

Abstract:

This work is essentially an investigation to establish whether there is semantic 'equivalence' in the connotative value of symmetrical terms that refer to both the male and female gender in Gikuyu, a central Bantu language. The theoretical framework used is Malinowski's Sociosemiotic Theory (1978). Two theoretical frameworks, namely: the situation and the linguistic system have been used in the analysis of data. Hence the objectives of the study were to establish if words in Gikuyu lexicon had 'equivalent' semantic connotations and to what extent certain lexical items if associated with one gender reinforce the subjugation of one gender while exalting dominance of the converse gender. Data was collected from five male informants and five female informants from Kabete area of Kiambu District. This was primarily due to the fact that the researcher is a native speaker of the Kiambu dialect spoken in the area. However generalizations can be extended to all Gikuyu speakers in most instances. It was evident in the findings that Gikuyu language discriminates against the female gender and also exhibits sexism in terms that refer to the female gender. Chapter Two explains asymmetry of nominal terms for males and females. It further explains the forms of address and titles used for both male and female genders. Chapter Three explains the role of gender and culture and the connotations that go with the existing asymmetries in the areas of marriage, immorality and divorce. Chapter four discusses sexism as reflected in the speech of Gikuyu speakers. This is exemplified by taboo language and abusive-language. Finally, chapter five is a revelation that indeed there exists no 'equivalence' in most of the terms used for both male and female genders,