

Pragmatic interpretation constraints in Kenyan Hip Hop lyrics

Abstract:

Based on lexical pragmatics in the framework of Relevance Theory which posits that lexical interpretation typically involves the construction of an ad hoc concept based on interaction among encoded concepts, contextual information and pragmatic expectations or principles, this study attempts an understanding and interpretation of the figurative language of Kenyan hip hop lyrics using pragmatics as its parameter. The main purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which Kenyan hip hop lyrics are prone to misinterpretation and misunderstanding as a result of the figurative language used. The generation gap is perceived to play a vital role in the misinterpretations and misunderstandings of the lyrics. The study was carried out using data collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary data comprised the Kenyan hip hop lyrics downloaded from the internet while the secondary data was through field work carried out by the use of questionnaires. The data was then analyzed and described using Wilson and Carson's (2007) lexical adjustment processes of narrowing and broadening. The results of the data analyses show that in most of the misinterpretations of the Kenyan hip hop lyrics, the inference process is constrained by the contextual information. This thesis is organized into five chapters. The first chapter is an introductory chapter. It gives the general framework of the study, that is, introduction, statement of the problem, the set objectives, hypotheses, rationale of the study, scope and limitation of the investigation, theoretical framework, literature review and research methodology. The second chapter which deals with the linguistic nature of the Kenyan hip hop lyrics focuses on the lexical choice and concepts used in the lyrics. It was established that the lexical items in the lyrics undergo word formation processes like borrowing, clipping, derivation etc. In addition, the way a concept is perceived influences the interpretation of that concept. The third chapter deals with aspects of pragmatic meaning. Some of the aspects treated include figurative language used in the lyrics like: metaphor, symbol, personification, hyperbole and connotations. Down-loaded data was transcribed and analysed focusing on specific aims. It has been demonstrated, in this chapter that meaning in Kenyan hip hop lyrics goes beyond the usual linguistic properties of utterance; hence there is need to use contextual information to arrive at the expected interpretation of the lyrics. Through lexical pragmatic theory, it demonstrated that the complex nature of the figurative language makes it hard for the addressee to arrive at the expected interpretation. The fourth chapter is field based. It handles the questionnaire. The objective of this chapter is to find out how the Kenyan hip hop consumer decodes meaning in the lyrics. Do the consumers arrive at one expected meaning? In addition, it was established that the misinterpretations which exist in the Kenyan hip hop lyrics are influenced by the generation gap. Lexical pragmatics theory in the framework of relevance theory was used to analyze the data collected. Finally, the last chapter is conclusion. It offers a summary of this thesis and suggestion for further research.