STYLE AND THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN FOUR
CONTEMPORARY KIPSIGIS SONGS

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ABSTRACT

This study is a stylistic investigation of the relationship between the portrayal of women and the linguistic style used in contemporary Kipsigis songs. It sought to confirm Schultz' (2000:82) contention that language reflects the thoughts, attitudes, and culture of the people who use the language. An analysis of the linguistic style used in contemporary Kipsigis songs lays bare the portraits hidden in songs by offering an account of the ideologies and attitudes masked in language. The lexical choices made and the syntactic organization of the language is key to arriving at the intended and implied meanings contained in language. The lexical choices identified in the study included foreign words, neologism, euphemism and other lexical items which were deemed necessary in pointing to the context of the messages needed in unraveling the meanings in the utterance. Other stylistic devices like figurative language, rhetorical questions, dialogue, commentary, and speech acts like imperatives and direct speech have also been employed by singers.

To explicate the style employed in the songs for the portrayal of women, the Relevance theoretical notions of comprehension procedure, the cognitive and communicative principle, and context enabled the researcher to arrive at the singers' intended and implied meanings of the songs from which different portraits of the women were accessed. A Relevance theoretic analysis of style revealed that in the four contemporary Kipsigis songs, women are portrayed as subordinate to the man, defenseless, passive, and voiceless individuals who have to work for and under a man. The songs sung by men portrayed women as sex objects meant to satisfy the man's desires.

The positive images of women that feature in the songs are those of dutiful, respectful and hardworking women who sacrifice and suffer to provide and protect their families.

Our findings reveal that different styles in Kipsigis contemporary songs use the Relevance theoretic notions of explicatures and implicatures through which various portraits of women can be accessed. These two notions enable the hearer to derive the intended meanings and also a range of other implications the speaker may not have intended to endorse but is implied in the utterance. Many of the portraits of women revealed by the present study have been derived from implicatures.