

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE COMPREHENSION OF KI-EMBU
IDIOMS: A RELEVANCE THEORETIC APPROACH**

BY

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DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been presented for examination in any other university.

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DEDICATION

To

My late mum Bertha Wangui Njanga

(Rested on 19th October 2012)

You were a great source of inspiration to me. The words of wisdom you always gave me will forever remain imprinted in my memory.

My dad Alvan Njanga Karunyu

Your moral and financial support is immeasurable.

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ABSTRACT

This study offers an analysis of the comprehension of Ki-Embu idioms. The study looks at how the hearer arrives at the figurative meaning of Ki-Embu idioms. The significant fact about idioms is that its comprehension cannot rely on the compositional meaning of the idiom. More contextual material has to be used to understand idioms. So, different idioms like transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque and opaque idioms need different activation of contextual information. In transparent idioms the hearer gets a clue from the words and can easily built the metaphor. In the interpretation of semi-transparent idioms the hearer finds fewer clues from words in the idioms and more activation of context is required. With the comprehension of semi-opaque idioms the hearer can rely on minimal clues from the actual words and more context is required. There is also need for cultural references of some terms. For the comprehension of opaque idioms the hearer does not get any clues from the words in the idioms. Opaque idioms are learnt like concepts. The study uses Relevance Theory as a framework.

Chapter one provides the background of the study. It represents a brief description of the language under study, the statement of the problem, the objectives, significance of the study and the methodology used for data collection and analysis.

In chapter two the study has discussed general information on idioms, definition of idioms and classification of idioms.

Chapter three classifies the data that is the Ki-Embu idioms into the four categories discussed earlier. It also discusses the meanings of the idioms.

Chapter four discusses the application of the Relevance Theory in interpretation of Ki-Embu idioms. It analyses the Ki-Embu idioms using the relevance theoretic procedure and lexical pragmatics and specifically broadening.

Finally, chapter five gives a brief summary of the study.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

Many scholars have defined idioms in various ways. Carter (1987:65) defines idioms as special combinations with restricted forms and meanings that cannot be deduced from the literal meanings of the words which make them up. Accordingly, an idiom is learned and used as a single unit. It should not be analyzed into its constituents. It is unchangeable and always carries a figurative meaning.

According to Langacker (1968:79) an idiom is a kind of complex lexical items. It is a phrase whose meaning cannot be predicted from the meanings of the morphemes it comprises.

Fraser (1970:22) as cited in Moreno (2007:145) defines an idiom as a constituent or a series of constituents for which the semantic interpretation is not a compositional function of the formativeness of which it is composed. (They) are idiomatic in the sense that their meaning is non-compositional.

Mario and Gaynor (1954:95) define an idiom as

1. Any expression peculiar to a language conveying a distinctive meaning, not necessarily explicable by, occasionally even contrary to, explicable by, the general accepted grammatical rules.
2. The idiom is a term denoting the general linguistic or grammatical character of a language

Idiomatic expression -an expression with meaning of its own often is incompatible with or even contrary to the individual meanings of words, which compose it (idiomatic expression).

Palmer (1976: 79-80) argues that we cannot predict for any given language, whether a particular meaning will be expressed by a single word or by a sequence of words.

According to him idioms involve collocation of a special kind: for example “kick the bucket” can only be understood as not only having the understanding of kick and the bucket, but also the fact the meaning of the resultant combination is opaque - It is not related to the meaning of the individual words but is sometimes (though not always) nearer to the meaning of a single word (thus kick the bucket equals die.) He also adds that although an idiom is semantically like a single word it does not function like one. Thus we will not have a past tense * kick the bucketed which would be the case if it would function as a single word. Instead it functions to some degree as a normal sequence of grammatical words so that the past tense form is ‘kicked the bucket’. But there are a great number of grammatical restrictions. A large number of idioms contain a verb and a noun but although the verb may be placed in the past tense, the number of the noun can never be changed. We have spilled the beans but not *spill the bean and equally there is no: * fly off the handles: *kick the buckets * put on good faces. There are also plenty of syntactic restrictions. Some idioms have passives but others do not. The law

was laid down and the beans have been spilled are alright but *the bucket was kicked is not. In no case could we say it was the (beans that were spilled, Law that was laid down, bucket that was kicked etc). The restrictions vary from idiom to idiom. Some are more restricted than others.

Moreno (2007:145) says that one way to bridge the gap between the literal and the idiomatic meanings would be to treat these expressions as metaphorical so as to assume that the gap is bridged by pragmatic inference. This possibility has been discarded traditionally on the basis that the constituent words in the idioms are semantically empty.

After all these I can now come up with the following working definition. An idiom is a phrase whose meaning is not the combinations of meanings of individual words. The meaning cannot be derived as a whole from conjoined meanings of the element. The meaning is either derived from context, cultural reference of items, or learnt like a phrase.

1.1 Background to the Language

According to William Muriria as cited in Mwaniki (1974: 3-4) the origins of the Embu are not clearly known. There was once a man known as Embu who was living at Mwenendega's grove. No one knows where he came from or when he settled there. Embu must have been here therefore even in pre-historic times He reproduced and reproduced until he filled the whole land with people.

Kamau Muthanu as cited in Mwaniki (1974: 19) says that the very first Embu people were a man and wife called Kembu and Werimba respectively. They came from the direction of Kirinyaga and settled at Muthiru (Upper North Embu present day Nvuvoor. They bore sons and daughters; one daughter was Wakina who was impregnated by her brother. The two were cast away to find a home of their own. Another daughter was Wamuturi who had the same fate. Many others had the same facts until Embu land had many people in it. Clans originated from naming the people 'children of Wamuturi or Wakina' and hence came the clans of Igamuturi and Kina respectively others followed. Since people were hunters /trappers the lands where they laid their traps became later their clan lands or 'Ngamba' by right of prior occupation. Mbeere people are the daughters of Muembu who on getting married to Mukamba were asked to build towards the direction of the husbands.

Ki-Embu is a Bantu language which is spoken in the Embu East, Embu West and Embu North Districts in Embu County, eastern part of Kenya. The native speakers call themselves the Aembu. A few linguists have studied Ki-Embu either together with Ki-Mbeere (Guthrie 1970) or as a dialect of southern Mount Kenya (Mutahi; 1977). Mutahi (1977:12) divides the dialects of southern Mount Kenya into Ki-Embu, Ki-Mbeere, Ki-Ndia, Ki-Gichugu and Ki-Mathira. He states that it is separate from Kikuyu and Ki-Mbeere. The 2009 Kenya population and housing census recognizes Embu as distinct from both Kikuyu and Ki-Mbeere and puts the

total population of Embu as 324,092 and 168,155 and 6,622,576 for Mbeere and Kikuyu respectively.

Aembu are surrounded by other closely related Bantu groups such as Kikuyu to the East, Meru and Chuka to the West and Kamba to the South. Embu district is on the slopes of Mt Kenya sloping from North West towards East and South East with a few isolated hills. The area is clearly productive in terms of agricultural foods such as maize and beans and dairy products.

Njeru (2010: 1) says that amongst speakers of Ki- Embu exists linguistic variations which give rise to three distinguishable dialects. The Kīiveti, Kīrūgūrū and the Southern dialect. Kīiveti is the dialect spoken by the people of Runyenjes and Kyeni areas. Kīrūgūrū is spoken in the northern parts of Embu close to Mt Kenya forest (Irangi) Manyata, Ng'andori and Nginda areas. This is the area which is very rich agriculturally and usually referred to as the (tea growing zones), dairy farming also thrives in this region. The Southern dialect is spoken in Gaturi and in the lower parts of Embu near the border of Embu and Mbeere. This is the Mbeti area which is usually referred to as “werū” which means “dry” because it is not as wet as the Northern parts. Economically this area is the coffee growing zone of Embu with some dairy farming. The three KiEmbu dialects are distinguishable at the lexical and phonological levels lexically; distinctions are observed in words and phrases for instance “going up the hill” is interpreted differently as “Kunūkia” by the Kīiveti dialect,” Kūthang’ata by Kīrūgūrū dialects. Phonological

differences are observed with regards to features of intonation. How intonation is placed in a word causes pronunciations differences which can be used to tell whether one is speaking Kirũgũrũ Kĩiveti or a Southern dialect. In my study I will use the Kĩiveti dialect because it is the dialect I use.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The problem with idioms is that they have a literal and figurative meaning. The difference between the literal and figurative meaning is that literal meaning does not make sense and the figurative meaning is the one which brings the understanding of the idiom. The hearer should be able to differentiate between the literal and the figurative meaning. The study seeks to establish how the hearer will reach the figurative meaning. Thus there is a gap between the sentence meaning and the speaker meaning. The question then is how the hearer reaches from the literal to the figurative meaning. The relevance theory will help to bridge this gap in understanding. Consider the following example of a Ki-Embu idiom which has two different interpretations:

1. Mundu wa njara ndaca
A person with a long hand
A thief

This idiom has the following meaning:

Literal meaning:

A person with a long hand.

It also has the following meaning

Figurative meaning:

A thief

The second meaning has no relation to the literal meaning. Thus the study seeks to find out how the listener arrives at the intended meaning.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To divide the Ki-Embu idioms into opaque, semi-opaque, semi-transparent and transparent idioms.
2. To find out the meaning of the Ki-Embu idioms.
3. To explain how the comprehension of opaque, semi-opaque, semi-transparent and transparent Ki-Embu idioms take place.

1.4 Research Hypothesis

1. Ki-Embu has opaque, semi-opaque, semi-transparent and transparent idioms.
2. Ki-Embu idioms have a figurative meaning or an encyclopaedic meaning.
3. The comprehension of Ki-Embu idioms can be explained through the broadening process of lexical pragmatics and through language acquisitions.

1.5 Rationale of the Study/Significance of the Study

This research used the relevance theoretic approach in comprehension of idiomatic expressions in Ki-Embu language. Idiomatic expressions give rise to two different meanings i.e. the literal /surface/ sentence meaning and the speaker meaning. The literal meaning is arrived at on the basis of understanding the individual meaning of each word in the sentence as per the dictionary meaning while the speaker meaning is the implied one, being reached through contextual implications.

There are other theories which have been employed to understand comprehension. The other theories include class inclusion theory, blending theory and domain interaction theory. There is a constant problem of how the comprehension has to be reached. This study is another attempt to apply the notions of the Relevance Theory on how idioms can be understood. The relevance theory will be used in bridging the gap between the two meanings and bring an understanding of the Ki-Embu idiomatic expressions. The researcher did not come across any documented literature on Ki-Embu idioms. Hence the study will give a new approach towards the study of Ki-Embu idiomatic expressions. The study will be very important for the Embu people who want to know more about the Ki-Embu language.

1.6 Scope and Limitations

The research study was based on Ki- Embu idioms used in communication processes. The idioms are collected from a native speaker of the Ki-Embu

Language. The study is not doing a dialect comparison. Proverbs and metaphors have comprehension difficulties but the study will be limited to idioms. This study will use relevance theory as the tool for analysis. The study does not intend to provide a complete presentation of the Relevance Theory. It is limited to lexical pragmatics. This study will use 40 idioms collected from the researcher and another native speaker.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study used Relevance Theory as the tool for analysis. The relevance theory was started and developed by Wilson and Sperber (1986/1995). This theory, according to Moreno (2007:30) is an approach to the study of human communication which is grounded in a view of human cognition that the human mind has evolved in the direction of increasing efficiency and is now set up in such a way that its attention and cognitive resources had to be automatically directed to the processing of the information which seems relevant at the time.

She adds that this relevant-driven processing stimulus in general is exploited in human communication and comprehension where the hearer's investment of effort, attention and cognitive resources is oriented to deriving the interpretation that the speaker intended to convey.

1.7.1 Cognitive Principle of Relevance

Relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995) as cited in Moreno (2007:30) is grounded on the assumption that our minds have evolved in the direction of increasing efficiency and are now set up so that they tend automatically to maximize relevance.

According to Relevance Theory any new information whether derived from external stimuli (utterances, sounds) or from internal representation (thoughts, memory, inference) will be relevant to an individual if it yields some positive cognitive effects when processed in context (e.g. by answering a question, confirming a hypothesis, correcting a mistake, etc.) Positive cognitive effects can be achieved by the warranted strengthening of an existing assumption or by combining with existing assumptions to yield a true contextual implication.

Moreno (2007: 30) states that the processing effort is the effort of perception, memory and inference required to represent an input access to contextual information and derive positive cognitive effects by a number of factors as varied as legibility syntactic complexity, audibility, familiarity with particular dialect, register, style or construction, the accessibility of contextual assumptions and the effort of imagination involved in constructing a context etc. On this approach the relevance of an input to cognitive process is a positive function of the positive

cognitive effects achieved in processing this input and negative function of the processing effort required to achieve these effects.

Moreno (2007:31) adds that the most basic theoretical claim of Relevance Theory is that human cognition, having evolved towards increasing cognitive efficiency is now geared to the maximization of relevance. That is, it is geared to striking the best balance between costs and effects and so to achieving the greatest cognitive effects for the least processing effort.

1.7.2 Relevance and Communication

The fact that ostensive stimuli create expectations of relevance follows from the cognitive Principle of Relevance. An ostensive stimulus is designed to attract the audience's attention. By producing an ostensive stimulus, the communicator therefore encourages her audience to presume that it is relevant enough to be worth processing. Even a self-interested deceptive or incompetent communicator manifestly intends her audience to assume that her stimulus is relevant enough to be worth processing. Why else would a listener pay attention? This is the basis for the second or communicative principle of relevance. Wilson and Sperber point out that the account of communication has practical implications for pragmatics. The overall task inferring the speaker's meaning may be broken down into a variety of pragmatic subtasks. There may be implicatures to identify, illocutionary indeterminacies to resolve, metaphors and ironies to interpret. All these require an appropriate set of contextual assumptions, which the hearer must apply. The

communicative principle of relevance suggests a practical procedure for performing these subtasks and constructing a hypothesis about the speaker's meaning.

1.7.3 Relevance and Comprehension

In the following section the study will talk about the relevance-theoretic subtasks, which are as follows:

Relevance- theoretic comprehension procedures:

- a) Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects: Test interpretive hypothesis (disambiguation, reference resolutions implicatures, etc) in order of accessibility.
- b) Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied (or abandoned) (Sperber and Wilson 2004:13)

Following the communicative principle of relevance, the presumption of optimal relevance is as follows.

- a) The ostensive stimulus is relevant to an audience if it is worth the addressee's effort to process it.
- b) If it is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preference. (Sperber & Wilson 1995:270)

In Relevance Theory the identification of explicit content is seen as equally inferential and equally guided by the communicative principle of relevance as the recovery of implicatures. The relevance theoretic comprehension procedure applies in the same way to resolving linguistic underdeterminacies at both explicit and implicit levels. The hearer's goal is to construct a hypothesis about the

speaker's meaning that satisfies the presumption of relevance conveyed by the utterance. The overall task can be broken down into a number of subtasks.

Subtasks in the overall comprehension process.

- a) Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about explicit content (explicatures) via decoding disambiguation, reference resolution and other pragmatic enrichment process.
- b) Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual assumption (implicated premises).

Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about intended contextual implications
(Implicated conclusions)

From the Relevance Theory this study has used context and the comprehension process.

1.7.4 Lexical Pragmatics

According to Sperber and Wilson (2004: 615), Relevance Theory, in answering basic questions on lexical pragmatics accounts for the lexical process of broadening and narrowing as they are triggered by search for relevance. Lexical broadening and lexical narrowing are processes that take place automatically in the human mind.

The lexical pragmatics theory was proposed and developed by Blunter in the 1990's. In lexical pragmatics, the concepts communicated by the use of words may differ from the concepts encoded in basically two ways, which are the theory's two main processes:

- a) Lexical narrowing
- b) Lexical broadening

The following sections talk about the two processes in more detail.

1.7.4.1 Lexical Narrowing

Wilson & Sperber (2004: 617) state that lexical narrowing is a case where a word is used in a more specific sense than the encoded one resulting to narrowing of the linguistically specified denotation. This process is driven by search for relevance which involves the derivation of cognitive effects and in particular contextual implications. The process increases implications and the hearer is entitled to narrow the interpretation until it has an interpretation that satisfies his expectation of relevance.

1.7.4.2 Lexical Broadening

This section discusses the concept of lexical broadening. In lexical broadening a word is used to convey a more general sense than the encoded one.

Broadening is triggered by the search for relevance and it involves the construction of ad hoc concepts based on information made accessible by the encyclopaedic entry of the encoded concept.

Wilson (2006) defines lexical broadening as the case where a word is used to convey a more general sense of meaning than the encoded one with consequent widening of the linguistically- specified denotation. Broadening is triggered by search for relevance. There are various types of broadening that include the

metaphorical extension, hyperbole, neologism, categorical extension and approximation.

Hyperbole- according to (Wilson 2006)) involves a radical type of broadening which allows the communicated concept to depart from the encoded concept. It is closely related to approximation. In hyperbole, people speak in exaggeration.

Hyperbole just as metaphor involves a wider degree of broadening and hence a greater departure from the encoded meaning. Hyperbole sometimes evokes reactions such as anger, comic effects and interest depending on how it is used and the context it is used in.

Example:

2) She is dying to see you.

This means that she is very eager to see you.

Approximation- involves the use of word/ utterances in a more strict sense to apply to a penumbra of cases that strictly fall outside it's linguistically –specified denotation. The extended meaning is only obtained in context of the word utterance. Approximation includes round numbers such as 1000 dollars, geometrical terms such as rectangular, oval, circular and such terms as 'red' where the precise colour value can deviate from lexically addressed precise colour to a shade of red.

Metaphorical extension is type of broadening which allows the communicated concept to depart much further from the encoded concept. It works best where polysemous meaning is involved. According to Cruse (1986:41) metaphors are part of figurative language. The meaning communicated by use of a particular word or phrase differs from the linguistically encoded or literal meaning assigned by the grammar. Therefore a metaphor is a type of broadening whereby meaning communicated is far from the literal meaning.

A metaphor induces the hearer or reader to view a thing, state of affairs, or whatever as being like something else by applying the former linguistic expressions which are normally employed in references to the latter

Examples of metaphorical extension include;

3) Mary is a saint

4) Peter is a pig.

Environment is used to extend the encoded concept of saint on the person Mary. A selection process takes place that selects the characteristics from saint to fit Mary according to the concept. This means that Mary is a very good person.

The three: metaphorical extension, hyperbole and approximation are types of broadening which like narrowing apply spontaneously unconsciously and automatically fine-tune the interpretation of every word or utterance. To understand such expressions is usually rendered more difficult as the communicated concept departs from the encoded concept. The goal of lexical

pragmatics is to explain what triggers the processes what direction does it take and when it is right to stop.

1.7.4.3 Ad hoc Concept Construction

The context of a concept on a given occasion of use is construct ad hoc out of the range of encyclopaedic information one has at his/her disposal- each of the concepts resulting in a slightly different combination of assumptions from encyclopaedic memory. This is according to Barslous in Sperber & Wilson (2004:17). They further explain that the linguistic context and accessibility of assumptions one will assemble for a given concept or a given occasion are relevance driven.

According to Sperber and Wilson (1986:250-251) utterances raise expectations of relevance not because speakers are expected to obey a co-operative principle or maxims of conversation or some other specifically communicative conventions, but because the search for relevance is a basic feature of human cognition which communication may exploit. The present study will mainly consider the broadening process, and within the broadening processes the process of metaphorical extensions because metaphors form most of the time the basis for idioms.

1.8 Literature Review

This section looks at literature review on the Embu, review on idiomatic expressions and literature review on Relevance Theory.

1.8.1 Literature on Embu

Very few studies have been done on Ki-Embu. Mwaniki (1971) has written an anthology of riddles, proverbs and stories from Embu.

Barnad (2008) on the relative clause in Ki-Embu states that Ki-Embu has both (+case) and (-case) strategies. (+Case) strategies are those which present an element in the restrictive clause, through which the relativized position those which present an element in the restrictive clause, through which the relativized position. This study will help me find out if my syntax is correct.

Njeru (2010) states that, it is not automatic for topic to fall on the initial element and focus on the final element in a sentence. There is a correlation of topic and subject. She further states that focus and predicate is realized syntactically when the sentence constituents are organized in a linear order of subject predicate which pragmatically is referred to as topic- comment articulation. Her study is in the field of syntax while this study is in the field of pragmatics. This study helps me find out if my syntax is correct.

Gitonga (2009) carried out a study on Ki-Embu using the ethnographical approach. The study showed how communication intentions change with time and context. Gitonga's work is in Kiswahili with few examples which are in Ki-Embu. This study is important in this research because it touches on context which is an important aspect of this study.

Other literature in Ki-Embu is by Mwaniki (1974), and Chesaina Ciarunji (1977). Their literature mainly gives the readers knowledge about the history and culture of the Embu. Some of this literature provides useful information about KiEmbu which the researcher uses for this study.

This literature of the Embu will help get further insight about the culture of the people which is useful in understanding the comprehension of Ki-Embu idioms. This is because when a speaker uses idiomatic expressions he/she focuses his/her attention on the shared cultural beliefs with the members of his/her community.

1.8.2 Literature on Idiomatic Expressions

Langacker (1968:80) says that any kind of language is not always appropriate in all occasions. In a case where a writer or a speaker uses idiomatic language she/he usually focuses attention on his shared cultural beliefs with the members of his /her community and the kind of audience his speech is directed to. In this she/ he knows that it is not easy to deliver a message using figurative language and to have to the same effect on the target reader as it is in the source language. This

literature review will help me understand how hearers arrive at the intended meaning of an idiom because the meaning depends a lot on shared cultural beliefs of a community.

Armstrong (2005:56) adds by saying that native speakers of a language can easily know the different uses of idioms and avoid pit falls of inappropriate ones. He further states that idioms are varied and each one has a specific context to occur and that their uses are lightly related to the functions they fulfil in discourse. This literature will help me analyse how speakers arrive at the figurative meaning from the literal meaning.

Ngoge (2012) states that Ekegusii idiomatic expressions have distinctive features that are different from proverbs, metaphors and similes. These distinctive features include conventionality, figuration, proverbiality, informality and effect. This helps me get an insight on the usage and comprehension of idioms in Ekegusii language.

According to Procter (1995:701) idioms are characterized expressions which consist of two or more words in affixed order having a particular meaning different from the meanings of each word understood on its own. They can have a literal meaning in one situation and a different meaning in another situation. This study helps me to understand more about idioms.

Fernando (1996:42) states that the main feature that differentiates between the different kinds of idioms as easily understandable or totally opaque is the degree of idiomacity that an idiom carries. He adds that categorization of idioms is based on a continuum from transparent to opaque called the spectrum of idiomacity. This literature is important in my study because it helps me in the classification of Ki-Embu idioms on a continuum from transparent to opaque idioms.

Sag & Nunberg (1983) as cited in Moreno (2007:151) states that the easier it is for people to identify the constituents in an idioms as having independent referents the easier it is to see how individual parts of the idiom contribute to the overall idiomatic interpretation and the more likely that those parts can be focused (e.g. in passives) substituted or modified. This literature is important because it helps in the interpretation of idioms. The meaning of the constituent words does not equal to the meaning of the idiom.

Warren (1994:4) states that:

Despite the fact that idioms are everywhere around us, some people still do not feel comfortable using idioms. They find it difficult to believe that the unusual combinations of words can be used with the special meaning of the idiom.

Warren's study is beneficial to this study this study seeks to explain how one is able to arrive at the figurative meaning of the idiom either by learning it as a phrase or by the context or even by cultural reference of some terms.

The literature review on idioms helps me to get more insight on the usage and comprehension of idioms even in other languages like Ekegusii and English.

1.8.3 Literature on Relevance Theory

Ngoge (2012) conducted a study on relevance theoretical analysis of implicatures in Ekegusii idioms but did not look at the comprehension of the idioms.

Other MA linguistic studies in lexical pragmatics namely; Mwebia (2006), Anyim (2010) and Kamau (2008) discuss metaphors and not idioms as a cognitive process of broadening; they use the lexical pragmatics theory in their studies. This is important for this study because it shows the similarity between the comprehension of metaphors and that of idioms. Some of the idioms have words that are metaphorical.

According to Moreno (2007:30) Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995) is grounded on the assumption that our minds have evolved in the direction of increasing efficiency and are now set up so that they tend automatically to maximize relevance.

Moreno (2007:216) further argues that the selective relevance-driven processing of the encoded concepts guides the hearer at every point to follow the most accessible inferential route in deriving the overall (idiomatic) meaning. She further argues that it is the set of assumptions and computations which the hearer uses in interpreting the string which help to bridge the gap between the encoded 'literal' meaning of the phrase and the resulting idiomatic interpretation and which may help the hearer perceive the expression as relatively transparent. This is beneficial

to this study because this study gets into detail on how exactly the comprehension of the idioms takes place.

Kabiru (2012) discusses at length the Relevance Theoretic approach to Gikuyu jokes. She notes that the theory is adequate in classifying Gikuyu jokes. From analysis of different jokes, it was discovered that jokes have different functions that they perform. The study confirmed that context and knowledge of the world (encyclopaedic entry) are important in joke interpretation. When there is incongruity it means there is violation of what the speaker or listener has stored in mind about the world knowledge. Context is what is in the environment. This is important for the current study because context helps in interpreting transparent, semi-transparent and semi-opaque idioms.

Schroeder (2005:8) asserts that context is like an encyclopaedia about the world. It contains the values and norms of a society, the personal belief system, the cultural norms in short all knowledge that the communicators have stored in their minds at the time they enter the conversation. One of the central points of Relevance Theory is that context is not pre-given but constructed on line (pragmatically adjusted) in accordance with the requirements of locating an interpretation that is relevant with Principles of Relevance. This will benefit the current because interpretation of idioms relies to some extent on context and also on cultural reference of items.

Ogola (2006) discusses the intercultural communication failures using Relevance Theory as a tool for her study. In particular, she looks at linguistic communication in relation to cultural context of the utterance and explores the concept of relevance and assumptions as stated in Relevance Theory. Ogola points out that different cultures have different representations of reality or world views which are closely related to language. These representations may be in the form of cultural stereotypes, images, attitudes, and they lay a decisive role in determining the hearer's understanding of the speaker meaning. Ogola's study is beneficial to the current study because it has some similarities on the issue of culture determining the way a community interprets its idiom.

Irungu (2011) looks at the role of explicatures and implicatures in advertising discourse. In her study she does a comparative study between Gikuyu and English using Relevance theory. She points out that both Gikuyu and English use explicatures and implicatures. However, the proportion of explicatures to implicatures in the two languages is different. Gikuyu exhibits more implicatures than English in its advertising discourse. English on the other hand, prefers to use explicatures and in samples analyzed, the proportion of explicatures in the English data is higher than that of Gikuyu samples.

Ramos (1994:307) in his commentary on Relevance Theory, states that the inference centred view of comprehension implies that there is no absolute certainty that the intended interpretation is what will be picked by the hearer. This is

important for this study because the study seeks to confirm what Ramos claims and further explains how the hearer reaches the figurative meaning from the literal meaning of idioms.

Carston (2002) argues that proposition expressed by an utterance is not fully determined by the meaning of the linguistic expression used to convey it. She draws a distinction between what is explicitly expressed by the speaker and the proposition she has implicated. She argues that the linguistic meaning (semantics) gives explicit context and the residue utterance meaning (pragmatically derived) is the implicit import (implicature) of the utterance. The results of Carston's claim is a study of how semantics and pragmatics conspire to enable humans to convey long and complex thoughts often through short and simple linguistic utterances. Her study will be valuable in the current study because they are both about arriving at the intended meaning.

1.9 Research Methodology

In this section the researcher looks at the data design, data collection method and data analysis.

1.9.1 Data Design

This research relies on two sources of data

1. Primary source
2. Secondary source

The primary data was obtained from the researcher's native speaker knowledge of the usage of idioms. The researcher speaks Ki-Embu as her first language and can fluently speak the language. She will therefore provide some data for this study.

The secondary source was from another native speaker who is very fluent in the language. He has also collected a number of figurative expressions in his earlier work. The informant has collected a number of Ki-Embu proverbs and idioms. The informant has a lot of interest in the Ki-Embu language. His competence in KiEmbu is proven by the fact that he has written a number of books in Ki-Embu including children's books. He was working at the Kenya Institute of Education in the Kiswahili department before he retired.

1.9.2 Data Collection

Data collection method was based on the researcher's knowledge and competence of the KiEmbu language. She then confirms the data she has with an informant who has done some research on the Ki-Embu figurative expressions. The researcher also collected data from the same informant who uses Ki-Embu as his first language and has done some work on the figurative expression. The researcher collected a total of forty idioms.

The researcher then sits with the informant and they confirm that what they have are existing idiomatic expressions.

1.9.3 Data Analysis

The data collected was divided into transparent, semi-transparent semi-opaque and opaque idioms. The data collected was analysed within the framework of Lexical Pragmatics and Relevance Theory in order to ensure that the research objectives are achieved. Data was analysed in the light of the concepts within the lexical pragmatics theory's cognitive process that is lexical broadening of metaphorical extension.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter forms the basis of the study. The background of the study gives the general idea the study seeks to fulfil. The research objectives and hypothesis were based on the topic of research.

The theoretical framework shows how Relevance Theory and specifically Lexical Pragmatics can be used to analyze the data. The literature review gives a highlight of studies on the target language and what scholars have done in the area of pragmatics. It also provides some literature on the Embu language, Lexical Pragmatics and some relations to Relevance Theory. The methodology section looks at the data source and data collection procedures and how data is analyzed in this study. The chapter also looks at the rationale and significance of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

IDIOMS AND IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

2.0 Introduction

Idioms are frequently used in a number of situations such as friendly conversations, business meetings to more formal and written contexts. Idioms are part of people's everyday lives and enrich a language. One would not be proficient in a language if he does not know the idioms and expressions of a language. Just like English, Ki-Embu is rich in the use of idioms.

2.1 General Information and Definition of Idioms

In this section the study will focus on general information about idioms and the various definitions of idioms.

2.1.1 General Information on Idioms

This section discusses general ideas about idioms. The Ki-Embu language is very rich in the use of idioms. They are used in formal style and slang. Idioms may appear in poetry, literature, in Shakespeare language and even in the bible. According to Newmark (1988:2) unlike in prose whereby understanding the dictionary meaning of individual words of a given sentence leads to the understanding of the meaning of the given sentence, the meaning of idioms is not understood that way. A combination of the context, stimulus and cognitive effects of a given idiom will help one in understanding the implied meaning of the idiom.

There is increasing interest in idioms by scholars and one of the reasons for this is that the vocabulary of a language grows continually with new developments in knowledge. New ideas need new names. Attitudes to language change all the time and several words which were considered to be slang in the past are now often considered to be neutral in style.

Another reason for the increasing popularity of idioms is that they add spice to the language. According to Applebee (1992: v), undoubtedly idioms are some of the most important parts of our everyday lives. They are used in our own speech and in writing. However, any kind of language is not always appropriate in all occasions. In case a writer or a speaker uses idiomatic language, she/he usually focuses attention on his shared cultural beliefs with the members of his/her community, and the kind of audience his speech is directed to. Newmark (1988:10) notes that understanding idioms in one language does not lead to understand those from a different language. This is because idioms are based on context and culture, and since culture varies from one community to another. Idioms from another culture are difficult to understand. For example understanding the idiomatic expressions in English does not lead to the understanding of those in Ki-Embu. An idiomatic expression like “bite the bullet” does not have an equivalent in Ki-Embu.

2.1.2 Definition of Idioms

Idioms are frequently used in a wide variety of situations ranging from formal to informal situations. Idiomatic expressions have been defined in different ways by different linguists and in different kind of literature.

According to the Oxford Advance Learners English Dictionary, (8th Edition 2010:744) “an idiom is a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words.”

Fraser (1970:22) defines an idiom as “a constituent or series of constituents for which the semantic interpretation is not a compositional function of the formatives of which it is composed.”

According to Pei and Gaynor (1954:95) “an idiomatic expression is an expression with a meaning of its own often incompatible with or even contrary to the individual meanings of the words which compose it.”

Accordingly, an idiom is learned and used in a single unit. Palmer (1976:79-80) adds that we cannot predict for any language whether a particular meaning will be expressed by a single word or by a sequence of words. Idioms involve collocation of a special kind, for example the English idiom ‘kick the bucket’. One not only have the collocation of ‘kick’ and ‘the bucket’ but also the fact of the meaning of the individual words, but the actual meaning sometimes merges (though not

always) a single word (thus kick the bucket equals dies). He also argues that an idiom is semantically like a single word but it does function like one.

According to Fromkin et al (2011:151) “idioms or idiomatic phrases typically start out as metaphors that ‘catch on’ and are repeated so often that they become fixtures in the language.”

Hence idioms are closely related to metaphors in that they need to achieve the activation of encyclopaedic entries and work on weak implicatures as suggested in Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson 1995). For example

- 1) To bite the bullet whose actual meaning is to face a painful situation bravely.
- 2) To hit the nail on the head whose actual meaning is to get to the heart of the matter.

Fromkin et al (2011:152) states thus,

“Idioms must be entered into a lexicon or mental dictionary as single items with their meanings specified and speakers must learn the special restrictions on their use in sentences .Most idioms originate as metaphorical expressions that establish themselves in the language and become frozen in their form and meaning.”

According to Newman (1988:10) idioms are contextual and cultural based.

Wales (2001:198) states that

“In linguistics idioms most usually denote phrases or strings of words which are idiosyncratic (idiomatic) in that they are language-specific not easily translated into another language and in that their meaning is not easily determined from the meaning of their constitutive parts. In English such phrases are characteristically fixed in collocation, ‘opaque’ in meaning and of restricted grammatical mobility so *bury* and *hatchet* collocate in *let’s bury the hatchet*’ or *‘They buried the hatchet’* meaning ‘let’s make peace’ etc but we don’t normally find **The hatchet was buried*. As from the above examples suggest idioms are metaphorical. Origins of

idioms are varied, usually anonymous. But *Nice one Cyril* comes from a football chant while *salad days' primrose path, caviar to the general* from Shakespeare.”

According to Collins English dictionary “an idiom is a group of words whose meaning cannot be predicted from the meanings of the meanings of the constituent words”

For example:

3a) (It was raining) cats and dogs.

It further defines an idiom as linguistic usage that is grammatical and natural to native speakers of a language.” On a similar vein, Crystal (1997:189) defines an idiom as

A term used in grammar and lexicology to refer to a sequence of words which is semantically and often syntactically restricted so that they function as a single unit. From a semantic point of view the meanings of the individual words cannot be summed to produce the meaning of the ‘idiomatic’ expression as a whole. From the syntactic viewpoint the words often do not permit the usual variability they display in other contexts

For example:

3b) It’s raining cats and dogs does not permit

3c) *it’s raining a cat and a dog etc.

Because of their lack of internal contrastivity some linguists refer to idioms as ‘readymade utterances’.

From the above definitions by different scholars it is clear that the meaning of an idiom does not depend on the dictionary meaning of individual words. After all these I can now come up with the following working definition: “An idiom is a phrase whose meaning is not the combinations of meanings of individual words.

The meaning cannot be derived as a whole from conjoined meanings of the different element but has to be inferred through other means”.

2.1.3 Classification of Idioms

Idioms have been classified differently by different scholars. Idioms differ greatly both in their character and composition.

Applebee (1992: 2) classifies idioms according to their origin. He argues that there are historical idioms, new idioms or foreign idioms. Historical idioms (let the cat out of the bag, blue stockings) were: “first used many years ago, sometimes even centuries ago, to describe familiar events or situations—buying food at a market, cutting wood or gambling.” Applebbe (1992:1) continues stating that new idioms (e.g. junk food, user friendly) are idioms that have become so popular to gain a place in the language during the last ten years. Many of those words have been spread through the media. Foreign idioms (e.g. cliché, faux opas) are expressions ‘borrowed’ from other languages.

Fernando (1996:35) classifies idioms into three sub-classes: pure idioms, semi-idioms and literal idioms. A pure idiom is a type of “conventionalized non literal multiword expression” whose meaning cannot be understood by adding up the meanings of the words that make up the phrase (ibid 35-36), for example the expression ‘spill the beans’ is a pure idiom because its real meaning has nothing to do with beans. A semi-idiom, on the other hand, has at least one literal element

(ibid) ‘foot the bill’ (i.e. to pay) is one example of a semi-idiom in which ‘foot’ is the non-literal element whereas the word ‘bill’ is used literally. Finally, literal idioms, such as ‘on foot’ or ‘on the contrary’ are semantically less complex than the other two and therefore easier to understand even if one is not familiar with the expressions (ibid).

Vinogradov (2008:33) classifies idioms according to the following features:

2.1.3.1 Semantic Feature

Meaning is the most important feature when talking about semantic feature of idioms. Figurative meaning is the basic characteristics of idioms for it helps to decide whether a fixed expression is an idiom or not. According to Vinogradov (2008:33) as cited in Claudia (2013) the meaning of an idiom is “the special chemical mixture” the meanings of all components which is completely new in quality. Example ‘to bite the bullet’ (to face things head on) cannot be understood based on the component words of the idiom for their meaning is far from the same as the set phrase. He thinks it is important to understand idioms metaphorically rather than literally. See his suggestions in the following:

a) Transparent expressions –their meaning can be derived straight from the constituents (paddle your own canoe). According to Fernando (1996:35) these idioms have a very close meaning to that of the literal one. Hence transparent idioms are usually not difficult to understand and translated because their meanings can be easily inferred from the meaning of their constituents, both components have a direct meaning but the combination acquires figurative sense, example.

4) To see the light=to understand

b) Semi-transparent phrases – these phrases allow both a literal meaning and an idiomatic one (to skate on thin ice). The idiom usually carries a metaphorical sense that could not be known through common use i.e. the meaning of its parts has a little role to play in understanding the entire meaning.

5) Break the ice= relieve tension.

c.) Semi-opaque phrases- these phrases are more idiomatic than semi-transparent phrases, their literal meanings are often rather unintelligible but they are not completely unintelligible

6) To burn one's bridges.

Leah (2006:5) argues that this type refers to those idioms in which the figurative meaning is not joined to that of the constituent words of the idiom. Thus, the expression is separated into two parts; a part with the literal meaning and another part with a figurative sense.

7) To pass the buck-=to pass responsibility.

d) Opaque phrases- their meaning cannot be derived at all from its constituents (to pass a buck). Leah (2006:5) states that opaque idioms are the most difficult type of idioms, because the meaning of the sum is never the sum of the literal meanings of the parts. So it would be impossible to infer the actual meaning of the idiom from the meanings of its components, because of the presence of items having cultural references. These culture-specific items have a great influence on the comprehensibility of the idiomatic expressions.

8) Spill the beans=reveal a secret

2.1.3.2 Syntactic Feature

It is common knowledge that an idiom is a set expression. The components in idioms can neither be added nor substituted. They cannot be changed or varied in the way literal expressions are normally varied, whether in speech or in writing.

Moreover when an idiom is used in a complete sentence it is hardly possible to change it into passive.

For example: an idiom like

9) 'Eat a humble pie'

This idiom means to say and show that one is sorry for a mistake that he/she made.

It would be unnatural to say

10) 'Humble pie was eaten by her'.

One cannot make other changes without losing the idiomatic meaning. Almost all idiomatic phrases fail in one way or another to permit the usual grammatical operations which literal phrases usually do. This relates to grammatical fixity of idioms.

2.1.4 Properties of Idioms

According to Sweet (1899:53) as cited in Skandera (2008) an idiom is composed of at least two words and is semantically opaque. Bolinger (1981) for example regards idioms as a "group of words with set meanings of the parts" and for Sinclair (1991: 172) an idiom is "a group of words which are chosen together in order to produce a specific meaning or effect in speech or writing."

Compositeness and opacity are considered to be essential properties of idioms, although it must be noted that, these criteria are not adopted by all linguists. The second property observed by Sweet (1899) the semantic opacity of idioms has been called into question. In many cases it is difficult to decide if the meaning of a

word combination is opaque or transparent. Whether the relationship between form and content is arbitrary depends primarily on how one defines the constituent words of a given idiom.

Allerton (1984:35) as cited in Skandera (2008:44) points out that in idioms containing a unique word such as “spick and span”, “the unique word does not have a clear meaning of its own and so could not even in principle have made a contribution to the meaning of the idiom as a whole”. Furthermore he states that highly opaque idioms are often more transparent from a diachronic point of view. The classic idiom for example might stem from an old method of slaughtering pigs which may be perceived as a metaphorical extension.

The third property used to describe the notion of idiom is semantic (or pragmatic) unanalyzability or non-composition ability. This property is sometimes linked with semantic opacity hence misleading, not always considered a separate defining criterion.

Whereas it is indeed impossible to assign individual features of an idiom to its constituent words, there may be a large number of idioms whose opaque constituents can be reinterpreted semantically and the idioms then analyzed compositionally.

Lakoff (1987:449-451) demonstrates that in a cognitive analysis of idioms even many highly opaque word combinations can be seen as being compositionally analyzable.

In

11) “Spill the beans”

For example he argues that spill is reinterpreted to mean ‘make public’ and the beans is reinterpreted as ‘information that is supposed to be a secret.’

According to Makkai (1972:160-161) the fourth property is a high degree of mutual predictability or mutual expectancy, among constituents in conjunction with a consistent semantic interpretation variously referred to as conventionality, institutionality or lexicality. The fifth property is the lexicogrammatical invariability of idioms also termed frozenness, fixedness or fossilization. McMordie (as cited in Skandera 2008:46) in his idiom dictionary insists that “as a general rule an idiomatic phrase cannot be altered: no other synonymous word can be substituted for any word in the phrase.” Sweet (1982:56) notes that “many idioms, though irregular in meaning, are quite regular and normal in form,” and that some idioms are more fossilized than others.

2.1.5 Characteristics of Idioms

This sub-section will look into the characteristics of idioms. The defining characteristic of an idiom is that it is an expression with different meaning from the literal; the usual way in which the words of a language are used to express thoughts.

William (1977:32) illustrates the following characteristics of idioms:

a) Inflexibility idioms typically appear only in limited number of syntactic frames of constructions unlike freely composed expressions. E.g. spilled the beans and not *spill the maize, kick the bucket and not *kick the buckets.

b) Conventionality: idioms are conventionalized. Their meaning or use cannot be predicted on the basis of knowledge of the independent convention that determines the use of their constituents when they appear in isolation from one another.

c) Figuration: idioms typically involve metaphors, (take the bull by its horns), metonymies (lend a hand, count heads), hyperbole (not worth a paper it is printed on) and other words of figuration of course. The speaker may not always perceive the precise motive for the figure intended.

d) Proverbiality: idioms are typically used to describe and implicitly to explain a recurrent situation of a particular social interest (becoming restless, talking informally and divulging a secret or whatever in virtue of resemblance or relation to a scenario involving concrete things and relations).

e) Informality: idioms are typically associated with relatively informal or colloquial registers and with popular speech and oral culture.

f) Affect: idioms are typically used to imply a certain examination or affective stance towards the things they denote.

g) Figurativeness: the main feature that characterizes idiomatic expressions is that the words are used metaphorically. Therefore the surface structure has little role to play in understanding of the meaning of the whole expression “bury the hatchet” meaning “to become friends again after a disagreement”. The meanings of the words “to bury” and “the hatchet” are different from the meaning of the whole expression.

2.1.6 The Recognition of Idioms

According to Bell (1991:3) an idiom is a kind of lexical unit in which the whole meaning of the expression is not apparent from the meanings of its components.

There are certain features which help in the recognition of idioms. They include:

a) Alteration of grammatical rules

The idiomatic expression is not always grammatical but it is established, accepted and used by native speakers of a language with a fixed structure and mean.

Example:

12) It's ages since we met (singular with a plural noun)

b) Conventional phrases

Idioms are special expressions which are almost known and agreed by all members of a particular community.

Examples:

13) once in a blue moon (rarely, infrequently)

14) Hit the roof (get very upset)

c) Alteration of word order

Idioms do not necessarily follow the normal word order

Examples:

15a) It may be well ahead of time (normal word order)

15b) It may well be ahead of time (probably): idiomatic expression.

d) Figurativeness

The basic characteristic of idiomatic expressions is that the words are used metaphorically. Therefore the surface structure has a little role to play in understanding the meanings of the words

Examples:

16) Kick the bucket. The meaning is to die. The meanings of the words *kick* and *the bucket* are different from the meaning of the whole expression.

e) Phrasal verbs are the most common type of idioms in English. Many of them carry idiomatic meanings that cannot be inferred from the form unless the phrase is already known.

Examples:

17) After the accident the car was *written off*. (Completely damaged)

18) During the meeting the two directors *fell out* (disagreed)

According to Baker (1992:63) it is possible to identify some grammatical and syntactic restrictions of idioms i.e. a speaker or writer cannot normally do any of the following with an idiom because the meaning would be changed.

f) Addition- adding any word to an idiomatic expression may alter its meaning or remove its idiomatic sense. For example adding the adverb *very* to the adjective *black* in *black spot*

19) (*very black spot)

The addition affects the figurativeness of its meaning completely.

g) Deletion- Deleting the adjective *panic* and the article *a* from the expressions

20) Push the panic button and

21) Break a leg

The idioms would totally change their meanings. Hence (**push the button*) and (**break leg*) have no idiomatic meanings.

h) Substitution –Idioms accept no replacement of words even if those words are synonyms. For example:

22) The long and short of it

This means the basic facts of a situation. The adjective *long* cannot be substituted by another adjective like *tall* despite the fact that they have nearly the same meaning.

i) Modification- Change in the grammatical structure of an idiom leads to destruction of the idiom meaning. For instance the expression

23a) (* between a hard place and a rock)

This is no more idiomatic because of the altered order of the items in the expression

23b) Between a rock and a hard place.

j) Comparative- adding the comparative form –er to the adjective *hot* in the expression

24) Be in hot soup

The comparative changes the conventional sense of the meaning *be in trouble*

k) Passive- the passive form

25) The bucket was kicked

This has a different meaning from its active one.

Leah (2006:4) adds that these restrictions affect the degree of idiomacity in lexical items and they may remove their main feature of figurativeness. These characteristics make the idioms to be considered as rigid structures almost impossible to be decoded.

2.1.7 The Relation between the Linguistic Form of an Idiom and its Meaning

According to Moreno (2007:304) “the meanings of words are arbitrarily stipulated in memory. The meanings of phrases and sentences however are derived compositionally from the meanings of their individual words and their syntactic structure.”-She further argues that since the meanings of idioms cannot be derived compositionally by the morpho-syntactic rules of a language the standard belief is that they too must be arbitrarily stipulated. Since idioms are just long words with no internal syntactic or semantic structure, very little modification is expected. For example:

26a) *The bucket was kicked by Jane.

26b) * The bucket, John kicked yesterday.

Cacciari (1993) as cited in Moreno (2007:304) states that “for most idioms we can establish some relation between their meaning and their form. In fact the meanings of an idiom’s elements often play a role in the way we use and understand idiom strings in conversation.” Idiomatic expressions form a highly heterogeneous community rather than a homogeneous non compositional class which lie on a continuum of compositionality.

Moreno (2007:305) argues that idioms vary regarding the extent to which meanings of the individual constituents contribute to the overall figurative interpretation. At one end of the spectrum we have non idiomatic phrases which are derived fully compositionally from their parts. At the other end we have non-compositional idiom strings, see the following examples:

- 27) Break a leg –This means good luck
- 28) Kick the bucket-This means to die

The individual constituents are in a completely arbitrary relation to the overall idiom meaning. She adds that most idiomatic expressions lie somewhere between these extremes, varying in the degree and ways in which internal semantics of their constituents is motivated and plays a role in comprehension, see the following examples:

- 29) Break the ice-This means to make the first move.
- 30) Give up the ghost -To stop working

According to Gibbs and Nayak, (1989) as cited in Moreno (2007:305) the relation between an idiom’s form and its meaning may be more or less direct. It may be a

one to one relation in that each word contributes independently to the figurative interpretation (e.g. the semantic relation between ‘pop’ and ‘utter’ and ‘question’ and ‘marriage proposal’ in pop the question). These idioms are typically known as ‘normally decomposable idioms’. It may be an all to one relation with the (literal) meaning of the whole phrase being semantically related to the figurative interpretation (bury the hatchet, pass the buck, push the panic button, crack the weapon). These idioms are typically known as ‘abnormally decomposable’ idioms. Finally the relation may be none to one in that the constituent words neither individually nor as a whole appear to be in any semantic relation to the idiomatic meaning, see the following example:

31) Break a leg- This means to wish someone luck.

These idioms are referred to as ‘non-decomposable’. They add that the relation may also be more or less transparent with the constituent words contributing to idiom meaning rather literally:

32) ‘Miss’ in ‘miss the boat’ - This means to miss an opportunity.

The constituent words may contribute to the idiom metaphorically,

Example:

33) Blow one’s stack –This means to get very angry and fly into a rage.

The constituent words may contribute hyperbolically.

Example

34) Eat one’s heart out

Or not contributing at all to deriving idiom meaning.

Example

35) Kick the bucket- This means to die.

36) Shoot the breeze.-This means to have a conversation in an informal way.

Cacciari and Glucksberg (1991); Nunberg et al, (1994) as cited in Moreno (2007:306) state that idioms whose constituent parts contribute (normally or abnormally, literally or figuratively) to the overall idiomatic interpretation have been characterized as decomposable/compositional or analyzable. Idioms whose constituent parts do not contribute to the overall idiomatic interpretation have been typically characterized as decomposable/ non decomposable or unanalyzable.

2.2 Idioms and Proverbs

This section will look at definition of proverbs, similarities between proverbs and idioms, and differences between idioms and proverbs.

2.2.1 Definitions of Proverbs

Nandwa and Bukenya (1983) as cited in Bukenya et al (1994:36) define a proverb as “a short pithy statement containing folk wisdom.”

Sunkuli and Miruka (1990) also cited in Bukenya et al (1994:36) define a proverb as ‘a terse, compact, pithy statement of popular wisdom accepted as an expression of truth.’

Odaga (1984:68) defines proverbs as:

Wise sayings which must be interpreted before their meaning can be fully understood. Every group of people has their own proverbs and uses them in their daily conversation. Like oral narratives proverbs touch on every aspect of the life of the people who create them. Therefore there are proverbs on political, social, educational, religious and economic issues while others have been passed down from generation to generation. Other proverbs are new, stemming from modern and current life styles and experiences of our time.

According to Kabira & Mutahi (1988:37) the Kikuyu use *thimo* which means proverbs. They define a proverb as “a metaphorical statement that summarizes a cultural context, event, a happening or an experience”. They go on to state that proverbs are used to warn, advise, inform, clarify, among other uses.

From the above definitions the salient features of proverbs can be summarized as:

- a) Short, terse or brief
- b) Indirect, obscure or gnomic
- c) Relatively invariable/fixed
- d) A statement
- e) Full of wisdom, truth or meaning

2.2.2 Similarities between Idioms and Proverbs

Both idioms and proverbs are reproduced as ready made speeches. People know and naturally accept their existence. Their lexical items are permanent moreover their meanings are conventional and largely metaphorical. For example: An idiom like

37) Eat a humble pie

This means humble yourself is widely accepted as a proverb? Undoubtedly all the constituent elements making up an idiom cannot be substituted by others as stated before. The word eat cannot be substituted by *munch* and *pie* cannot be substituted

by *burger* despite their relationship. As in idioms, as stated before, also in proverbs undoubtedly all the elements making up a proverb cannot be substituted by others

An example of a proverb is

38) All is well that ends well.

None of these words can be replaced with any other word. Due to the permanence of member words in idioms and proverbs therefore it is impossible to make any change in them even when it is with synonyms.

Idioms and proverbs are not always transparent and their meanings are sometimes ambiguous. Learners are fascinated by them since they are always intrigued with the expressive colourful language. Idioms and proverbs are also part of figurative language that produces cultural information and their use shows that the person is a part of that social group that uses them (Hatch & Brown 1995:202-203).

2.2.3 Differences between Idioms and Proverbs

Idioms are short arrangements of words that have meaning beyond their literal meaning. They can be completely different from the literal meaning, such as *bite the bullet* which means begin a difficult task. Or they can mean close to their literal meaning but carry a lot of cultural baggage along with them such as *land of the free* which means what it says but carries lots of American patriotic baggage or *tea and sympathy* which denotes a rendezvous with a particular commiseration in mind.

A proverb is instead a short or pithy remark or story designed to convey a moral or practical message. It comes from the eponymous book of the Bible which in many chapters has pages and pages of one or two verse statements of that kind. Proverbs are usually pretty literal in their meaning and are certainly not restricted to those in the bible, see the following example:

39) Many hands make light work.

An idiom is an expression that can be understood only as a whole not by analyzing its constituent parts. For example if you know what ‘*spill*’, ‘*the*’, ‘*beans*’ mean that won’t help you understand that

40) Spill the beans which mean reveal a secret.

A proverb may or may not be idiomatic but express succinctly some of philosophy, folk wisdom, or advice.

Proverbs differ from idioms in that they display shared cultural wisdom. Therefore proverbs are easily understandable and sometimes the first part of the proverb might be enough to express the whole meaning.

For instance *do not count your chicks* is used instead of *do not count your chickens before they are hatched*. Even if proverbs may be considered as culture specific because they are bound to culture, many proverbs have equivalence in different languages .E.g. the English expression *Hurry hurry has no blessings* has a similar proverb in Kiswahili, *Haraka haraka haina Baraka*. This fact is not equivalent with idioms; it may not be the same there. That means that idioms may not have an equivalent in different languages.

2.3 Idioms and Metaphors

Metaphors have been recognized as rhetorical devices that compare two seemingly different objects. King (2000:216) defines metaphors as ‘describing something by using an analogy with something quite different.’ For example:

41) The words are clear as crystal

This is an idiom that expresses the similarity between words and the crystal in the degree of clarity. While examples such as:

42) His temper boiled over,

43) She is a saint,

44) He is a pig, are metaphors.

According to Maleej (2005) both idioms and metaphors have in common the fact that they cannot be understood if taken literally. He identifies idioms and metaphors as culture specific aspects of a particular language i.e. the non-existence of a direct one to one correspondence in the target language of a particular idiom in the source language is the result of culture specific metaphors. In connection to this Maleej argues that “culture specific metaphors are best represented in phraseology. Native language idioms and set phrases can blend together ethno-specific concepts pertaining to the worldview of its speakers to their national character as well as their traditional social relations thus becoming an embodiment of national dispositions and spiritual values. They are presented metaphorically indirectly and figuratively, which is why culture-specific metaphors produce idioms that have no corresponding counterparts in another language.

Maleej (2005) states that both idioms and metaphors have a power of likening i.e cannot be understood if taken literally. The difference between the two, however, can be marked through a separate existence of a basic correlation. The latter, due to the fact that idioms in the past have an old reference which represents systematic metaphors.

2.4 Idioms and Clichés

According to Nattinger and De Carrico (1992:32) idioms are considered as one feature of prefabricated speech which is often used in performed language. However they are not the only kind of prefabricated speech; there are many other kinds of formulaic fixed phrases among which are clichés. Clichés resemble idioms because they include patterns which are relatively frozen. But they differ from these in the sense that these patterns are usually made up of extended stretches of language. In clichés like *have a nice day, there is no doubt about it'* the distinction from idioms is obvious; being easily understandable from the meaning of their individual constituents. In contrast idioms are often learnt as a single unit not taking into account the meaning of their parts.

2.5 Idioms and Fixed Expressions

There are fixed expressions like *Ladies and Gentlemen, as a matter of fact, all the best* which allow a little or no variation in form just as idioms do.

According to Baker (1992:63) fixed expressions however, are distinguished from idioms since they have almost transparent meanings. Thus the meaning of

45) As a matter of fact

for example can easily be inferred from the meaning of its constituents in contrast to idioms like:

46) Break the ice,

47) Give up the ghost,

48) Chew the fat

In these idioms the meaning of the whole expression is different from the meaning of its parts. In spite of its clarity the meaning of a fixed expression as that of an idiom is not just the sum meaning of its components. Fixed expressions may bring in the mind of the reader all the aspects of experience associated with the different contexts in which the expression is used.

Although different scholars have classified idioms into different categories this study will classify idioms as classified by Vinogradov (2006). He classifies idioms into: Transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque and opaque.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter was divided into five major sections. The first section has looked at general information and different definitions of idioms. The different definitions help in giving a clear picture of what exactly idioms are. It also looked at the classification of idioms according to different scholars. It has looked at classification by Applebee (1992) who classifies idioms according to their origins

that is historical idioms, new idioms or foreign idioms. Fernando classifies idioms into three sub-classes that are pure idioms, semi-idioms and literal idiom. Vinogradow (2008) classifies idioms according to semantic feature which are; transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque and opaque idioms. He also classifies idioms into syntactic feature. The characteristics and properties of idioms are also discussed in the first part. The essential features which help in recognition of idioms assist in differentiating idioms from other figurative language. These essential features include alteration of grammatical rules, conventional phrases, and alteration of word order, figurativeness, and phrasal verbs. Some grammatical and syntactic restrictions of idioms have been highlighted too. In the second section the study looked at idioms and proverbs; i.e. their similarities and differences. Idioms and metaphors, and idioms and clichés are discussed in sections three and four respectively. The last section discusses idioms and fixed expressions.

CHAPTER THREE

CLASSIFICATION OF IDIOMS

3.1 Introduction

According to Vinogradov (2008: 33) as cited in Claudia (2013) idioms can be classified according to semantic features and syntactic features. Under the semantic features, classification can be done according to semantic transparency according to this range of idiomacity that is: transparent idioms, semi-transparent idioms, semi opaque idioms and opaque idioms.

The study will adopt this semantic classification for the Ki-Embu idioms and the classification will be discussed below. This chapter will classify ki-Embu idioms into transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque and opaque idioms. In each subsection the study discusses how the hearer arrives at the figurative meaning of each idiom.

3.2 Classification of Idioms

In this study the Kiembu idioms, collected by the researcher have been categorised into transparent, semi- transparent, semi- opaque and opaque idioms and will be discussed below:

3.2.1 Transparent Idioms

Like already said before, transparent idioms are not difficult to understand and to translate, because their meanings can be easily inferred from the meaning of their constituents. These idioms have a very close meaning to that of the literal meaning of the words, i.e. Their meaning can be derived straight from the meaning of its constituents.

Consider the following examples

1. Njagi arata mīgwĩ na ngĩma
Njagi is wasting arrows with an ape.
*Putting effort on something unimportant
at the expense of other important things.*

In the encyclopaedic entry it is known that an ape is very fast/swift and hence has a way of escaping when it is targeted at. This idiom is thus transparent because when you aim arrows at an ape they will always have a way of dodging the arrows. This means that by aiming at an ape you are simply putting too much unnecessary effort on things that are not important when you should be doing other things that are important. It is easy to infer the metaphor of the idiom and so arrive at the meaning of the idiom by transferring the meaning of the components into a metaphor. The metaphor in this case is an ape which isn't worth wasting arrows aiming at it. The ape has been likened to putting too much effort on something that is useless at the expense of more important things. Consider another example:

2. Tiga gŭtwa mŭfŭ na ũratŭ
Stop climbing the tree with shoes on.
Trying to accomplish an impossible task

In the encyclopaedic entry it is known that if you climb a tree with shoes on, you do not make any progress. This is because you will keep sliding back for lack of grip. Therefore this idiom can be said to be transparent because it is very easy to infer the meaning of the idiom from the meanings of its constituents and build a metaphor. Both components, that is, ‘climbing a tree’ and ‘shoes on’ have a direct meaning but the combination acquires the figurative sense of a metaphor that is trying to accomplish an impossible task. Look at the following example:

3. Kŭŭgagatia
To ferment yourself.
To make yourself aggressive.

Anything fermented like porridge is known to be very aggressive especially if it is put in a bottle or container. The minute the container is opened then the porridge comes out very aggressively. Hence there is a direct relationship between the fermenting of porridge and the aggression with which it pours out. It has been used metaphorically. It is easy to derive the meaning of the idiom ‘to make yourself aggressive’ straight from the components, ‘ferment yourself’ and arrive at the figurative sense. It is not difficult to understand and translate the meaning of the idiom ‘kŭŭgagatia’.

Below is another example:

4. Njĩru aĩĩ kĩongo kĩũmũ.
Njiru has a hard head.
Njiru is stubborn.

The literal meaning of this idiom is ‘hard head’ whereas the figurative meaning is ‘stubborn’. When someone says Njĩru has a hard head it is easy to understand and translate this idiom to mean that Njĩru is stubborn. This is because both components i.e. ‘hard’ and ‘head’ have a direct meaning but the combination acquires a figurative meaning. A hard head has been used metaphorically. In the encyclopaedic entry when one is referred to as having a hard head it is known that it means one is stubborn. Therefore this idiom can be classified as a transparent idiom.

Below is another example

5. Ndwĩga nĩwaringa mwarĩmũ nthi.
Ndwiga has dropped down the teacher.
Ndwiga has disappointed the teacher.

When one is said to have ‘dropped down another’, in the encyclopaedic entry it is understood in its figurative sense that they have let the other person down or disappointed him. This means that Ndwiga has failed to meet the expectations of the teacher of acting responsible and doing what is expected of him/her. Hence when such an idiom is used then you should be able to interpret it to mean that Ndwiga has failed or disappointed the teacher. The meaning can be derived straight from the constituents i.e. ‘drop down’.

Another example:

6. Kūruta wīra wangune
To do the work of a bird called ‘ngune’
To do unproductive work

In the encyclopaedic entry of Ki-Embu speakers there is a bird known as ‘ngune’ which is known to do very unproductive work. The bird gets into a river and removes a frog from the water. The bird then places the same frog very close to the river so that it (the bird) can relax a bit. The frog definitely leaps into the water again. Hence the bird is known to do such useless work. In such a case then if someone is seen to be doing useless work then he is said to be doing the work of the bird known as ‘ngune’ in Ki-Embu. Ngune has been used metaphorically to represent anyone who does unproductive work. This is a transparent idiom because it is easy to understand and to translate it into a metaphor because of the encyclopaedic entries about ‘ngune’ known to the Kiambu people. The bird is associated with doing work which is unproductive, see the next example:

7. Muthoni aĩ njara ndaca.
Muthoni has a long hand.
Muthoni is a thief.

In the encyclopaedic entry in Ki-Embu a long hand is associated with stealing. Therefore if a person is said to have a long hand then it means that the person is a thief. It does not mean that literally the hand is long but it is associated with picking what does not belong to you. It is easy to translate the meaning of this idiom into a metaphor because when you associate the length of the hand with stealing it means picking what does not belong to you. The long hand has been

used as a metaphor. The components of this idiom that is long hand have a direct meaning but the combination of these two components acquires a figurative meaning. This makes the idiom transparent.

Consider the next example:

8. Mweri ũyuĩ nĩtũkwova mũcĩvi.
This month we shall fasten the belt.
This month brace up for difficulties.

The literal meaning of this proverb is to fasten the belt while the figurative meaning is to brace up for difficulties or difficult times. In the encyclopaedic entry of the Wa-Embu it is known that when one is told to fasten a belt it means that there is bound to be a problem and hence when the belt is tied then even if you eat little food or no food at all, you may not feel hungry. The idiom is thus transparent because it is easy to translate the meaning of this idiom. The components that is 'fasten' and 'belt' have a direct meaning but the combination acquires a figurative meaning.

3.2.2 Semi-Transparent idioms

The idiom carries a metaphorical sense that could not easily be known through common use i.e. the meaning of its parts has a little role to play in the understanding and deriving of the metaphor and so of the entire meaning. They can be regarded as metaphors having no (?) counterpart with a literal meaning.

Consider the following example:

9. Nĩna una ĩru
I have bent you back
To relax

The literal meaning is ‘bending your knee’ while the figurative meaning is ‘to relax’. The idiom carries a metaphorical sense in the use of bending a knee to mean to relax. In Ki-Embu language it is assumed that when one is tired then there is need to bend the knee so that you relax. The word knee is used metaphorically in this case. Otherwise if it wasn’t for the metaphorical sense of the word knee, then the meaning of the other parts of the idiom would have a little role to play in understanding the entire meaning. This idiom is grounded in the Ki-Embu culture and understanding of the concept ‘bending knees’.

Look at the example:

10. Marĩgu onĩre na kanyua.
Marĩgu saw with her mouth.
Marĩgu faced harsh consequences.

This is a semi-transparent idiom because the word ‘kanyua’ which means mouth has been used metaphorically. This means that Marigu saw something that really shocked her so she opened her mouth in shock. This is interpreted to mean that now that she opened her mouth it means that she used her mouth to see instead of using her eyes. The shock was too much that she couldn’t keep her mouth shut. The meaning of the parts that is ‘open’ and ‘mouth’ has little role to play in understanding the entire meaning. Consider another semi-transparent idiom:

11. Mũthoni aranyũa ma cũmbĩ.
Mũthoni is taking that which is salted.
Mũthoni is wallowing in poverty.

The literal meaning is Muthoni is taking that which is salted. In this case the encyclopaedic entry refers to salted water though the word water has been left out. This idiom allows both a literal meaning and an idiomatic one. In the Embu culture it is believed in cases of extreme poverty people may not afford any accompaniment for ugali so they take salty water to accompany the ugali. It is also believed that even in jail people accompany something like ugali with salty water. This is a way of showing how pathetic the conditions are. That means that it could refer to taking of salty water instead of an accompaniment like stew or vegetables and also the idiomatic sense which means wallow in poverty. This encyclopaedic entry of the idiom ‘that which is salted’ together with the metaphorical use off the components makes it a semi-transparent idiom.

3.2.3 Semi-Opaque idioms

The literal meaning of these idioms are often rather unintelligible but they are not completely unintelligible. The figurative meaning is not joined to that of the constituent words of the idiom. These idioms are more idiomatic than semi-transparent phrases. Consider the following examples.

12. Njue niaracokirie iratu.
Njue returned the shoes.
Njue passed on.

This is a semi-opaque idiom. The literal meaning is that Njue returned the shoes while the figurative meaning is that Njue passed on. The literal meaning is rather unintelligible. This is because when one is told ‘Njue returned the shoes’, the first thing that comes to the mind is which shoes? Or ‘whose shoes’? The literal meaning is not joined to that of the constituent words of the idiom which is ‘returned the shoes’. It is on further analysis that one may be able to tell that this means that Njue passed on. This idiom is more idiomatic than it is semi-transparent. This means that it is even more difficult to arrive at the metaphorical sense than with semi-transparent idioms.

13. Athuri nĩmaraĩganĩrire ciongo.
The old men placed their heads together.
The old men consulted.

This idiom is semi-opaque because when you come across it the first interpretation may not give you the figurative meaning. One would actually try to fathom how the old men placed their heads together. The figurative meaning which is to consult is not joined to that of the constituent words of the idiom. The literal meaning of ‘placing heads together’ is rather unintelligible but not completely unintelligible. This means that it is not very easy to get the meaning on the first interpretation but on closer scrutiny the words putting heads together may give you a clue of the figurative meaning of the idiom, see the next example:

14. Peter nũĩravandire mbũĩ
Peter planted feathers
Peter went mad.

On reading such an idiom the non-native speaker is not able to interpret correctly the figurative meaning of this idiom. One is likely to ask where the feathers were planted. To the native speaker of Kiambu through the encyclopaedic entry, it is implied that feathers are planted on one's head/hair. The figurative meaning which is 'to become mad' is not joined to the constituent word that is 'planting feathers'. The figurative meaning is not so obvious by looking at the meanings of the constituent words. This idiom is more idiomatic than it is semi-transparent. The omission of the implied word hair/head makes it even more difficult to get the figurative meaning at once. However, one may later be able to get the figurative meaning because in some cases we see mad people putting feathers on their hair. This then means it is a bit easier to get the figurative meaning than it would have been to get the meaning of an opaque idiom, see another example:

15. Mũthoni aĩ nthakame mviũ.
Muthoni has hot blood.
Muthoni is immoral.

The meaning of this idiom is rather unintelligible but with a closer look it is not completely unintelligible. This idiom is more idiomatic than semi-transparent. The figurative meaning that is 'immoral' is not joined to that of the constituent words of the idiom which is 'hot blood'. However when the idiom is used in reference to a woman then one is able to interpret it to mean that one is immoral. It is not so obvious to get the figurative meaning. The interpretation of this idiom needs the

access to the encyclopaedic entries of the Kiambu culture about the correlation of ‘hot blood’ and ‘women’.

3.2.4 Opaque Idioms

The meaning of these idioms is totally different from the meaning of its parts. It is impossible to infer the actual meaning of the idiom from the meanings of its constituents because of the presence of items having cultural references. These culture specific items have a great influence on the comprehensibility of the idioms. They are the most difficult type of idioms when it comes to comprehension. Consider the following examples:

16. Karamu ka Mumbi nĩ karanyuire rangi.
Mumbi’s pen absorbed the ink.
Mumbi got sacked.

This is an opaque idiom because there is no relationship at all between the meaning of the parts of this idiom and the actual meaning of the idiom. It is not easy to interpret this idiom to mean ‘get sacked’, because there is no connection at all with the word ‘pen’. However for native speakers, with time they may be able to get the figurative meaning because of having a cultural reference of the pen. In Kĩ-Embu when one is employed they say that one is ‘written’. Hence the ‘writing’ which means employed is associated with a pen. Hence the culture specific reference of pen has a great influence on the comprehensibility of this particular idiom. Consider another opaque idiom:

17. Tiga kũnyua kīruru
Stop drinking my shadow.
Idling while others are busy.

It is very difficult to get the meaning of this idiom by looking at the meaning of the constituents of this idiom which are ‘drinking my shadow’. There is no relationship at all between the literal meaning and the figurative meaning. However in the Kĩ-Embu language it is common to use the terms ‘kũnyuakīruru’ which in English is ‘drink ones shadow’ when you are referring to someone who is standing while others are working. Hence reference of the term shadow has a great influence on the comprehensibility of this idiom. Use of the term ‘kiruru’ is culture specific in the Ki-Embu language. There is another opaque idiom:

18. Njīru nīwatūra gacere
Njiru has drilled the calabash
Njiru has gone to extremes.

This idiom is opaque because there is no relationship at all between the meaning of the constituent parts and the meaning of the idiom. There is no connection whatsoever between ‘drilling a calabash’ and going to extremes. So it would be impossible to infer the actual meaning of the idiom which is ‘going to extremes’ from the meanings of the components which is ‘drilling a calabash’. Among the Wa-Embu a calabash is an important item which was used to serve porridge or ‘githeri’. It was used as a kind of a plate because a long time ago the Aembu people never used to have plates so a calabash was very important. Therefore when it is drilled or when it has a hole it becomes useless because it will pour the

content. It is also difficult to really drill a hole in a calabash. Hence if one deliberately made a hole in a calabash then he/she would be said to have gone to the extreme. See another example:

19. Njeri nīwatema nyimba.
Njeri has pierced a boil.
Njeri has dared.

It is not easy to infer the actual meaning of this idiom from its components which are 'gūtemanyĩmba'. This is because the piercing of a boil has no connection with the meaning of this idiom which is 'to dare'. A boil is known to be very painful and no one would like to tamper with it. For one to think of piercing or even poking it then it would mean that they are very daring. This idiom could be used to refer to someone who has done something that no one would dare to joke or interfere with. For example if someone shouted down a teacher, then that would be taken to be a very daring deed hence this idiom would be used to refer to such a case, see another opaque idiom:

20. Mary nīwanyua nthĩ.
Mary has drunk the earth.
Mary has disappeared.

This is an opaque idiom because there is no relationship between the elements of the idiom and the actual meaning of this idiom. It is impossible to infer the meaning of this idiom which is 'to disappear' from the meanings of the components that is 'to drink the earth'. Drinking the earth has no relationship at all with disappear. In Embu when people die they are buried six feet down therefore

they are out of sight. In that case then when one is said to ‘have drunk the earth’ it means they are out of sight hence have disappeared. This is a difficult idiom to interpret. It is the cultural reference of the components which help in the interpretation, see another idiom:

21. Njoki nīwagucia mbevo
Njoki has absorbed in cold.
Njoki looks weakened.

This is an opaque idiom because it is very difficult to infer the actual meaning of the idiom from the meanings of its constituents. There is no relationship between the meanings of its parts which are ‘absorbed in cold’ and the actual meaning of the idiom which is ‘looking weakened’. One can actually absorb in cold without necessarily being weak. However among the A-embu someone who looks like she is feeling cold may be associated with looking weak. The culture specific reference of ‘absorbing cold’ helps in the comprehension of this idiom. Otherwise the meaning of this idiom is totally different from the meaning of its parts. See another example:

22. John nīwauna mbūri kūgūrū.
John has broken the leg of a goat.
John has impregnated a girl.

This idiom is opaque because there is no relationship between the meanings of the components of this idiom with the actual meaning of the idiom. There is no relationship between ‘breaking the goat’s leg’ and ‘impregnating a girl before marriage’. In most cases it refers to an underage girl. However the native speakers

may be able to interpret this idiom because of having a cultural reference of breaking a goat's leg. A girl is looked at in Embu culture in terms of the number of goats she is worth in payment of dowry to the father by the groom. This use of the statement 'breaking a goat's leg' is euphemism for referring to impregnating a girl before marriage. If a girl has been impregnated before marriage she loses her worth in terms of number of goats that are paid for her. Without this transfer in meaning, it would be very difficult to get the meaning of this idiom by looking at the constituents of this idiom. See another idiom:

23. Wanja nīwarīa marīgu.
Wanja has eaten packed food.
To dilly dally.

The meaning of this idiom is totally different from the meanings of its parts. It is impossible to infer the meaning of this idiom which is 'to dilly dally' from the meanings of the constituents which is 'eat some kind of packed food'. It is difficult to comprehend the meaning of this idiom. However, eating some kind of traditionally packed food has a cultural reference among the Aembu which shows one is just whiling away or just taking his/her time and not doing anything constructive. Someone who is just dilly dallying and not doing anything so serious. This therefore makes it an opaque idiom.

3.3. Difference between the different types of idioms

The difference between transparent idioms and semi-transparent idioms is that transparent idioms are not difficult to understand and to translate because their meanings can be easily inferred from the meanings of their constituents. One easily can build up a metaphor from the meaning of the words used in the idiom. These meanings have a very close meaning to that of the literal one. This is illustrated with the example given earlier.

2. Gūtwa mūfi na iratū.
Climbing a tree with shoes on.
Trying to accomplish an impossible task.

It is impossible to climb a tree with shoes on because one will keep on sliding back. Both components of this idiom that is ‘climbing a tree’ ‘with shoes on’ have a meaning that can easily be transferred into a figurative sense. It is easy to comprehend and translate such an idiom.

On the other hand semi-transparent idioms allow both a literal meaning and an idiomatic one. These idioms carry a metaphorical sense that cannot be known through common use and the words in the idiom. The interpretation is reached through a word that has to be set into context; from context only or even words left out that are linked with the context. In the example seen earlier,

10. Kuona na kanyua
Seeing with your mouth
Face harsh consequences.

The word “mouth” has been used metaphorically. This is because when one is faced by some harsh consequences they may end up opening their mouth in shock and disbelief. So one is referred to as seeing with his/her mouth but in the real sense one cannot see with their mouth it is the harsh consequences that make one open his/her mouth. Therefore one does not get the figurative meaning of the idiom immediately one comes across it the first time. If it wasn't the metaphorical sense of the word mouth then the other part of the idiom would have a little role to play in understanding the entire meaning.

For the semi-opaque idioms, when you come across them the first interpretation may not give you the figurative meaning. The literal meanings of these idioms are rather unintelligible but not completely unintelligible. However on further analysis one gets a clue of the meaning from one of the parts though it is a bit more difficult to get the meaning of the semi-opaque idioms than it is to get the meaning of semi-transparent idioms. One is able to interpret the meaning of the semi-opaque idioms from the context, a word in the idiom which gives a clue and also through language acquisition. Therefore one does not get the figurative meaning after reading them once or twice.

As seen in the earlier example:

12. gūcokia iratū.
To return the shoes.
To pass on.

When one comes across the above idiom, one may not get the figurative meaning immediately. The literal meaning is not joined to that of the constituent words of the idiom. The word shoes have been used metaphorically hence making the idiom semi-opaque. It is used metaphorically to mean the end of life's journey. Life is a journey so when you die it means you have come to the end of the journey hence you return the shoes because you will not need them again. The shoes are returned to the maker.

Opaque idioms are different from all the others and are the most difficult to interpret. The meaning of these idioms is totally different from the meanings of its parts. Unlike the transparent idioms, it is impossible to infer the actual meaning of the idiom from the meanings of its constituents. This is because of the presence of items which need cultural reference for interpretation. This is illustrated in the example seen earlier.

22. Kuna mbūri kūgūrū.
Breaking the leg of a goat.
Impregnating a girl before marriage.

There is no relationship at all between the meanings of the constituents of the idiom. 'Breaking the leg' of a goat has no relationship with 'impregnating a girl'. It is difficult to interpret this idiom. Among the Embu there is the cultural reference of 'breaking the leg of a goat' to mean impregnating, hence this helps in the interpretation of the idiom.

3.4 Summary

This chapter has looked at the classification of Kiembu idioms according to Vinogradov (2008). The idioms have been classified into transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque and opaque. Under the transparent idioms the study has looked at the definition and analysed eight Ki-Embu idioms in this category. In the semi-transparent idioms the study has defined and analyzed three Ki-Embu idioms in this category. In the semi-opaque category of idioms the study identified four idioms that belong to this category, looked at the definition and analyzed them. In the last category of opaque idioms, this study has focussed on the definition and analyzed eight Ki-Embu idioms. This chapter has also looked at the differences between transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque and opaque idioms.

CHAPTER FOUR

APPLICATION OF THE THEORY

4.0 Introduction

This chapter aims at applying the relevance theory in the interpretation of Ki-Embu idioms. It analyses the comprehension of Ki-Embu idioms using the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure and it also uses lexical pragmatics and specifically lexical broadening to analyse the comprehension of the idioms. In the illustration the study has used the classification of idioms from chapter three i.e. transparent, semi-transparent, semi opaque and opaque idioms.

In the first section the study discusses the Relevance Comprehension procedure in general. The second section is divided into two subsections; the first subsection is a general overview of comprehension of Ki-Embu idioms. The second subsection discusses the comprehension of Ki-Embu idioms in detail in their respective categories.

4.1 Relevance Theory Comprehension Procedure

Relevant Theoretic comprehension procedure according to Wilson and Sperber (2004:15) is

- a) Follow a path of least effort in constructing an interpretation of the utterance (that is consider interpretation in order of accessibility).
- b) Stop when your expectation of relevance is satisfied.

Yus (2010: 682) summarizes the basic ideas of Relevance Theory in four statements:

- a) Every utterance has a variety of possible interpretations all compatible with information that is linguistically encoded.
- b) Not all these interpretations occur to the hearer simultaneously, some take more effort to think up.
- c) Hearers are equipped with a single general criterion for evaluating interpretations.
- d) This criterion is powerful enough to exclude all but one single interpretation so that having found an interpretation that fits the criterion the hearer looks no further.

Since idioms have more than one possible interpretation this study goes by what Wilson and Yus say that hearer's are equipped with a single criterion for evaluating interpretations. This criterion is so powerful that one is able to exclude all the other interpretation and is left with a single one.

4.2 Comprehension of Ki-Embu Idioms

This section will look at the overview of Ki-Embu idioms and how comprehension of such idioms takes place.

4.2.1 Overview of Comprehension of Ki-Embu Idioms

Ki-Embu idioms are interpreted as illustrated in the following table. That means that comprehension is guided by the following factors.

Table 4.1 Factors that Guide Comprehension of Ki-Embu Idioms

Transparent	Semi transparent	Semi-opaque	Opaque
-Clue from Words -Broadening– metaphorical extensions	-Clue from Words -Broadening– metaphorical extension -Context	- Minimal clue from words - More processing effort - More context - Cultural reference - Broadening – metaphorical extension	- Minimal or No clues from words - Rely on cultural reference of terms - Learnt like a phrase as new concepts

The above overview shows that idioms rely on metaphors. Metaphors are hidden in idioms. Metaphors are developed into idioms. The first three categories of idioms can only be interpreted through the developing of metaphors in activating more or less context. The last category (opaque idioms) can no longer rely on this mechanism, they have to be learned like a concept.

In the comprehension of transparent idioms the words in the idiom give a clue because the constituent words have a close meaning to that of the literal one i.e. the words in the idiom have a close meaning to the figurative meaning of the idioms. Comprehension is made easier by use of explicature that is every word in the idiom gives a clue towards the intended meaning. The transparent idioms also have metaphorical extensions, which are part of figurative language. A metaphor is a type of broadening whereby meaning communicated is far from the literal meaning. A metaphor induces the hearer to view a thing or state of affairs like

something else by applying the former linguistic expression which is more normally employed in reference to the latter. There is a close relationship between idioms and metaphors because idioms are presented metaphorically. Hence in order to understand the idiom one must understand the metaphor.

In interpreting semi transparent idioms one gets clues from the words in the idiom. There are also metaphorical extensions in the semi-transparent idioms but one also needs context to be able to come up with the correct interpretation.

In comprehending semi-opaque idioms one gets minimal clue from words, one is required to use more processing effort; more context is also required to get the figurative meaning. There are not enough clues to guide the interpretation of the idiom to get the intended meaning. So there is need to have knowledge of some cultural references of some terms. This means that one goes back to history of the people to get cultural references of some of the words.

In comprehension of opaque idioms, one gets no clue from the words of the idioms. None of the encyclopaedic assumptions made accessible by the words in the string (separately or in combination) helps in the identification of the speaker's meaning. Although the first time these opaque idioms are encountered, the hearer may explore these assumptions in an attempt to assign a plausible interpretation of the strings; he would need to reject them for not helping to make the utterance relevant in the expected way. Opaque idioms are usually learnt like a phrase or a

new concept. One cannot access it in terms of interpretation if it is not learnt like a phrase or a new concept. This is because the meanings of the words in the idiom have no relationship at all to the figurative meaning of the idioms

4.2.2 Comprehension of Ki-Embu Idioms in detail

Unlike in prose whereby understanding the dictionary meaning of individual words of a given sentence leads to the understanding of the meaning of the given sentence, the meaning of idioms is not understood that way. A combination of the context, stimulus and cognitive effects of a given idiom will help one in understanding the implied meaning of the idiom. Understanding idioms in one language does not lead to understand those from a different language. This is because idioms are based on context and culture and since culture varies from one community to another, idioms from cultures other than the hearer's are difficult to understand.

This research study supposes that the meaning a speaker intends in using an idiom on a certain occasion is pragmatically constructed on-line by relevance driven inferential mechanisms which take as input a set of highly accessible encyclopaedic assumptions from the concepts encoded by the idiom string and its constituent words.

The depth to which the encoded concepts are processed in arriving at the (ad hoc) concept the speaker intends as a component of the explicature of her utterance is

constrained at every stage by the search for an optimally relevant interpretation. In the following section the study is going to apply relevance theory in each category of the selected idioms to illustrate how we will arrive at the figurative/implied meaning of the idiom.

4.2.2.1 Transparent Idioms

Transparent idioms are not difficult to interpret because their meaning can be derived from the constituents of the utterance. These idioms have a very close meaning to that of the literal one i.e. the words in the idiom can guide us to find out the figurative meaning of the idiom.

Comprehension of these idioms would proceed the same way as the comprehension of any utterance. Following a path of least effort, the hearer takes the encoded concepts as a starting point for deriving the speaker's meaning. A consequence of taking the path of least effort is that he often finds his expectation of relevance satisfied after considering only a subset of encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the encoded concepts.

According to Relevance Theory these idioms require a little processing effort to get to the intended meaning. Consider the following example that was discussed in chapter three.

- 1) Kūruta wīra wa ngūne
To do the work of a bird called “ngūne”
To do unproductive work.

In the encyclopaedic entry of Ki-Embu speakers there is a bird known as “ngũne” which is known to get into a river, remove a frog then place it next to the river so that the bird can relax a bit. When the bird places the frog next to the river it (the frog) leaps back into the river and the bird will get into the river and repeat the same process. Hence when the above idiom is used the listener will relate the work that is described to the work of the bird “ngũne” to be very unproductive work because he has associated with the concept “Ngune” in the encyclopaedic entry the useless work of the bird catching and losing the frog at the same time, Hence in the comprehension of the idiom, the listener will use the least effort in constructing an interpretation of the idiom. The listener then stops when his/her expectation of relevance is realized. Comprehension is also made easier if the idiom gives a clue through the word ngũne and its encyclopaedic entries of the intended meaning. The word “ngũne” has been used metaphorically to refer to anyone doing work which is unproductive hence there is quick access to the figurative speech. This is an element of lexical broadening. In lexical broadening a word is used to convey a more general sense than the encoded one. Broadening is triggered by the search for relevance. It involves the construction of ad hoc concepts based on information made accessible by the encyclopaedic entry of the encoded concepts. Specifically in this case we have metaphorical extension. A metaphor induces the hearer to view a thing or whatever it is as being like something else. In this case the original concept of ‘ngune’ the bird has been broadened and used in a wider sense and

transferred to someone who does work that is useless. With all these then, the comprehension of this idiom takes little effort in interpreting the figurative meaning.

Consider another example:

- 2) Muthoni aĩĩ njara ndaca.
Muthoni has a long hand.
Muthoni is a thief.

The concept encoded by the words “njara ndaca” ‘long hand’ gives access to a wide variety of encyclopaedia assumptions. In the encyclopaedic entry of Ki-Embu speakers, the use of long hand is associated with a hand that stretches beyond its boundaries hence picking what is not yours. This helps in the comprehension of the idiom because one uses a path of least effort and he finds his expectations of relevance satisfied after considering only a subset of encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the encoded concepts of the words “njara ndaca” namely the long hands as a symbol of grabbing things that do not belong to the respective person. Understanding of the metaphor “njara ndaca” also helps in the interpretation of the idiom because it gives the hearer a quick access to the figurative speech because one is guided by the words in the idiom. In this case the figurative speech is a metaphorical extension of the word ‘long hands’. In the metaphorical extension, the cognitive environment is used to extend the encoded concept of long hand into the ad hoc concept *thief. A selection process takes

place that selects the characteristics from long hand which can pick what does not belong you to fit the ad hoc concept *thief.

4.2.2 Semi-Transparent Idioms

These idioms carry a metaphorical sense that could not be known through common use i.e. the meaning of the parts has a little role to play in the understanding of the entire idiom. It is not as easy to find the figurative meaning as it is usually the case in transparent idioms. Comprehension of these idioms requires a little more processing effort than that of transparent idioms.

Consider the following example;

- 3) Muthoni aranyua ma cumbĩ.
Muthoni is taking that which is salted.
Muthoni is wallowing in poverty.

In the idioms the word water is omitted but in the actual sense the idiom refers to taking salty water. This omission makes comprehension a little more difficult i.e. one uses a little more processing effort to get the intended meaning.

One is required to bring in the issue of context so that the idiom is understood. In this case the context is that salty water is normally associated with poverty in the Ki-Embu culture. This is in the case where one is taking ugali with “salty water” because she cannot afford any other accompaniment. The metaphor is a type of broadening whereby the meaning communicated is far from the literal meaning. The idiom “that which is salted”, induces the reader to view “that which Muthoni

is taking and it happens to be salted water” as being a sign of poverty. This is because it is believed that in jail people eat ugali with salty water for lack of any other accompaniment. Another step for comprehension is needed, in Ki-Embu culture it is believed that prisoners live poor, and the way the prisoners live is that of taking ugali with salty water, so salty water becomes a metonymy for poverty. The idea of the metonymy standing in for poverty can only be accessed because of the Ki-Embu cultural belief system. This is a process of broadening because the words ‘that which is salted’ is used to convey a more general sense of meaning than the encoded one. The processing of this idiom altogether thus takes a little more effort than that of a transparent idiom.

Consider another example

- 4) *Maĩgu onire na kanyua*
Maĩgu saw with her mouth
Maĩgu faced harsh consequences.

The word mouth in this idiom has been used metaphorically. The hearer might construct an ad hoc concept “kuona na kanyua” which means seeing with your mouth which is broader than the encoded concept in that it denotes situations in which someone is too shocked that she opens her mouth in disbelief. The mouth cannot see even when it is open. The meaning communicated by use of the words seeing with your mouth differs from the literal meaning assigned by the grammar. A selection process takes place that selects the encoded concept of seeing with your mouth to fit being faced by harsh consequences that shock you. In this case

there is need to bring in context. This is because one may open his/her mouth when he/she is yawning, picking his/her teeth or even because he/she is shocked. Hence the comprehension not only requires the metaphorical extension of words, but also the context is very important. More context is needed to develop the metaphorical extension. The context here is the harsh consequences that Marigu is facing. This makes one use more processing effort than transparent idioms to get the intended meaning or to get to a point where the expectation of relevance is satisfied.

4.2.3 Semi-Opaque Idioms

In semi-opaque idioms the figurative meaning is not joined to that of the constituent words of the idiom. They are more idiomatic than semi-transparent idioms. This might mean that the comprehension of these idioms require more processing effort in computing cognitive effects. There is need to add more activation of context in order to get the figurative meaning.

Consider the following example used in chapter three.

- 5) Njue niaracokirie iratũ.
Njue returned his shoes
Njue passed on

The literal meaning of this idiom is not joined to that of the constituent words of the idiom which is “returned the shoes”. In processing the meaning of the idiom the words “returned the shoes” may not be enough. The hearer needs to add more context in order to be able to get the figurative meaning. People put away shoes at

the end of the day or at the end of a journey. This idiom does not talk about returning the normal shoes but the hearer needs to understand that the shoes are being returned to the maker/creator. Then the hearer binds the metaphorical use of the term shoes to the context because the word itself gives minimal clue. If someone is at the end of a journey symbolically “they return shoes” to the maker/creator who is the owner of the shoes. By these then it means that the one who has passed on hence will not need the “shoes” to walk again, his movements are over. The broadening process here is triggered by search for relevance. The meaning of the word shoes in this idiom differs from the linguistically encoded or literal meaning assigned by the grammar. This shows that in the process of interpreting the idiom one will use more effort in computing cognitive effects before his/her expectations of relevance are satisfied.

Consider the following example of a semi-opaque idiom.

- 6) Peter nuuravandire mbui.
Peter planted feathers.
Peter went mad.

On hearing this idiom it may not be easy to get the figurative meaning. The processing of this idiom will involve broadening the compositional meaning of the phrase “planting feathers” so that the resulting phrasal ad hoc concepts denote situations where the feathers are planted. Planting feathers has been used metaphorically. This is because it is not the actual planting of feathers. The cognitive environment of the culture is used to extend the encoded concept of

planting feathers and get the result that planting feathers means that someone has gone mad. There is another term in Kiambu that is used to refer to someone going mad which is *kuguruka*. This is a homonym whose other meaning is to fly. Hence through the bridge of the two meanings then one arrives at the meaning of the idiom. In the encyclopaedic memory of native speakers they know that feathers planted on the head are a sign that one has gone mad. However, it is not easy to arrive at that conclusion unless one has added more context to understand not only the encoded concept that it is not just planting feathers anywhere but specifically on the head, so first a narrowing process takes place as planting feathers on the head is an ad hoc concept of the general one planting feathers anywhere. Furthermore planting of feathers on the head has a cultural reference among the Embu people which refers this kind of activity to people who have gone mad then results in the categorical extension, i.e. the broadened concept * people have gone mad.

The processing effort of this idiom is more because the words don't give much clue but there is need of more context and also binding of the narrowed concept to the context, i.e. the metaphor only makes sense in the cultural context of the Aembu people. If used in another context it may not make sense.

4.2.4 Opaque Idioms

These are the most difficult types of idioms when it comes to comprehension. None of the encyclopaedic assumptions made accessible by the words in the

strings (separately or in combination) helps in the identification of the speaker's meaning. It is impossible to infer the meanings of the idioms from the meaning of its constituent because these idioms require cultural references. This means that in the history of the language some words developed some special usage attached to the culture. These culture specific items have a great influence on the comprehensibility of the idioms. Consider the following example of opaque idioms discussed in the previous chapter.

- 7) John nĩwauna mbũri kũgũrũ.
John has broken the leg of a goat.
John has impregnated a girl before marriage.

There is no relationship between “breaking the leg of a goat” and impregnating a girl before marriage. It is not easy to interpret this idiom. The hearer takes the encoded conceptual representation as the starting point for inference. Using the encyclopaedic assumptions about ‘goats’ or ‘breaking the leg of a goat’ would not help the hearer to derive implications about impregnating a girl before marriage. In this case the hearer will have to bring in the cultural reference of the terms “a goat whose leg is broken”. In the Embu culture a father looks at his daughter in terms of the goats that she is worth for dowry. So if a girl gets pregnant before marriage then it means her value in terms of goats diminishes. In this case then she is likened to a goat whose leg is broken because the value of that goat goes down. This assists in the interpretation of the idiom to mean ‘impregnating a girl before marriage’. The idea to link a broken leg of a goat to the idea of impregnating a girl

before marriage is learnt as a whole concept. If it is not learnt as a whole concept then it is not possible to interpret the figurative meaning.

Consider another example of an opaque idiom.

- 8) Njoki niwagucia mbevo
Njoki has absorbed cold.
Njoki looks weakened.

It is difficult to infer the meaning of this idiom from the meanings of its constituents. Absorbing cold in other areas does not necessarily mean that one is weakened.

When processing the interpretation of this idiom the encyclopaedic assumptions about ‘absorbing cold’ would not help the hearer to derive implications about being weak. Although the first time this idiom is encountered, the hearer may explore these assumptions in an attempt to assign a plausible interpretation of the strings; he would need to reject them for not helping to make the utterance relevant in the expected way. Explicit learning is needed. We do not have a case of lexical broadening because this idiom is learnt like a phrase or as a new concept just the way language is acquired. In comprehending the meaning one has to go into history because the terms used have a cultural reference. Among the Aembu the terms “absorbing cold” has culturally been associated with weakness. So when one looks weak he/she is judged to have absorbed cold. When someone looks like he/she is feeling cold it is assumed that they are weak, i.e they are not strong enough to overcome the cold. The strong people don’t look like they are feeling

cold. Therefore without the cultural reference that link the terms “absorbing cold” to mean “weakness” it would not have been easy to get the figurative meaning of the idiom.

4.3 Summary

This chapter looked at the application of Relevance Theory in the comprehension of Ki-Embu idioms. Comprehension of Ki-Embu idioms takes place in different ways in the different categories of idioms that is transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque and opaque idioms according to the Relevance Theory comprehension procedure. In comprehension of transparent idioms one is guided by the constituent words in the idiom because they have a close meaning with that of the figurative meaning. The comprehension is built on the metaphorical extensions in the idiom. In interpreting semi-transparent idioms one is not only guided by words in the idiom but more context is activated to arrive at the metaphors. In interpreting semi-opaque idioms there is minimal clue from the words in the idiom but comprehension is assisted by more context and also cultural reference of some words in the idiom to build the necessary metaphor for the understanding of the idioms. There is minimal clue from the words when one is interpreting opaque idioms. Interpretation of the opaque idioms relies on more context, cultural reference of terms in the idiom and also the fact that these idioms are learnt like a phrase or as a new concept.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the research findings which led to the conclusions and recommendations.

5.1 Conclusion

The study was based on the Kiambu idioms. These idioms were randomly sampled. Relevance Theory made it possible to analyse the comprehension of Kiambu idioms as it accounts for what is going on the minds of the speaker and hearer.

The Kiambu idioms were classified according to the semantic features according to Vinogradov (2008-33) i.e. into transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque and opaque idioms. Then they were analyzed and the factors behind the different interpretations of the idioms were explained. Idioms rely on metaphors. Metaphors are hidden in idioms. Metaphors develop into idioms.

In the comprehension of Kiambu transparent idioms, one gets clues from the words which are made easy by the use of explicature. These idioms have a very close meaning to that of the literal one i.e words in the idiom can guide to find out the figurative meaning. These idioms are not difficult to comprehend because their meaning can be derived from the constituent of the words. All idioms have

metaphorical extensions. A metaphor induces the hearer to view a thing or a state of affairs like something else by applying the former linguistic expression which is normally employed in reference to the latter. In metaphorical extension, the cognitive environment is used to extend the encoded concept. The hearer constructs an ad hoc concept which is broader than the encoded concept. A selection process takes place that selects the encoded concept.

In interpreting Kiambu semi-transparent idioms the hearer gets clues from the words in the idiom. The metaphorical sense could not be known through common use that is the meaning of the parts has a little role to play in the understanding of the entire idiom. One is required to bring in the issue of context to get the figurative meaning. On the other hand for the comprehension of Kiambu semi-opaque idioms there are minimal clues from words. Figurative meaning is not joined to that of the constituent words of the idiom. There is need for more context to get the figurative meaning. The hearer binds the metaphorical use of the words to the context because the words give minimal clues. There are not enough clues to guide the interpretation of the idiom to get the intended meaning so there is need to have knowledge of some cultural references of some terms. These cultural references require the hearer to have a historical background of the culture to know how the cultural references were arrived at.

For one to interpret Kiambu opaque idioms, he/she does not get any clue from the words of the idioms. Opaque idioms are usually learnt like a phrasal or a new

concept. This is because the meanings of the words in the idiom have no relationship at all to the figurative meaning of idioms. None of the encyclopaedic assumptions made accessible by the words in the strings helps in the identification of the speaker's meaning. It is not possible to interpret the opaque idioms if they are not learnt like a phrase because the words in the idiom do not give a clue of the figurative meaning of the idiom. Context does not help in the interpretation of opaque idioms.

5.2 Recommendations

The study used the Relevance Theory to analyze the comprehension of Kiambu idioms. We therefore recommend that future researchers should be done on Kiambu idioms using a different theory.

Since the study used Vinogradov (2008: 33) classification of idioms, another research can be done using classification by another scholar e.g. classification according to their origin that is historical idioms, new idioms or foreign idioms. This classification is suggested by Applebee (1992: 2).

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APPENDIX I

1. Kũnywa nthi
Drink the earth
Disappear
2. Kuĩgagatia
Is ferment yourself
Make yourself aggressive
3. Kũringa mundu nthĩ
To hit someone down
To disappear
4. Kiongo kũmũ
Hard head
Stubborn
5. Kũnywa kiruru
Drink someone shadow
Idling when others are busy
6. Kanyua karaca
Long mouth
Gossiper
7. Ngoro nyũmũ
Hard heart
Hard hearted
8. Gukorwa wĩ kaviũ ngũro
A knife removed from the sheath
Stark naked
9. Nthakame nviũ
Hot blood
Immoral

10. Gūtūra gacere
To drill a hole in a calabash
To go to extremes
11. Gūtema nyimba
Pierce a boil
To dare
12. Kuna rwago
Break the fence
Elope with a girl
13. Kuna mburi kūgūrū
To break the leg of a goat
Impregnate a girl before marriage
14. Kwīganīrira ciongo
Putting heads together
To consult
15. Kūringa mūvuru
Hit/shake a tree known as muvuru
Do a difficult task
16. Kūndira magego
Eat my teeth
Cheat
17. Kūruta wīra wa ngune
To do the work of a bird known as
Ngune
To do a useless job

18. Gũta mĩgwĩ na ngĩma
To waste arrows on an ape
*Putting effort in something unimportant
at the expense of other important tasks*
19. Gutwa mũfĩ na iratu
Climbing the tree with shoes on
Trying to accomplish an impossible task
20. Gwĩkia ndia mũti
Put a stick in a pool of water
Test the waters
21. Gũta mbau
Throw wood/timber
Loose focus/direction
22. Guokia nthakame na kamuti
To roast blood with a stick
To do a useless job
23. Kwonia Ngai matina
Show God your behinds
brag with your possession
24. Kũgucia mũkia
Pull the tail
Be the last
25. Kuna ĩru
To bend your knee
To rest
26. Kuna mundũ mũfĩ
Break someone's tree
To let someone down

27. Kũrĩria matu kĩrong'oi
To ask the ears to shut
To overlook/ignore
28. Kũrĩa marĩgũ
To eat packed food
To dilly dally
29. Kũnywa ma cumbĩ
To take that which is salted
Wallow in poverty
30. Kũgucia mbevo
Absorb cold
To look weakened
31. Kwova mũcivi
Tighten the belt
Brace for difficult times
32. Gũcokia iratũ
To return the shoes
To die
33. Kũvanda mbũĩ kiongo
Plant feathers on your head
Become mad
34. Karamu kũnyua rangi
A pen taking ink
To be sacked
35. Kwona na kanyua
Seeing with the mouth
Face harsh consequences

36. Gwĩcũra maĩ nda
Feel like your stomach is full of water
Be very scared
37. Gũkamĩra nthĩ
Milking on the ground
To do unproductive work
38. Kwongia mũromomo
Suck your mouth
39. Kwĩĩ undu ekarii
There is way he looks
Looking suspicious
40. Njara ya kũrĩma
Hand of farming
A good farmer