community stigmatises involuntarily childless women by using linguistic approaches.

DISCUSSION

The objectives, data analysis, and subsequent findings were taken into consideration when determining what the study’s main findings were. The following research question served as the foundation for the study:

- Which are the linguistic strategies that help in stigmatising involuntary childless women among the Gikùyù people?

Regarding the question of what linguistic strategies are used by the Gikùyù people to stigmatise involuntary childless women, the study found that the majority of these techniques were carefully developed to stereotype involuntary childless women and carefully persuaded the general public to accept it as the general truth. Syntactic level structures, semantic derogation, argumentation methods, negation strategies, obligation strategies, and finally, doublespeak was utilised to stigmatise the involuntarily childless women. These linguistic techniques explained how particular lexicons were created with the intention of enslaving childless women through stereotypical linguistic choices. Through discursive ideologies, society was led to feel that involuntary childless women were lacking something, which helped to normalise uneven gender and power relations.

CONCLUSION

The study’s goal was to identify linguistic strategies that stigmatised the involuntary childless women in the Gikùyù community. According to the study, language has a significant role in the development of stereotypes. This role is demonstrated through societal beliefs that are cleverly created by creating, supporting, and also repeating specific biases. The study established how deeply these prejudices have permeated the Gikùyù community, leading to the

stigmatisation of involuntary childless women. In this way, the research's central objective—that discursive strategies are crucial in the creation of stereotyped discourses in the Gikùyù community—is confirmed and supported by the study's findings.

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