

**A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE IDIOM IN LUBUKUSU:  
A RELEVANCE THEORETICAL APPROACH**

**BY  
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**DECLARATION**

This is my original work and has not been submitted for examination in any other University.

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This project has been submitted for examination with my approval as the candidate`s supervisors.

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## **DEDICATION**

First, I dedicate my gratitude to God for the success of this work. The Book of James 1:17 “Every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows.”

To Victorine, my loving wife, the times were not very good but still you did not despair.. Thank you. To the children: Nakhumicha, Nekoye, Masulia and Bwami, cherish good education.

To my late parents, late brother, you went away so soon. Brothers: Patrick, Nyongesa and mulamwa Rose, thank you all for raising and giving me a firm foundation in education. Mwebale koo.

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**THE ROOTS OF EDUCATION ARE BITTER: GOD BLESS YOU ALL  
ABUNDANTLY.**

## **ABSTRACT**

This research work presents a linguistic study of the description and comprehension of the idiom in LuBukusu. The research seeks to investigate on the types of idioms in LuBukusu, identify the processes of their comprehension, investigate the role of context in processing meaning and finally rate the adequacy of Relevance Theory in handling the idioms in LuBukusu language.

The research uses Relevance Theory by Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson (1986 &1995). This is a theory of cognitive communication that offers an insight on how hearers infer meaning (for non-compositional language use). Gutt (2000:31), points out that human communication creates an expectation of relevance on the part of the hearer that his attempt at interpretation yields adequate contextual effects at a minimal processing effort. Wilson and Sperber (2012:103) state that the human system of perception, memory and inference has a major deductive device that plays a role in spontaneous inference. The human mind is such that it identifies and takes note of important aspects in the environment, singling out and processing information that is maximally relevant. The researcher obtained data through the qualitative method. Data was mainly collected from the primary sources and also accessing real life situations by directly observing the natural setting. The primary sources included: weddings, initiation meetings, religious gatherings, funerals etc.

The research found out that the idioms in LuBukusu can be classified into the categories of transparency, semi-transparency, semi-opaque and opaque. The research also found out that Relevance Theory adequately provides the tenets of description and comprehension procedure of the different types of idioms in LuBukusu.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION TO LUBUKUSU LANGUAGE

LuBukusu language is one of the seventeen dialects of the Luhya. Kanyoro (1983:7) states that the term Luhya has been referred to differently by a number of scholars among them Hurtingford (1944; 3) who points out that the name Luhya is a derivation of the term “Luhya” which means clan.

Osogo (1966:7) further observes that the term “Luhya” is used in reference to fellow tribesmen. He goes on to identify four distinct groups of the Luhya dialects on the basis of intelligibility as follows: Northern, Central, Eastern and Southern.

#### a) Northern:

Babukusu

Tachoni

#### b) Central:

Bawanga

Bamarama

Batsotso

Bakhayo

Bakisa

Basamia

Banyala (KK)

Banyala(BUS)

#### a) Eastern:

Bisukha

Bidakho

Batiriki

**d) Southern:**

Balogoli

Kanyoro (1983: 80) classifies the LuBukusu language under class 1 (Northern). The classification is as follows:

**a) Northern:**

LuBukusu

Lusamia

Lunyala (KK)

Lunyala(BUS)

Lukhayo

Lumarachi

**b) Central:**

Luwanga

Lumarama

Lukisa

Ltsotso

Lukabras

Lunyole

Lutachoni

**c) Southern :**

Lwidakho

Lwisukha

Lutiriki

Loogoli

Guthrie, (1971), states that LuBukusu is classified as (E31C) among one of the seventeen or so dialects under the Luhya of the wider Bantu. The other Luhya language groups are: Lulogoli, Luwanga, Lunyore, Lwisukha, Lwidakho, Lukabras, Lumarachi, Lukhayo, Lunyala(KK), Lunyala(BUS), Lutachoni, Lutiriki, Lusamia, Lutsotso, Lumarama and Lukisa. The Luhya currently occupy the counties of Kakamega, Bungoma, Busia, Vihiga, Trans-Nzoia and the diaspora regions.

Fedders and Salvadori (1980) quoted in Timbwa (2012) describe the Luhya thus: “They are not a single entity, they do not constitute a homogenous group of people. There are variations in dialects, the rituals etc. The emphasis on economic pursuits and other such cultural... but all the Luhya share a common language and some of the other essential elements of total culture (1980:99).”

This research views Luhya as a collective term deriving from the polygamous nature of the traditional African set up of the traditional homestead. The term Luhya is used to collectively refer to people of the same homestead.

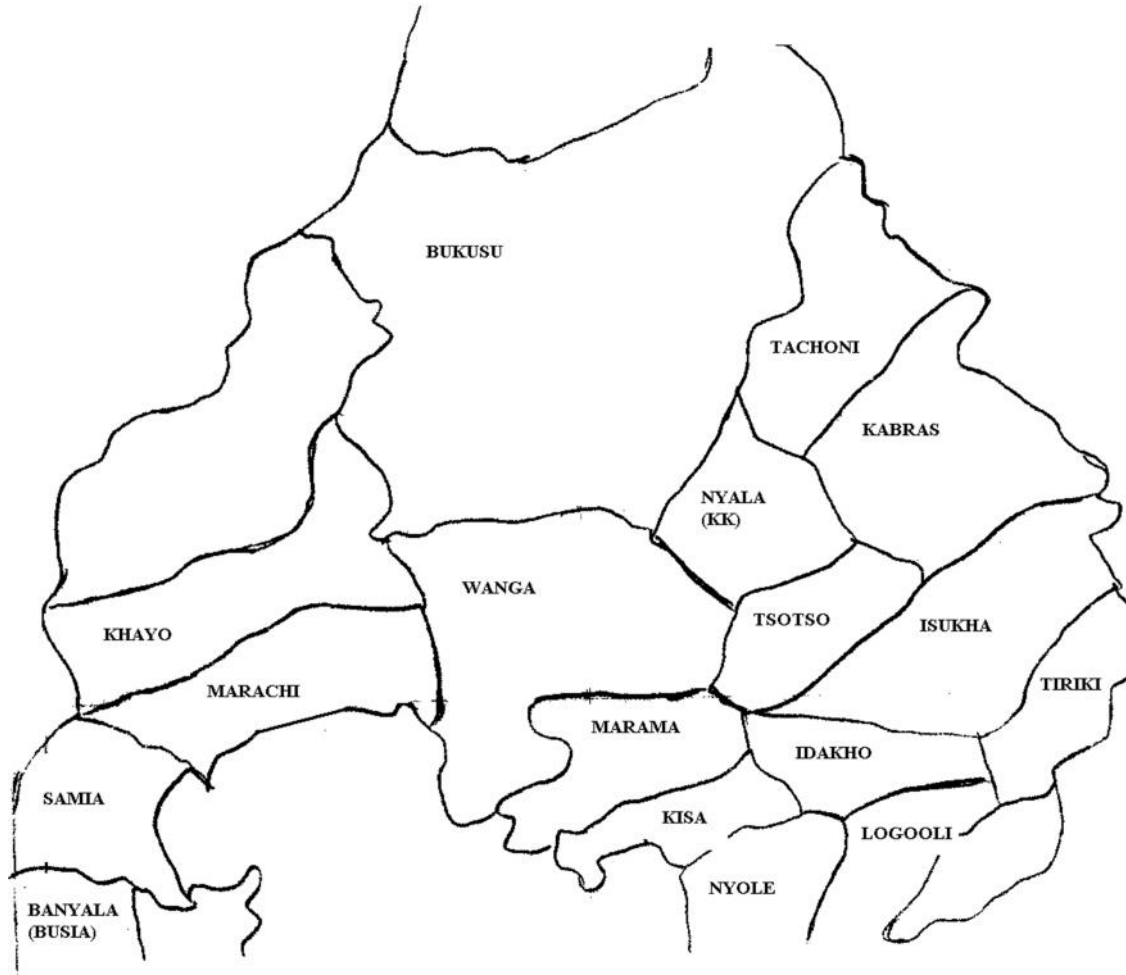
Sikuku (2011:2-3), points out that LuBukusu is closely related to LuGisu, a language spoken in the Eastern part of Uganda. This is evident from their mutual intelligibility. He notes that the prefix Lu- in Lubukusu denotes ‘language. Other prefixes include: Bu- which refers to the place where the language is spoken; Ba- denotes the speakers of the language; and Omu- is a singular form for the speaker of the language. He further observes that within LuBukusu are subtle dialectal variations mainly related to geographical location and tonal but not semantic.

Sikuku (2011:3) identifies three of these dialectal variations thus:

- a) Western (Sudi)
- b) Central (Sirisia)
- c) Eastern (Webuye).

The variations inherent in these groups are phonological and lexical but do not affect intelligibility issues. This research treats the LuBukusu language as homogenous.

Adapted from Angongo (1983)



Adapted from Kanyoro (1983:80)

LuBukusu is spoken in the counties of Bungoma, Trans-Nzoia, parts of Kakamega (Lugari sub-county), Uasin Gishu (Eldoret North) and parts of West Pokot.

## 1.1 Language background

### 1.1.1 The Vowel System

LuBukusu language has five vowels [a, e, i, o, u] with a corresponding number of long vowels [aa/a:/, ee/e:/, ii/i:/, oo/o:/, uu/u:/] formed by doubling the vowels, Sikuku J. M, (2011).

This vowel system is accredited by the following contrastive distinction between the short and the long vowels:

#### Short Vowels

Sala /sala/ (pray)

Mela /mela/ (germinate)

Sila /sila/ (be quiet)

Omulosi /omulosi/ (a witch)

Yibula / ibula/ (give birth)

#### Long Vowels

saala /sa: la/ (give birth)

meela /me: la/ (get drunk)

siila /si: la/ (swell- a medical condition)

omuloosi /omulo:si/ (old woman)

yibuula / ibu:la/ (reveal yourself)

### 1.1.2 The Consonant System

LuBukusu language has twenty consonantal sounds grouped according to their place and manner of articulation and in addition to whether they are voiced or voiceless. These consonantal sounds occur either initially or medially but not terminally. LuBukusu is a consonant vowel (CV) language structure.

**Table : 1 Representation of LuBukusu Consonants**

Manner of articulation	Voiceless	Voiced	Place of articulation
Plosives	p t k		Bilabial Alveolar Velar
Fricatives	f s ʃ  x		Labial-dental Alveolar palatal- alveolar bilabial uvular
Affricates	tʃ		Alveolar-palatal
Lateral		l	Alveolar
Retroflex		r	Alveolar
Nasals		m n ŋ ɲ	Bilabial velar velar palatal
Prenasals		mb nd nj	Bilabial Alveolar Palatal
Semi-vowels		  w	Palatal  Bilabial

The LuBukusu language also has the following voiced consonants [b, d, dʒ, g] which do not occur as independent sounds but are preceded by the following nasals [m, n] as nasal compounds or pre-nasalised stops.

### **1.1.3 Nouns and pronouns**

LuBukusu nouns are elaborately classified into numerous classes referred to as Noun class systems in Bantu (Sikuku: 2011).

This classification is based on plurality patterns, agreement marking and patterns of pronominal reference. Demuth, (2000: 1) notes that, the Noun classes are part of the larger concordial agreement systems where nominal modifiers, pronominals and verbs are all morphologically marked with the same Noun class features.

## **1.2 Background to the study**

The idiom has been studied for a considerable time by linguists and researchers with a view of explaining explicitly its comprehension. The idiom's pervasiveness in language and its role in communication warrant the need for its study. Among these linguists and researchers is Crystal (1997, 2003), who refers to an idiom as a sequence of words syntactically and semantically restricted to function as a single unit. Other linguists include, Fillmore et al (1998), who says that an idiom is a linguistic expression that is syntactically and semantically idiosyncratic. Other linguists are Chomsky:1980, Cruse:1986, Fraser:1970, Katz:1973, complement the above but add some detail to their definition by observing that an idiom is a form whose meaning cannot be derived compositionally by the morphosyntactic rules of the language and are arbitrarily stipulated in memory. Unlike the foregoing definitions of the idiom, Mair (1986), views the idiom as a common word typical of a language whose meaning is not real but is understood through popular usage. Nunberg et al (1994) in addition, define the idiom as a figurative form manifesting a high degree of conventionality in the choice of component lexical items.

Lastly, Bell, (1991:3), states that an idiom is a lexical unit which the whole meaning of the expression is not apparent from the meaning of the component parts. We infer from the various definitions that an idiom is an expression that is different from the literal composition of the words that expresses it. For purposes of this study, we undertake to define the idiom as an expression that is different in comprehensibility depending on type and context.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

The principal of compositionality states that the whole should derive meaning from the parts that make up the whole. The meaning of the component parts that make up the whole should be understood before the whole. The compositional principle does not apply to the idiom. The idiom`s pervasiveness in language use therefore makes it an object of study but so far it has not been done in LuBukusu as depicted by the various studies in LuBukusu language.

Maloba, (2002, 2007, 2008, 2011, 2012), conducted researches in Discourse analysis of opinion columns, Proverbs and Metaphors in LuBukusu and Biblical Dilemma: competing interests of English and LuBukusu. Nganga (2013), conducted research on Funeral and Performances among the Bukusu of Western Kenya, Situma, (2013), Analysed Jokes in LuBukusu using Relevance Theory.

This study sets out to investigate how the different types of idioms are comprehended and therefore enabling communication in the LuBukusu language.

### **1.4 Objectives of the study**

- a) To classify the idiom in LuBukusu into the four categories namely: transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque and opaque.
- b) To identify the comprehension processes for the four different types of idioms in Lubukusu
- c) To investigate the role of context in the processing of idiom meaning.
- d) To find out if Relevance Theory can adequately explain the idioms in LuBukusu



## **1.5 The Hypotheses**

- a) That the LuBukusu idioms can be classified into four categories namely: transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque and opaque
- b) That the cultural background and the context of the utterance aid in the comprehension process of the idioms in Lubukusu
- c) That Relevance Theory adequately explains the comprehension of the idiom in LuBukusu.

## **1.6 Rationale and significance of the Study**

The idiom is identified as a form that expresses something other than the literal meaning of its individual words. This means that the words of a language may not always be used with exactness in meaning. This research is important as far as providing insight into the analysis of the idiom whose meaning is varied on the compositionality continuum. The study provides an interpretative approach in the analysis of the non-compositional data. The research will remain significant in a number of ways: provision of a source of data for reference in language and linguistic scholarship in as far as ad hoc concepts are concerned.

## **1.7 Scope and Limitations**

The study limits its scope to descriptive and interpretive approach in derivation of meaning in the idiom in LuBukusu. The study limits itself to the derivation of meaning in the idiom based on the variations on the compositionality continuum or scale. The study uses the Relevance Theory in the process of explaining the idiom's comprehension process.

## **1.8 Literature Review**

A number of studies have helped shape the course and intention of this current study on the idiom in LuBukusu. Among the most important ones is:

Moreno (2007) Relevance Theory, (Sperber & Wilson: 1986/1995) is founded 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 maximise relevance.

Moreno (2007:216) goes to further argue that the selective relevance driven processing of the encoded concepts guide the hearer at every point to follow the most accessible inferential option in deriving the idiomatic meaning.

Moreno goes on to argue that it is the set of assumptions and computations which the hearer uses in the interpretation of expressions which help to overcome the gap between the encoded literal meaning and the idiomatic meaning. This study centres on the comprehension of the idiom meaning thus how the gap between the literal and idiomatic meaning is bridged arrive at the intention of the speaker.

Moreno (2001), who provides a pragmatic background to Relevance Theory stating the insight into the analysis and interpretation of the idiom. The study provides a guiding framework upon which this study finds its foundation.

Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995) on their part, state the Relevance Theory and the comprehension procedure. Further in their lecture notes,(PLIN2002) 2007-08 state the Pragmatic theory. Shroeder (2005:8) provides a useful insight in the understanding of the idiom by stating what context is. The comprehension of idiom meaning is partly dependent on context and therefore the understanding of context affects the comprehension of the idiom.

Shroeder (2005:5 ) states that context is like the encyclopaedia of the world. It contains the values and the norms of a society. It entails the knowledge that communicators have stored in their minds at the time they enter a conversation.

Ramos (1994:307) further provides commentary on Relevance Theory by observing that the inferential part on comprehension process implies that there could be no complete certainty that the intended interpretation is automatically what the hearer would perceive. This view is important to this study since the study seeks to examine how understanding is reached from the non-compositional expression of the idiom.

Carston (2002) on the other hand argues that the proposition expressed by an utterance may not necessarily be determined by the meaning of the linguistic expression. She draws a distinction between the explicit expression by the speaker and the proposition that is

implicated. She argues that the linguistic meaning (semantics), provides the explicit context and the pragmatically derived meaning is the implicit meaning (implicature) of the utterance. Karimi (2013) points out that the results of Carston's observation is the study of how semantics and pragmatics combine to enable human communication through a short and simple linguistic utterance.

In addition to the foregoing, a number of research dissertations were useful, among them: Atich (2004), researches on the semantic distinctiveness of Kenyan English accounting for meaning through the Lexical dynamism. This work was found useful in the area of ad hoc concepts. Ogola (2006) analyses the pragmatics of Inter-cultural common failure using Relevance Theory. He demonstrates the key concepts of relevance such as inferential communication, context, cognitive and communicative principles, Explicature and Implicature. It is useful in relating how inference and context are related.

Kamau (2008), analyses the truth condition in pragmatics using the Relevance Theory. The study focuses on the truth condition and context giving insight into how both semantics and pragmatics interact. The study is important since the current study investigates the role of context in the derivation of meaning.

Mukuyu (2009), studies language mixing in the language of advertisement in commercial banks in Kenya using lexical pragmatics. The lexical pragmatic processes of ad hoc concepts are discussed and therefore are relevant to the current study.

Koech (2013), on the other hand, studies figurative language in Kipsigis songs using Lexical adjustment pragmatics. The study is relevant to our study since it uses the lexical adjustment processes, that is, the ad hoc concepts of narrowing and broadening. The role of context in figurative language is highlighted. This is important since context plays a role in the comprehension of the idiom.

Last but not least, Karimi (2013), analyses the comprehension of the idiom in Kiambu using Relevance Theory approach. This study is useful in our research in the area of theoretical approach and the analysis of the idiom.

## **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

A Pragmatic theory explains the link between the encoded concept and the communicated concept of the utterance. This research is conducted within the framework of Relevance Theory credited for its flexibility in offering explanation on how hearers infer meaning of utterances both explicitly and implicitly. The idiom is an utterance whose meaning is varied depending on the compositionality scale.

Some idioms are transparent, semi-transparent, semi- opaque and opaque.

### **1.9.1 The Relevance Theory**

The Relevance Theory developed by Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson (1986& 1995) accounts for how communication and cognition are reached. Carston (2002:404) points out that relevance is an input to cognition and it yields a cognitive understanding of human understanding of the utterances.

Gutt (2000:31) quoted in Khisa (2014) goes on to state that the central claim of Relevance Theory is that human communication creates an expectation of optimal relevance which is an expectation on the part of the hearer that his attempt at interpretation will yield adequate contextual effects at minimal processing effort.

Relevance Theory according to Wilson`s lecture notes (PLIN 2002, 2007-08) is based on the following assumptions:

- a) Every utterance has various possible interpretations all compatible with the information that is linguistically transmitted.
- b) Interpretations cannot be accessed by the hearer at the same time
- c) Hearers possess a single general criterion for evaluating interpretations which can either be accepted or rejected as assumptions about the speaker`s meaning.
- d) This criterion is capable of excluding all the assumptions but the hearer is entitled to the assumption that satisfies the criterion of relevance.

The theory has a central claim that expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise and predictable to guide the hearer towards the speaker`s meaning. The theory looks at communication as an ostensive inferential device having the informative and

communicative intentions. The speaker has the intention of notifying the hearer about some information and the hearer in turn is expected to recognize this intention. The ostensive inferential process highlights the intention that is explicitly manifested. The ostensive inferential process highlights the intention that is implicitly manifested, the implicated premises, the conclusions arrived at and the background knowledge of the hearer in understanding the intentional and the informative message of the speaker. This is important in the interpretation of the idiom.

Relevance Theory tries to explain how communication takes place. A speaker intending to convey some information produces a stimulus which enables the hearer to identify the information he or she (speaker) intends to convey. This aims at explaining how the hearer infers the speaker's intention. In line with the notions expressed, this study will take cognizance of two crucial principles of relevance namely: the cognitive principle and the communicative principle.

### **1.9.2 Relevance and Cognition**

Sperber and Wilson (1986:251) state that relevance is a potential property of an input and that such an input raises expectations of relevance because the search for relevance is a basic feature of human cognition which is exploited. In Relevance Theory, any external stimulus or internal interpretation which provides input in the cognitive process may be relevant to an individual at some point.

The notion of relevance is viewed in the perspective of the Cognitive and processing effort: the greater the positive cognitive effects achieved by processing an input, the greater the relevance of the input to the individual, the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the relevance of the input to an individual.

At every moment, the mind is confronted with much more information than it can possibly attend to. People tend to pick information that is relevant to them as long as it yields positive cognitive effects and less processing effort is required in their processing. According to Sperber & Wilson (1995), ostensive inferential communication- exploits a

general cognitive principle; that the mind tends to attend primarily to information which is relevant in a technical sense.

Relevance is described in terms of the ability to improve the individual's overall representation of the world. New information achieves relevance when it strengthens or conforms to the existing assumption. The more assumptions it strengthens, the more relevant it will be. When new and old assumptions contradict each other, the weaker of the two assumptions is abandoned. New information is relevant in any context in which it contradicts and leads to the elimination of an existing assumption- the more assumptions it eliminates and the stronger they were, the more relevant it will be. Contextual implication is information that is lastly derived from the context of the utterance.

The greater the contextual effects the information has, the more relevant the information will be. In the inferential theory of communication a speaker who wishes to give some information produces a stimulus enabling the hearer to identify the intention. This is referred to as the ostensive inferential communication, in which the communicator provides contextual clues that he or she intends the audience to reach a certain conclusion. This intention is twofold, involving the informative intention and beneath it, the communicative intention. It is also noted that in verbal communication is a system of codes working to conceptualize the grammar of that utterance in a language.

Utterances made provide evidence for the hearer to decode the intention of the speaker, though this involves knowing more than the meaning of the sentence uttered. It involves both coding and inference. This relationship is reflected in the notion that, an utterance is a stimulus used by the hearer as evidence in inferring the speaker's meaning. The information encoded in the stimulus is seen as part of the evidence which when coupled with appropriate contextual clues or information leads to inference of the speaker's communication. Evidence gained from a stimulus is interpreted against a number of assumptions which lead to a variety of inferences. The question of how the inferential theory explains how communication is reached is explained through the cognitive principles of the Relevance Theory below

### **1.9.3 The Cognitive Principle of Relevance**

This principle according to (Sperber & Wilson) states that human cognition is geared towards maximization of relevance. The cognitive principle of relevance is a central assumption about human cognition which shows a strong relationship between the cognitive effects and the processing effort. The human system of perception, memory and inference has a deductive mechanism that plays a major role in spontaneous inference.

Since there is a lot of information available for the individual to attend to and much more that the mind can process, it then follows that the human mind is organized in such a way that it identifies and takes note of important aspects in the environment and the mind picks and processes information that is maximally relevant. Maximization of relevance means that an input, that is, an utterance, inference or perception becomes maximally relevant if it gives rise to more cognitive effects and at the same time use less effort in processing the inputs. Relevance is not only centred on external stimuli such as sights, sound and utterance but also the internal interpretations such as memories, thoughts and conclusions of inferences.

In Relevance Theory, once an utterance is made, then the expectations of relevance are raised since the search for relevance is a basic feature of human cognition which both the speaker and hearer aim at. This is beneficial in the interpretation of the idiom. An utterance will be relevant to an individual when there is a link with the background information available in form of world knowledge, belief systems and socio-cultural knowledge in order to result in conclusions that are the most valuable at that time. Wilson & Sperber express reservations, pointing out that it is not always true that we succeed in maximizing relevance but it is that sufficient tendency of picking out the most relevant at that time.

#### **1.9.4 The Communicative Principle of Relevance**

This principle states that every act of communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance (Wilson & Sperber: 2002:38). This is therefore based on the observation that an ostensive stimulus is optimally relevant to a hearer if:

- a) It is relevant enough to be worthy the hearer's processing effort
- b) It is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's ability and preference.

The communicative principle of Relevance and the definition of optimal relevance point to a practical procedure of performance of all the sub-tasks applied by the hearer to enable him or her construct a hypothesis about the speaker meaning. The sub -tasks are constructed into the Relevance Theory comprehension procedure which state that:

The hearer takes the linguistically encoded sentence meaning and following a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects, considers the interpretations (reference assignment, contextual assumptions, implications etc) in order of accessibility and stop when expectations of relevance are satisfied ( Wilson & Sperber 2004:260). The speaker's utmost intention is to encode an utterance that would be easy enough for the hearer to understand. The utterance should be formulated within his or her abilities and preferences so that the first interpretation that satisfies the hearer's expectation of relevance is what she or he intended to convey. An utterance with two satisfactory competing interpretations would cause the hearer unnecessary extra processing effort of choosing between them and the resulting interpretation not satisfying the condition on optimal relevance mentioned earlier.

The hearer thus follows a path of least effort in the interpretation that satisfies the expectations of relevance in the absence of contrary evidence, and this would be the most plausible hypothesis about the speaker's meaning. The role of context in this study is central to idiom processing as it provides the contextual clues for inference. In Relevance Theory, context is referred to as the cognitive environment. In order for the utterance between the encoded concept and the communicated concept to be understood, ad hoc concepts should be understood.



## **1.10 Research Methodology**

This section looks at the research methodology involving the method of data collection and data analysis.

### **1.10.1 Data collection**

This research used the qualitative method of data collection because it is a more flexible approach to the discussion of the utterances. The data was mainly collected from the primary sources. The researcher accessed the real live experiences through direct observation and the participant`s observation. The data was gathered primarily through a close visual inspection of the natural setting or site rather than engaging the members of the setting in conversation or interview. The researcher collected data mainly through the listening and noting technique.

This primary setting include: weddings, circumcision ceremonies, funeral meetings, dowry negotiation meetings, times of civil strife, resolution and peace building sessions, religious meetings etc. The various primary sources provided first hand raw data in actual context.

In addition, the data collected was verified by three adults all above the age of sixty, one of them a retired teacher of English and literature in high school and the other two above the age of seventy are respected Bukusu cultural custodians. The retired teacher was so selected to give the research an academic approach while the other two cultural custodians gave the data collection process a raw and natural perspective.

Over a hundred idioms were collected, verified and classified as transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque and opaque.

### **1.10.2 Data Analysis**

Over a hundred idioms were collected in LuBukusu and each of them was transcribed and translated into English (free translation) for ease of understanding by the various stakeholders. The analysis was done based on the four categories of idioms namely:

transparent, semi-transparent, semi- opaque and opaque. This analysis was done with the comprehension procedure in mind.

### **1.11 Conclusion**

This chapter has stated the background to the research through a brief introductory survey of the LuBukusu language within the Luhyia and overally belonging to the Proto-Bantu parent family of languages. The chapter has outlined the background of the study by looking at the idiom and understanding what it is. It has stated the research problem, the research objectives, the research hypotheses, rationale and justification. It has provided the literature review on the studies related to this research in one way or the other. The chapter has also provided the theoretical framework on Relevance Theory within which this research is done and finally, the research methodology and conclusion.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE IDIOM**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter, states the concept of the idiom in details; its definition and occurrence. The chapter then analyses the idiom in its categorial classes namely: transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque and opaque. The chapter also states the meaning of context applied broadly and playing a central role in the comprehension of the idiom. It looks at the types of idioms and finally the classification of idioms.

#### **2.1 The concept of the idiom**

This section highlights the different views about the idiom from a variety of sources as follow:

An idiom is an expression in the usage of language that is peculiar to itself either grammatically or in having meaning that cannot be derived from the conjoined meaning of its elements, (MerriamWebster`s Collegiate Dictionary,10<sup>th</sup> edition). The Advanced Learner`s English Dictionary, (2010:744) defines an idiom as a group of words whose meaning is different from the meaning of the individual words. Fraser (1970:22) refers to an idiom as a constituent or series of constituents for which the semantic interpretation is not a compositional function of the of the formatives of which it is composed.

Pei and Grayor (1954:95) quoted in Karimi (2013), state that 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.

Olali, (2014:5) quoted in Khisa, (2014:21) states that an idiom is an expression that means something other than the literal meanings expressed. He points out that idiomatic language does not convey meaning directly but is implicit.

According to Olali, (2014:6), understanding an idiom is based on the speaker`s familiarity with the expression, the understanding of context and at the same time it should have been used before their objective. He points out that since meaning of the idiomatic expression cannot be predicted, context plays a key role in its understanding. The expressions are always in a fixed order having a particular meaning that is different from the meaning of each word.

William, (1977:32,) quoted in Khisa, (2014:22), gives the following characteristics of the idiom:

- a) Conventinality; idioms are conventionalized. Their meaning or use cannot be predicted. On the basis of knowledge of the independent convention that determine the use of their constituents when they appear in isolation from one another.
- b) Inflexibility: idioms typically appear in limited number of syntactic frames of construction unlike the freely composed expressions e.g alive and kicking cannot be living and kicking.
- c) Figuration: idioms typically involve metaphors e.g., take the bull by the horns, metonymies e.g. lend a hand etc.

Fromkin et al, (2011:152), states that idioms must be entered in the lexicon or mental dictionary as single items with their meanings specified and speakers must learn the special restrictions on their use in sentence.

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 meaning of its component parts.

Moreno, (2007:304), on the other hand see the idiom`s words as having meaning that is arbitrarily stipulated in memory. According to Moreno, the meaning of the idiom cannot be derived compositionally from the morphosyntactic rules of the language.

We undertake to define the idiom as an expression that is different in comprehensibility depending on the type and context of the utterance.

## **2.2 The classification of the idiom**

As already observed, an idiom is an expression whose comprehensibility depends on its type and the context of its speech. A number of linguists have therefore come up with different classifications of the idiom among them Fernando (1996:35) quoted in Karimi (1913) who classifies idioms into three categories namely: pure idioms, semi-idioms and literal idioms.

He points out that a pure idiom is a kind of conventionalized non-literal multi-word expression whose meaning cannot be understood by adding up the meanings of the words that make up the phrase (ibid 35-36). He gives the example of "spill the beans" as a pure idiom because its meaning has nothing to do with "beans." He points out that a semi-idiom has at least one literal element (ibid) "foot the bill" meaning to pay. "Foot" is the non-literal element whereas "bill" is used literally. He lastly points out that the "literal idioms" are semantically less complex than the other two and therefore easier to understand even if one is not familiar with the expression.

According to Vanagradow (2008:33) quoted in Karimi (2013), idioms are classified to their semantic and syntactic features. In the semantic feature classification are idioms categorized to their semantic transparency. He points out that the meaning of an idiom is the "special chemical mixture" of the meanings of all components which is completely new in quality. According to Gibbs and Nayak (1989), the idioms whose individual words contribute to idiom meaning are decomposable. Decomposition is the equivalent of transparency. The contemporary views on the idiomatic expressions hold that idioms do not form a homogenous non-compositional class but are a highly heterogeneous class lying on the continuum of compositionality. They vary in regard to the way in which the meaning of the constituent parts contribute to the overall interpretation. At one far end of the continuum are the non-idiomatic phrases deriving fully compositionally from the meaning of the component parts: while at the other end are the non-compositional idiom strings whose individual constituents are in complete arbitrary relation to the overall meaning of the idiom. Most idiomatic expressions lie between these extreme ends varying in the degree and ways in which the internal semantics of their constituent parts are motivated to play a role in the comprehension process .

Idioms can therefore be classified according to the range of idiomaticity on the range of idiomaticity continuum as follows: transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque and opaque.

Below is a typological analysis of these categories as outlined above.

### 2.2.1 The Transparent Idioms

The idea of transparency is used in reference to the ease in which the referent object or information is easily seen through, detected, perceived, understood or grasped by the senses or mind. Gibbs and Nayak (1989) observe that the idioms whose individual words contribute to the idiom meaning are decomposable thus transparent. The transparent idioms play host to the literal perspective since they are semantically less complex and therefore easier to comprehend. The meaning of the transparent idioms can be deduced from the meaning of their component parts. These idioms have a close relationship with the literal meaning of the constituent words with their meaning deriving direct from the meaning of the literal constituents. The comprehension of this type of idiom follows a path of least effort since assumptions made are highly accessible by the encoded concepts.

The comprehension process of the transparent idiom is done in the same manner as any ordinary utterance. It follows the path of least effort with the hearer taking the encoded concepts as the starting point in the derivation of the speaker`s meaning. The hearer finds his expectations of relevance satisfied upon considering a subset of the encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the encoded concepts.

Below are examples drawn from English:

<b>Idiom</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
1. To play with fire	To experiment with danger
2. To rack one`s brain	To search one`s memory
3. To pat on the back	To encourage/ congratulate
4. To miss the boat	To lose an opportunity
5. To button one`s lip	To be quiet/ say nothing about it
6. To Lose one`s grip	To relax or lose focus
7. To pop the question	To propose marriage
8. To promise the moon	To excite (falsely)

9. To give a hand	To aid/ to rescue
10.To lay one`s cards on the table	To be open in one`s dealings
11.To take under your wing	To bring under one`s Care
12. Not taking strangers at their word	To be wary of strangers
13.To be caught between a rock and a hard surface	To be in a difficult situation/To have no option out
14.To get up on the wrong side of the bed	To be easily irritable
15.To add insult to injury	To aggravate the situation or to make the situation worse.

The meaning of the transparent idioms can easily be derived from the literal meaning of the component parts. The words of the idiom give a clue to the meaning of the idiom.

Below is an articulation of the examples in context;

1. To play with fire (To experiment with danger)

When Ruto talked of Matanda`s big body, he did not know he was playing with fire.

The hearer of this idiom, “to play with fire” derives the implications of relevance from the literal meaning of the component parts which mean ‘to experiment with danger.’ The comprehension of this idiom follows a path of least effort with the hearer accessing the encyclopaedic assumptions that are associated with the concepts encoded by the words constituting the idiom. This process of pragmatic adjustment results in the formation of Ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the literal meaning. “To play with fire” denotes or makes reference to a situation in which somebody experiments with danger or something harmful to one`s state or well being. From a literal perspective, “fire” can be harmful or destructive. It is the harmfulness or destructiveness in it that is targeted in this idiom.

Consider the example below:

2. To promise the moon (To excite falsely, to give a false un-attainable promise)

The groom promised the bride the moon after their wedding.

The comprehension of this idiom “to promise the moon” takes the path of least effort. The hearer accesses encyclopaedic assumptions that are associated with the concepts encoded by the words constituting the idiom. This process of pragmatic adjustment results in the formation of ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the compositional or literal meaning. “To promise the moon” denotes a situation in which somebody promises what is not achievable or that that is impossible to attain.

Literally, the moon is bright and high up the sky. When you promise someone the moon then you promise someone something high up the sky which further denotes something too expensive and possibly priceless. The moon is so high in the sky and therefore metaphorically bears the connotations of, ‘high value’ something that takes a fortune to acquire, in the same way someone would spent a fortune to reach the moon.

The moon is the connotation of invaluable, priceless or too expensive to afford. In promising the moon, one is therefore understood to be promising what is unattainable. The idiom ‘promise the moon’ is transparent in the sense that its location so high up the sky is at a great height and therefore reaching it is an impracticality.

Consider the following;

3. To button one`s lip (To be quiet, to say nothing about it)

The child was told to button up his lip in the presence of the visitors.

The hearer of this idiom takes the literal meaning of the utterance, ‘to button one`s lips’ as the encoded concept. The comprehension of this idiom “To button one`s lip” takes the path of least effort in the derivation of the assumptions relevant to the denotations. The hearer accesses the encyclopaedic assumptions that are associated with the concepts encoded in the words constituting the idiom.

This process of pragmatic adjustment results in the formation of Ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the compositional or literal meaning. The idiom To button one`s lip” denotes a situation in which one remains quiet and not saying anything. Buttoning one`s



lips has the literal meaning of closing, shutting or covering one's mouth. When one buttons up their lips then one is supposed to remain silent, and not say anything over a given matter.

Buttoning one's lips means being quiet, not uttering or revealing anything about a certain happening.

Consider the example below:

4. To be caught between a rock and a hard surface(to be in a difficult situation)

Wandili was beaten, left for the dead and his house set ablaze by the neighbours when he stole from the old woman.

The two places of reference, a rock and a hard surface are both not conducive for one's survival or habitation. Both carry the qualities of toughness in texture or feel, therefore are uncomfortable places from a literal perspective. The referent in this case was in a difficult situation left and right and had no way out of the predicament he was found in. He had limited options for his survival basing the analysis of it on the ensuing circumstances.

The comprehension of this idiom "To button one's lip" would take the path of least effort in the derivation of assumptions that denote the cognitive effects associated with it. The hearer accesses the encyclopaedic assumptions that are associated with the concepts encoded by the words constituting the idiom easily.

This process of pragmatic adjustment results in the formation of Ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the compositional or literal meaning. The idiom 'To be caught between a rock and a hard surface' denotes a situation of difficulty.

The idiomatic expression has a literal perception since the words 'rock and hard surface' correspond to the intended meaning. The referent was found in a difficult situation.

Consider the example stated below:

5. To lay down the law (To inaugurate the law)

President Kibaki lay down the law for the country when the new constitution was promulgated in August 2010.

In the comprehension of this idiom, “To lay down the law” the hearer follows a path of least effort in the derivation of the implications that make the utterance relevant. The hearer accesses the encyclopaedic assumptions that are associated with the concepts encoded by the words constituting the idiom.

This process of pragmatic adjustment results in the formation of Ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the encoded meaning. The idiom “To lay down the law” therefore denotes a situation of establishing or inaugurating the rules or statutes of governance. “To lay down the law” means to establish or set up the rules that provide guidance in the various operations. The meaning of the idiom is contained in the literal meaning of the words of the idiom. Therefore, this idiom is transparent.

To lay down the law means to establish, inaugurate or come up with the rules and regulations in the running of the affairs whether of the state, sector, company or any other organization to direct the course of its affairs.

### **2.2.2 The semi-transparent idioms**

In the comprehension of the semi-transparent idiom, the hearer would first try the literal reference and fail the test of relevance before trying the metaphorical implication. Karimi (2013), points out that the semi-transparent idiom bears metaphorical reference that would not otherwise be understood from the common or literal use. In the semi-transparent idiom, the literal meaning of the idiom’s component parts has little role in the derivation of the idiom’s intended communication. The component parts are less direct in meaning and therefore do not contribute compositionally to the intended meaning. The semi-transparent idiom is identified from the fact that at least one of the component parts is literally interpreted while the other (rest) are metaphorically understood from the clues provided by the compositional component.

**The table below shows this category of idioms**

1. To spill the beans	To reveal the secret
2. Ace in the hole	A hidden secret, strength or unrevealed advantage
3.To hit the sack	To go to bed
1. To wake up on the wrong side of the bed	To be easily irritable
2. To break the ice	To break the silence, to begin off a conversation or talk
3. Wild goose chase	A frustrating or lengthy undertaking that accomplishes little.
4. A whole nine yards	Everything or the whole of it
5. To make from scratch	To start on nothing or built from nothing
6. Take the cake	To be particularly good or outstanding
7. Backing up the wrong tree	Looking in the wrong place

Consider the examples below:

6. To spill the beans (To reveal the secret)

Wechuli is a real gossip, after seeing us together be sure he will spill the beans to my mother.

A gossip is one fond of talking about other people`s affairs. They only wait for a slight opportunity to capitalise on. In this context, the gossip noticed the referent in company of somebody else and therefore found an opportunity or reason of either accusing or saying what he witnessed. The referent does not expect any one else to be aware of the company and whatever else ensued. The word `spill` is the literal form while `beans` is the non-compositional form that is used metaphorically.

The hearer works out the meaning of this idiom from the point of view that `to spill` literally means to pour out. The hearer checks out on the literal meaning of the word `beans` and finds it not conforming to the literal situation. In the comprehension of the component part `beans` whose meaning is more than the literal assignment, the hearer accesses the encyclopaedic assumptions about it metaphorically.

This process of pragmatic adjustment would result into the formation of Ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the literal meaning. Working out meaning from this broader metaphorical view assigns the word `beans` the broader meaning of `secrets.` The meaning of the idiom `to spill the beans` is therefore `to reveal the secrets.` `Beans` is used metaphorically to refer to secrets or private engagements which other people were not expected to be aware of.

To `spill` means to `pour out` while `beans` is used metaphorically to refer to secrets. The idiom `spill the beans` metaphorically refers to `revealing secrets.`

Consider the following:

7. Ace in a hole (hidden secret, strength or advantage)

Bensouda , the ICC Prosecutor is an Ace in the hole in her presentation of evidence against Deputy prsident Ruto.

The word 'Ace' has several meanings, but all tend to relate in one way or the other:

- a) In the game of cards, an Ace is a card with only one symbol of either the highest or lowest value
- b) In Tennis, an Ace is a fast serve that an opponent does not see.
- c) It also means someone who is good at doing something.

A hole is a depression in a solid body or surface whose synonyms are pit, ditch, trench or cavity. It is a deep depression on a surface which could also metaphorically mean a treasure or bank. The hearer of the idiom, "An ace in the hole" would work out the implications of relevance from the literal form 'hole' which could be a depression in a surface, a broken part of something or even a treasure of some sort.

In the comprehension of the form 'ACE', whose meaning is more than the literal assignment by the grammar of the language, the hearer accesses the encyclopaedic assumptions about it metaphorically. This process of pragmatic adjustment would result into the formation of Ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the literal meaning.

The hearer would then work out meaning from a broader metaphorical perspective which assigns the idiom "An ace in the hole" the broader meaning of 'Hidden strength or advantage.' The meaning of the idiom, "An ace in the hole" is the unseen strength or the hidden advantage.

Bensouda is in the context of the utterance, is astute and good at doing her work. She is so tactful in her presentation of the evidence of charges conferred against the Deputy President. She brings up lethal evidences one after the other contrary to the expectations of the defense team. The lethal pieces of evidence are hidden behind the scenes causing anxiety and panic for they point at likely convictions.

An Ace in the hole therefore means hidden secrets, strength or unrevealed advantage which somebody should not under-estimate.

Consider:

8. To break the ice (to break the silence)

Wafula managed to break the ice with the stranger sitting next to him.

The hearer of the utterance would try the literal meaning to test for the implications that would satisfy the relevance from the context provided.

The literal meaning would be that Wafula probably broke the ice with the seatmate. The literal meaning would not provide enough implications to satisfy the speaker's intention. From the Relevance Theory perspective, the comprehension of the utterance "break the ice" used loosely would be no different from the comprehension of the metaphorical use. The literal meaning of the utterance gives access to a range of encyclopaedic assumptions. The word 'ICE' has the literal understanding of being very cold. This would aid the hearer to metaphorically broaden the meaning of the concept by forming an Ad hoc concept about the utterance. 'Ice , would mean a spell of silence.' The meaning of the idiom, "break the ice" would be 'to break the silence.'

The metaphorical concept derived from the denotation would be 'to break the silence.' The idiom, 'to break the ice' therefore means 'to break the silence.'

Consider the following example:

9. To wake up on the wrong side of the bed (to be easily irritable)

The prefect warned the class to be careful with their class-teacher for he seemed to have woken up on the wrong side of the bed.

A bed is not known to have the right or wrong sides.

In activating the literal meaning of the idiom, the hearer may not be able to arrive at the intention of the speaker. The literal understanding of this idiom does not communicate the speaker's intended message. In the comprehension of this idiom the hearer would use the literal meaning loosely or in an Ad hoc manner to invoke the metaphorical perspective. The literal meaning of the expression gives a range of encyclopaedic

assumptions considered in their order of accessibility in the search of implications to satisfy the expectations of relevance. The literal meaning of the idiom, 'to wake up on the wrong side of the bed' would be broadened metaphorically to include 'being irritable.' The idiom means being irritable, easily annoyed or having tempers.

Unlike the literal perspective, the processing of the semi-transparent idiom would require a little bit more processing effort since the communication is worked out from the metaphorical point of view.

10. To hit the sack (to go to bed)

Nekoye was very tired after the day's work that she immediately hit the sack on arrival home.

The hearer of this idiom would work out its comprehension from a literal perspective for the implications of relevance and upon not deriving the necessary implications to satisfy the intention of the speaker use the literal meaning in accessing a range of encyclopaedic assumptions during the online interpretation. The assumptions would be considered in their order of accessibility in the search for implications necessary in the satisfying the expectations of relevance raised by the utterance. The hearer would satisfy the expectations of relevance by broadening the ad hoc concept to loosely include the metaphorical reference with 'hit' meaning 'go' and sack meaning 'bed.' The idiom, 'to hit the sack' refers to going to bed straight away without delay.

### **2.2.3 The Semi-Opaque Idioms**

A substance that is referred to as semi-opaque draws from the fact that such a substance can be difficult seeing through or understanding it. In the semi- opaque idioms therefore, the literal or compositional rule is broken since meaning may not be derived from the component parts. Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary, 10<sup>TH</sup> Edition, describes the term semi-opaque as partly or nearly opaque. It is something nearly obscure, concealed, arcane or esoteric, all making reference to it as being understood by a few, mysterious, secret and enigmatic.

According to Karimi (2013), in the semi-opaque idiom, the compositional meaning is unintelligible but on further analysis may yield meaning.

She further points out that, the figurative meaning may not be joined to the meaning of the words that make up the idiom and that the idioms in this category could be regarded as more idiomatic than the semi-transparent. In this type of idiom therefore, a certain level of context is evoked to enable the comprehension process. It is worth noting that the idiom in this category has the compositional meaning communicating a different message from the idiomatic meaning.

The table below articulates examples of the semi-opaque idioms in English:

Idiom	Meaning
By the skin of one`s teeth	Narrowly, barely (narrow escape)
Have eyes in the back of the head	Be able to perceive something, events outside their field of vision.
Best of both worlds	Asituation where-in someone has the privilege of enjoying two different opportunities
Put the cat among the pigeons	To create a disturbance and trouble
Wild goose chase	A frustrating or lengthy undertaking that accomplishes little
Icing on the cake	Additional good thing
Burn the midnight oil	To work well into the night, to go an extra mile
Bite the dust	To die, pass on
Cold shoulder	Display aloofness and disdain
Crocodile tears	Fake tears



Consider the following examples in context:

11. To survive by the skin of his teeth. (To barely or narrowly survive, a narrow escape)

Mr. Sifuna survived by the skin of his teeth when a transit goods trailer hit his vehicle and damaged it beyond repair.

The hearer of this idiom will pursue the fact that a transit goods vehicle is very heavy in terms of its own weight and in addition to the goods it carries. Its speed on the Highway is normally high. When such a vehicle comes into contact with a smaller vehicle, we expect far reaching damage, destruction and loss. However, when one survives from such a grisly occurrence, then it is through the hand of God and the survival is by a whisker, therefore a narrow escape.

In the public domain, when such an accident happens then survival of the occupants of the smaller vehicle is indeed ruled out. At the same time, teeth have virtually no skin covering them and if there is, then it is so thin that it may be unnoticed. When it is alleged that one survived by the skin of their own teeth, then that survival was by chance and through the hand of God. In the prevailing circumstances, survival was not guaranteed, therefore this was a narrow escape. The hearer of the utterance takes the encoded conceptual representation as the starting point for inference. The skin covering the teeth is a very thin layer that usually goes unnoticed. The layer is negligible.

When one's survival is equated to such a thin veneer of coverage, then the hearer builds up the connection between the thin veneer of coverage and the narrow survival or escape thus deriving the relevance of the implication.

Consider the following:

12. To have eyes in the back of the head.

Before the principal left for the week-long retreat, he confided in his deputy to have his eyes in the back of his head.

The eyes are objects of sight located on the face- at the front of the head. The principal's utterance is a deliberate attempt at communicating an idea or message. He will be away for a week and before leaving, he has a word for the deputy whom he is leaving behind

and in charge. He is communicating the idea that the deputy should be vibrant, keen and diligent in monitoring and discharging his mandate.

In suggesting that the deputy possesses eyes in the back of the head, the principal is not implying that the deputy's eyes literally shift position to the back of the head but he is encouraging the deputy to have his attention everywhere in order for him to run the school effectively in his absence.

The idiom means that the deputy's perception should go beyond his field of vision and supervision in order to effectively administer.

Consider:

13. To be the best of both worlds.

Enjoying two different opportunities at the same time.

The head student is the best of two worlds, he is not only a good athlete but the leading academician.

The situation calls for outstanding and exemplary performance in two different disciplines or fields concurrently. The referent should be clearly above the rest in performance in the two or so areas of specification. The referent should not only be a participant but a leading competitor and contender.

The head student is gifted in two fields of reference since his performance in them is exemplary. The hearer of this idiom draws relevant implications based on the encyclopaedic entries of the world being one and therefore the notion that one can be the best in two worlds is reference being made in things other than the real world.

One is best in activities of performance in the various disciplines. The referent's assessment based on the output or performance is clearly found exemplary. The performance is quite impressive in the two spheres of participation to warrant such declaration.

Consider:

14. Put the cat among the pigeons (create disturbance)

The principal put the cat among the pigeons when she proposed a reduction in the students' consumption of meat and bread due to the high cost.

The hearer would try to perceive the relevance of the utterance from the fact that the cat is an enemy of the pigeons since it preys on them. The pigeons would not be at peace neither would they be settled in the presence of the cat for it would be just a matter of time before striking. The cat preys on the pigeons and therefore the moment it appears then the pigeons are on high alert since their lives are at stake.

The notion of the principal's proposal at the reduction of the students' much cherished diet draws analogy from the relationship seen existing between the cat and the pigeons, the relationship of predation, hunter and hunted relationship.

Putting the cat among the pigeons is seen as betrayal of trust since it amounts to setting the strong against the weak. The presence of the cat among the pigeons is expressed through the noise and activities of restlessness communicating resentment of the unwelcome visitor since the visitor's presence heralds trouble and communicates doom.

The hearer of this idiom, 'Put the cat among the pigeons' figuratively draws relevance from 'Cat' whose presence unsettles the peace among the pigeons. The cat is a metaphorical representation of enmity. We derive the understanding that, the cat and the pigeons are not friends. Their relationship is that of enmity. The presence of the cat, unsettles the peace and tranquility of the pigeons hitherto enjoyed. The idiom thus means to cause disturbance and unrest that unsettles the state of affairs. The cat's presence among the pigeons is a counter-productive effort.

Consider the following:

15. To burn the midnight oil (To go an extra mile)

The students in the candidate class were asked to burn the midnight oil in order to perform well in their studies.

From the encyclopaedic entries the hearer of this utterance would retrieve the information that burning involves lighting while oil is a highly inflammable substance that is used for lighting as the compositional.

The literal meaning derived does not correspond to the meaning of the idiom which is 'To go an extra mile.' In the comprehension of this expression the hearer would also register the fact that the time referred to as midnight is a later indication of time whose timeline just borders on the dawn of the new day.

It is common practice for people to have retired for the evening long before this hour. When one therefore burns the midnight oil then one would have had a long stretch of time into the later hour. It involves bit of sacrifice on the part of the referent since this would require one to go out of the way to accomplish the need. This is an extra effort away from the normal practice induced by the desire to either accomplish or achieve a certain requirement.

The idea of burning the midnight oil is a rallying call and encouragement done in the interest of accomplishing a given task and achieving positive results. It refers to that extra effort, denial and sacrifice. It means to go an extra mile in whatever one is doing to better the results of the particular engagement.

#### **2.2.4. The Opaque Idioms**

Something referred to as opaque is that that is not seen through. According to Merriam Webster Dictionary 10<sup>th</sup> edition, opaque means hard to understand or explain. It is understood by a few, it is obscure, mysterious, secret, enigmatic and esoteric. Karimi (2013) views the meaning of the opaque idioms as being different from the meaning of its component parts.

It is therefore not an easy task to work out meaning from the constituent parts. Opaque idioms do not conform to the grammatical and semantic composition and meaning of the form. The meaning is different from the form. Karimi (2013), further observes that due to the idiom`s mysteriousness and their esoteric nature, the culture they derive from has a

strong influence on their comprehensibility. This sets them out as the most difficult in terms of their understanding.

Below are the examples of the opaque idioms in English;

Idiom	Meaning
1.To have no horse in the race	To have no vested interest
2. A Pig in the poke	Deceptive, defective item
3. Rain cats and dogs	Raining strongly, hard
4.To shoot the breeze	To chat idly and generally waste time
5.To cut the mustard	To perform well, to meet expectations
6. To be a couch potato	Lazy person
7. To take a flak	To take responsibility for the action taken
8.To have a ball at the disco	To have a good time
9.To kick the bucket	To die
10.Totake the bull by the horns	To be daring, courageous and fearless

Consider:

16. To have no horse in the race (To have no vested interest)

The Chief Examiner told the examiners to have no horses in the race during marking exercise.

Horses are domestic animals used for racing competitions and in some cases used in the control of crowds. They are normally trained and controlled by the rider. The idiom, ‘To have no horse in the race’ is opaque since the form of it does not conform to the expression of its meaning.

There is no relationship between ‘having the horse in the race’ and the derived meaning ‘have vested interest.’

The hearer of the idiom would search for its relevance metaphorically and culturally from the understanding that a horse is preferably treated differently from the other animals reared in the home. It is carefully tended and given a lot of attention and time. It is not treated ordinarily. It is the preferred animal. From this background and the context of the utterance, the hearer would then try to derive relevance.

If the horse is the preferred animal of the stock, then it follows that the farmer has more interest in it than the rest of the members of the stock on the farm. If so, then its treatment is that of carefulness because of the vested interest. When a speaker talks of having no horses in the race, in the context of the utterance, the derived sense is that the speaker is aware of the likely bias in terms of treatment and therefore steadfastly warns against it as a malpractice that works against equity and fair treatment to the players.

Consider the following example:

17. A pig in the poke

To buy a defective item.

The matron of the school bought many items for boarding with the least knowledge that they were a pig in the poke.

A pig is a domestic animal whose pork gives us bacon and sausage. To poke is to push something quickly with your finger or with a pointed object as it is in the game of pool. The idiomatic meaning of this expression is ‘buying a defective item.’ The meaning cannot be derived from the literal combination of the component parts. The forms are different from the output meaning giving us a scenario of opaqueness.

The hearer of this idiom would derive the sense from the context of the utterance which would play a crucial role in determining the communication. When one buys a pig in the poke then one would have bought something defective and therefore not worthy. It is as though somebody just pushed the item to you unknowingly when you eventually discover that what you bought was a defective item not worth the effort or cost.

Consider:

18. To rain cats and dogs

To rain strongly and hard.

Yesterday it rained cats and dogs and property of unknown value was either destroyed or swept away.

The cats and dogs are pets kept in the home for security reasons. To rain cats and dogs is not true because when it rains then the resultant feature is the droplets of water and not cats and dogs. The cats and dogs are not a product of rainfall. This idiom is therefore opaque since the component parts do not correspond to the intended meaning of the utterance.

The hearer of this idiom would decipher its meaning basically on the context of the utterance. The hearer would try the literal perspective for the implications of relevance before using the cognitive environment when the literal meaning fails to yield implications that would satisfy the expectations of relevance.

When it rains cats and dogs then the likely scenario is that it has rained so strongly that surface run-off could sweep away these pets. To rain cats and dogs is to rain so strongly and heavily.

Consider:

19. To shoot the breeze

To chat idly and generally waste time

The four candidates were warned against shooting the breeze when they had no more time left for their preparation. To 'shoot' means to drive out, force out with some relative force while 'breeze' is the cool comforting air that blows about gently. The literal meaning of the component parts is different from the meaning communicated by the component parts.

The meaning is non literal therefore opaque. The hearer of the idiom would try the literal meaning for implications of relevance and not finding enough implications, revert to the cognitive environment for implications of relevance. The context of the utterance would

assign reference to the idiom as warning against wastage of useful time when the time-frame left appears well spent.

To 'shoot the breeze' would generally appear to mean talking idly and appearing to be so relaxed and in no hurry for anything. The referent is oblivious of the need in saving time, good time management is not an issue.

Consider:

20. To be a couch potato

To be a lazy.

Nekoye was warned against being a couch potato and yet she was a KCSE candidate.

Literally, a couch is a long low comfortable seat (piece of furniture) used for sitting, sleeping or resting while a potato is an edible root tuber plant.

However, the meaning of this idiom is non literal in the sense that the form does not conform to the meaning. There is no relationship between the literal meaning and the idiomatic meaning. The idiom is therefore opaque. The hearer of this idiom would unravel its meaning from the environment of usage (the cognitive environment). From such a context, the hearer would use inference to work out the intention of the speaker in the use the idiom.

The hearer would infer that if a couch is used for resting then the referent would exactly want to laze about doing nothing meaningful just like the potato that has no initiative of its own. To be a couch potato is therefore to be lazy, less interested in work, a lay back and generally lacking in initiative.

Consider :

21. To take a flak

To take responsibility for the action taken

The Kenya Rugby Sevens team head coach took a flak for the poor performance of the team at the just concluded international tournament.



From a literal perspective, a flak is a bomb, missile or bullet fired at a plane from the ground. When this is done, there are obvious repercussions or expectations of death and destruction. The hearer of this idiom would build up implication from the figurative perception that bombs, missiles and bullets are explosive agents of death and destruction. When this communication is put to context 'the rugby head coach took the flak' then the communication bears a metaphorical implication. The rugby head coach was the object of the fired salvos (bombs, missiles and bullets).

The idiom, 'to take a flask' is metaphorically broadened to therefore mean taking criticism, arguments and opinion positively.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has looked at the English idiom with the revelations that this can be classified into four categories of identity and analysis. The idioms' level of comprehensibility range on a continuum of transparency, semi-transparency, semi-opaque and opaque. The transparent idiom is more or less closer to the literal communication, with the literal meaning of the expression conforming to the idiomatic meaning. The semi-transparent and the semi-opaque both appeal to the figurative assignment for derivation of relevance. The opaque idiom on the other hand is completely non-compositional with the literal meaning bearing no known relationship with the idiomatic meaning.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**APPLICATION OF RELEVANCE THEORY TO THE CONCEPTS**  
**OF TRANSPARENCY AND SEMI-TRANSPARENCY OF THE IDIOM IN**  
**LUBUKUSU**

**3.0 Introduction**

This chapter describes the comprehension and interpretation process of the idiom in LuBukusu. It describes data based on the concepts of transparency and semi-transparency of the idiom in LuBukusu. The two concepts share a relationship in that they both use the literal meaning of their component parts to derive meaning. The transparent idiom derives its interpretation from the literal understanding of the idiom's component parts in addition to metaphorical extension (broadening) to express its meaning. The semi-transparent idiom on the other hand like the Transparent idiom derives its interpretation from the words of the idiom, uses the broadening concept and context in its comprehension and interpretation. The two concepts are articulated here-below respectively.

**3.1 The Relevance Theory comprehension procedure**

- a) All utterances have possible interpretations compatible with the linguistically encoded information.
- b) Interpretations do not occur to the hearer at same time, some take more effort to formulate
- c) Hearers are endowed with a singular general sequence for evaluating interpretations.
- d) Once the correct interpretation is reached, the rest are excluded and the hearer looks no further.

We note that idioms have many possible interpretations but for the purposes of this study, we elect to follow what Wilson and Yus, point out that hearers are equipped with a single criterion for evaluation interpretations. This works in such a way that one is able to exclude all the other possible interpretations and is left with a single one.

According to Karimi (2013), there are factors that guide the comprehension of the idioms. These factors are articulated in the table below:

Transparent idiom	Semi-transparent	Semi-opaque	Opaque
Clue from the words	Clues from the words	Minimal clue from the words	Minimal or no clues from the words
Broadening/metaphorical extension	Broadening/metaphorical extension	More processing effort	Relies on cultural reference of the terms
	Context	More context, cultural reference, Broadening/metaphorical extension	Learnt like a phrase or a new concept

Adapted from Karimi (2013:54)

The table above, Karimi (2013), points out that idioms greatly draw from the metaphor and that metaphors are hidden into idioms. The Transparent, the Semi-transparent and the Semi-opaque are interpreted through the activation of both the metaphor and the context while the opaque idioms do not since are interpreted through the cultural register and they must also be learnt as new concepts.

### 3.2 The Comprehension of the Idiom

Below we articulate the comprehension of the concepts of the transparent and the semi-transparent idioms using data from the LuBukusu language.

#### 3.2.1 The Transparent Idioms

This category of the idioms is so termed because it has its meaning easily derived from the literal properties or the grammatical meaning. The idiom's meaning easily derives from the component parts. The relation between the idiom's component parts and their meaning is more or less direct. It is this notion of direct correspondence of the component parts to the meaning that appeals to the character of this type of idiom. The comprehension of this type of idiom takes a path of least effort with the hearer taking the encoded concept as a starting point for deriving the speaker's meaning. As a result, the hearer would find their expectations satisfied upon consideration of a subset of the encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the encoded concept.

Idiom	Translation	Meaning
Khukwa ne khukhwinyokha	To fall and stand	To strive through thick and thin
Khurangisha endaa	To front the stomach	To put your own interests before anything
Khukhupa kumukhono mufubo	To beat the hand in the collection hole	To embezzle resources meant for public utility
Khukhwalukha	To hatch	To be appear in a new form
Khukhwinyokhela kumukhono kumubi	To wake up on the wrong hand	To have bad luck in your undertaking

Below is an articulation of examples using data from LuBukusu language to explain the notion of transparency:

22. Khukwa ne khukhwinyokha (to fall and stand)

To strive through thick and thin

Wafula omutambi lakini akwa ne kenyokha khusomesha babana bewe

GLOSS: Wafula is poor but he falls and stands to take his children to school. (Wafula struggles to ensure his children get education.)

The LuBukusu idiomatic expression “khukwa ne khukhwinyokha” (to fall and stand) has a literal reading. The comprehension of this idiom takes the path of least effort with the hearer accessing the encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the concept encoded by the words making up the idiom with ease. The idiom, “Khukwa ne khukhwinyokha” literally refers to falling and standing. The falling and standing relates to that determination, that spirit of fighting on and on. This process of pragmatic adjustment results in the formation of Ad hoc concepts that are broader in denotation than the encoded literal meaning. The words “Khukwa ne khukhwinyokha” are therefore broadened figuratively to denote a situation in which the referent is determined in doing what is at stake. The referent thus has that stubborn determination, that fighting spirit aimed at fulfilling his or her mandate or obligation.

The idiom, ‘khukwa ne khukhwinyokha’ (to fall and rise) therefore explains the effort put in the struggle for the achievement of a given course. The referent lives in a state of want but that has not been a deterrent to his vision of having his children receive education. The idiom, ‘khukwa ne khukhwinyokha’ is a pointer to that continued struggle towards the achievement of a certain plight.

Consider the following example:

23. Khurangisha endaa (to put in front stomach)

To put one's interests first.

Omukholi wa serikali sekenyekha karangisha endaa mwikhalabana lyewe tawe

GLOSS: A worker of government should not put stomach first in the work.

A good government worker should not front personal interests in service delivery.

The idiom means putting one's own interest before other people's plight or benefiting oneself at the expense of the people served. The idiomatic expression "Khurangisha endaa" has a literal reading in meaning.

The comprehension of this idiom takes a path of least effort. The hearer of this idiom accesses the encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the concepts encoded by the words constituting the idiom. This process of pragmatic adjustment results in the formation of Ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the compositional or literal meaning. The idiom "khurangisa endaa" therefore denotes a situation in which the referent serves his or her own interest (stomach) at the expense of the mandate of one's service. One serves his or her own interests instead of serving the interests of the many.

The idiom, 'khurangisha endaa' (to front the stomach) is a swipe at corruption. In one fronting one's stomach in the provision of services one serves one's own interests first at the expense of other people's plight. The idiom refers to selfish interests.

Consider the following:

24. Khukhupa kumukhono mufubo (to beat hand in the collection hole)

To embezzle/ steal resources

Waiguru kaapa kumukhono mufubo eye bakhalabani banyelele be sibala

GLOSS: Waiguru beat hand in the collection hole of National Youth Service. (Waiguru put her hand in the N Y S treasury).

Waiguru embezzled funds.

The hearer of this idiom "Khukhupa kumukhono mufubo" works out the implication of the utterance by following the path of least effort. The hearer accesses the encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the concept encoded by the words making up the idiom. This process of pragmatic adjustment results in the formation of Ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the literal meaning. The words of the idiom, "Khukhupa kumukhono mufubo" are broadened to denote a situation in which the referent or person in charge diverts the resources meant for the plight of the many to one's own selfish interests replicated or expressed in word "stomach."

The word "mufubo" is the equivalent of a "bank or treasury" which is a collection of a given resource basically meant for the plight of many. A person who takes from it unlawfully has

no permission (has no moral authority to do that), therefore the choice for the constituents “khukhupa kumukhono mufubo” (to beat a hand in the treasury) instead of “to take from the treasury.” The choice of words of the idiom has the connotations of evil or bad intention. The idiom therefore means to embezzle resources meant for the public plight.

Consider the following example

25. khukhwalukha (to hatch)

To come out in a new form

Bwami kaluukhe khukhwama mwikombe

GLOSS: Bwami has hatched out from the initiation seclusion.

To come out in a new form (to graduate)

This utterance is normally used in reference to the hatching of the chicks or the breaking of the shell of an egg to enable the chick come out new. What comes out of the shell is new and therefore different from what the thing was. It is this literal connotation that is carried over or broadened in the idiomatic expression. When a boy is initiated, he is separated from the normal practice and is secluded from the rest for a certain period of time (the healing period.)

The comprehension of this idiom “Khukhwalukha” takes a path of least effort. The hearer accesses the encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the concepts encoded by the words consisting the idiom. This process of pragmatic adjustment results in the formation of Ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the literal or compositional meaning. The meaning of the words (word) of the idiom “Khukhwalukha” is broadened to denote a situation in which there is a process of movement from one stage to the other. It means coming out in a new form or graduating from one form to the other.

Consider the following:

26. Khukhwinyokhela kumukhono kumubi (to wake up on hand bad)

To wake up on a wrong hand

Matifari kenyokhela kumukhono kumubi mumasomo kewe

GLOSS: Matifari woke up hand bad in his studies (Matifari woke up on the wrong hand in his studies).

Matifari has bad luck in his studies.

In normal circumstances, there is no hand that is regarded as bad. When one therefore wakes up on the wrong or bad hand then negative connotations get into focus. The comprehension process of this idiom “Khukhwinyokhela kumukhono kumubi “ takes the path of least effort with the hearer accessing the encyclopaedic assumptions that are associated with the concepts encoded by the words constituting the idiom. This process of pragmatic adjustment results in the formation of Ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the literal interpretation of the words of the idiom ”kumukhono kumubi.” The meaning of the words of the idiom ‘khukhwinyokhela kumukhono kumubi’ is broadened to denote a situation of bad or hard luck in one`s undertaking and generally in life. The referent is not lucky in his or her engagements.

When one wakes up on the wrong hand then one does not wake up the normal way. There is no hand that is literally a wrong one since the purposed role is good. A hand could be termed bad if its role in service delivery yields negative results. This is a pointer to bad luck in what one is engaged in. One`s star is never so bright because so many issues or obstacles come in one`s way to curtail achievement.

### **3.2.2 The semi-transparent idioms**

This type of idiom allows both the literal and the idiomatic meanings. The idiom usually carries a metaphoric sense that may not be known through common use. The meaning of its component parts may have little role to play in the understanding of the entire meaning.

The unraveling of this idiom requires a little more effort in processing it than it is in processing the transparent idiom.

Below are examples to articulate the case:



Idiom	Translation	Meaning
Khukhwima khuaywa	To stand on an axe	To withstand the pain(ordeal) of the circumcision blade
Khulia sifubi	To eat orphan-like	To eat a lot/ to have insatiable appetite/ to a high affinity for food
Khukwa mubikele	To fall in his/her legs (feet)	To ask for forgiveness
Khukhwaya mwikha	To graze downwards	To deteriorate in health
Khubwana kumulilo	To light a fire	To beat up emotions/ to incite

Consider the following examples:

27. Khukhwima khuywa (To stand on axe)

To bear the pain or ordeal courageously

Bwami akheme khuaywa sikhebo sirakho

GLOSS: Bwami will stand on the axe the next circumcision season.

Bwami will be initiated in the next circumcision season.

The hearer of the idiom “Khukhwima khuaywa” works out the implication of this idiom by checking out on the literal meaning of the word ‘khuaywa’ and finds it not corresponding to the literal meaning. In the comprehension of the word ‘khuaywa’ the hearer finds the meaning seeming more than the literal assignment. In the comprehension of the component parts “Khukhwima khuaywa” the hearer would find the meaning of the constituent parts being more than the literal assignment of the grammar of the language in question. The hearer would then access the encyclopaedic assumptions about the word metaphorically. This process of pragmatic adjustment would result into the formation of Ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the literal meaning.

Working out meaning from this broader metaphorical perspective would assign the idiom “Khukhwima khuaywa” the broader meaning of “To withstand (bear) the pain or ordeal of circumcision.”

The hearer works out the metaphorical sense in the idiom “stand on an axe” and finds that the meaning of the idiom does not derive from literally standing on an axe.

The axe is a tool which has a sharp cutting edge bearing the connotations of the traditional surgeon’s cutting blade. An axe reputedly bears a sharp edge for the purpose of cutting and splitting wood. The hearer of this idiom would work out its implications from the build-up facts that to stand on an axe would require a lot of courage, encouragement. In order for one to stand on an axe, one should be daring and courageous since the act involves cutting and therefore infliction of pain and yet the referent (initiate) should bear it, should withstand it and still stand on the sharp edges of the axe gallantly and with valour.

The meaning of the idiom, “Khukhwima khuaywa” (to stand on an axe) is to stand or withstand or bear the pain of the ordeal of circumcision which involves infliction of a lot of pain but still the initiate would be under obligation (expected) to bear it without showing any signs of cowardice. It therefore means bearing the pain or ordeal valiantly.

Consider the idiom below:

28. Khulia sifubi (To eat orphan-like)

To have insatiable appetite/ to eat a lot

Wanyonyi alilanga busa elala sifubi

GLOSS: Wanyonyi eats conclusively orphan-like

Wanyonyi’s appetite is insatiable/ Wanyonyi eats a lot

The hearer of this idiom would first try to understand the literal meaning of the word 'orphan' which is one whose parents have passed on and one who lives in a state of want or need. The hearer tries to fit the literal meaning of the word "omufubi" to its literal meaning and finds the meaning not conforming to this literal perception. The hearer would then search for the encyclopaedic assumptions broader in denotation than the literal meaning. The hearer would broaden the meaning of the word "omufubi" to metaphorically refer to a referent who maximizes on an opportunity ie eating a lot. The referent is in a state of want or in need of basic requirements and because there is no other person to take care of them, they take the responsibility of feeding for them.

When an orphan happens to get some food, he would eat conclusively since there is no guarantee for the next meal. This character is normally transferred and used in reference to any other person who may not be in that state of want but who has an insatiable appetite or a high affinity for food. The semi- transparency in the idiom is the link between the true orphan and the referent who bears the said quality i.e a high affinity to food.

The encyclopaedic entry for orphan is a liking for food so when one's affinity for food is equated to that of an orphan, then one is thought of eating a lot.

Consider the following:

29. Khukwa mubikele (To drop/ fall in the legs)

To ask for forgiveness/ to repent

Omwami Uhuru kakwile mubikele bia omusasaroti omurabolwa asalile buruki bwewe.

GLOSS: President Uhuru fell in the legs of the Holy Father for intercession so as he governs well. President Uhuru asked for forgiveness and blessings from the Holy Father to enable him govern well.

This idiom is a semi-transparent one having both the literal and the metaphoric meaning. The literal meaning is physically going down on knees at someone's feet which still bears a very close relationship with the metaphorical reading of asking for forgiveness and by extension blessings. The act of asking for pardon possibly for doing wrong is tantamount to going down on one's knees.

The hearer of this idiom “khukwa mubikele” works out its meaning by checking out on the literal meaning of the word ‘mubikele.’ and finds it not relevant to the situation or context. The comprehension of the component part ‘mubikele’ has meaning outside the literal assignment. The hearer accesses the encyclopaedic assumptions about the word ‘mubikele’ metaphorically. This process of pragmatic adjustment would result into the formation of Ad hoc concepts which are broader in denotation than the literal meaning.

Working out meaning from this broader perspective would assign the word ‘mubikele’ the broader meaning of ‘repentance or asking for forgiveness and by extension blessings.’ The idiom, “khukwa mubikele” (to fall at his feet) means to ask for repentance, forgiveness and blessings. It is to submit.

Consider the idiom below:

30. Khukhwaya mwikha (To graze towards down)

To be in a critical condition of health

Omusakhulu kalwalile lukali alikho kaya mwikha

GLOSS: The old man has been sick for long, and he is now grazing downwards.

The old man is in a critical condition.

The literal meaning of the word “khukhwaya” in the idiom is “to graze” possibly the livestock moving from an upper ground towards the lower part of the field or grazing area. They are animals that are known to graze. However, this idiom used in reference to human beings would have metaphorical reference. The general reading the hearer would have on hearing the utterance would be an association to movement downwards.

The hearer of the idiom “Khukhwaya mwikha” would check out on the literal meaning of the words of the idiom and find it not conforming to the literal situation or context. In the comprehension of the component parts of this idiom, the hearer would find the meaning of “khukhwaya mwikha” being more than the literal assignment of the grammar of this language. This would motivate the hearer to access the encyclopaedic assumptions about the words of the words of the idiom by broadening the meaning to metaphorically refer to “being in a critical condition of health.” This process of pragmatic adjustment would yield in the formation of Ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the literal meaning.

Working out meaning from this broader metaphorical sense would assign the idiom “khukhwaya mwikha” the broader meaning of “being in a critical condition of health.” When one becomes critically sick then one is thought of moving to that lower direction.

The idiom has a literal perspective generally referring to the physical environment and the metaphorical connotation referring to the deteriorating state of health. The health state of the referent has taken on a downward movement. The downward movement is a worrying trend since it metaphorically points to the terminal status.

The idiom, “Khukhwaya mwikha” (to graze downwards) is a metaphorical reference to the deteriorating state of health and therefore the eminent implied grave whose location is downwards or underground.

Consider the idiom below:

31. Khubwana kumulilo (To light a fire)

To incite/ excite or beat up emotions

Wetang`ula kabwana kumulilo khulifwa lya Jacob Juma.

GLOSS: Wetang`ula lit fire in death of Jacob Juma

‘Kumulilo’ is a flame that burns and can be used in cooking or setting something ablaze ordinarily or literally.

However, the relevance of the utterance derives from the metaphorical reference that apart from cooking, fire can also be very destructive. The hearer of this utterance will first of all test the relevance of this utterance from the literal meaning of the forms “khubwana kumulilo” (to light fire).

The hearer would start by testing the relevance of the words of this idiom from a literal point of view and finding the perspective not relevant, access the encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the words “khubwana kumulilo.” This process of pragmatic adjustment results in the formation of ad hoc concepts associated with the denotations. The words “khubwana kumulilo” are broadened metaphorically to mean beating up emotions or inciting against.

The hearer would then look for implications of relevance from the encyclopaedic assumptions at his disposal checking out each word for the due relevance in the circumstances provided (context). The context of the utterance is the death of the referent. There is a connotative implication between the lighting of the fire and death. To light fire is to beat up emotions. Wetang`ula`s speech therefore caused anxiety and emotionally excited and possibly incited the hearers not to destruction but to provocation of thought as to what in essence may been the circumstances of the death.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

Chapter three has described the concepts of transparency and semi-transparency by articulating examples in each incidence. The concept of transparency derives its comprehension from the literal understanding of the constituents that make up the idiom. This concept requires little processing effort in its comprehension since meaning is worked out from a literal perspective and metaphorical broadening. The concept of semi-transparency requires a little more processing effort than the literally encoded meaning. The concept appeals to the broadening aspects metaphorically and the contextual appeal in the assignment of meaning.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**APPLICATION OF RELEVANCE THEORY TO THE IDIOM IN**  
**LUBUKUSU: THE CONCEPTS OF SEMI-OPAQUE AND OPAQUE**

**4.0 Introduction**

Chapter four states the comprehension processes of the semi-opaque and the opaque idioms in the LuBukusu language. Both the semi-opaque and the opaque idioms are identified as such because of their non-conformity to the literal meaning. The semi-opaque idioms have less attachment to the literal or grammatical clues to the meaning of the idiom in question and as such require more processing effort, context and some remarkable level of the cultural environment within which the utterance is made. The processing of this idiom also requires a certain level of metaphorical broadening. The opaque idioms on their part do not appeal to the clues provided by the component parts in their processing of meaning. This type of idiom relies greatly on the cultural aspects in the interpretation and such this idiom is learnt just like a phrase or a new concept.

**4.1 The semi-opaque idioms**

In this category of idioms, the literal meaning of the idioms may seem insensible and not clearly understandable on first sight though on further analysis may yield some sensibility. In this category, the figurative meaning is not influenced by the literal meaning of the constituent parts of the idiom. The idioms in this category do not conform to the compositional principle as compared to the transparent category and the semi-transparent category to some extent and therefore are more appealingly idiomatic than the semi-transparent idiom. The comprehension of this idiom requires more processing effort in the computation of cognitive effects and there is need for more activation of context so as to derive the figurative meaning. They require a little more processing effort in their comprehension than it is in the processing of the transparent and the semi-transparent idioms respectively. In this case the figurative meaning is not tied to the literal meaning.

Below are examples on the semi-opaque idiom:

Idiom	Translation	Meaning
Khuboela khusitweya	To tie on the inner garment	To be mean or stingy
Khurundukha libimba	To be broken the boil	To have a sigh of relief
Khulilila mulisi	To cry in the smoke	To shed crocodile tears
Khufumbusya ekhisi	To reveal the antelope	To be a whistle blower
Khuchekhela engila	To laugh at the road	To be easy-going\ to have no principles
Khukhwikhala khwifumo	To sit on the spear	To court danger
Khukhwibenela muunda	To bleed inside the stomach	To suffer quietly
Khukhalangila aatikha	To fry from a broken part	To fight a losing battle
Khulia emuuma	To eat a ball-like thing	To bond
Khusinga sikokhe	To wash off ash	To cleanse after bereavement of a parent



Consider:

32. Khuboela khusitweya (To tie on the inner garment)

To be stingy/ mean

Omuloosi oyu aboelanga bibiewe khusitweya solibinyola tawe

GLOSS: Old woman that one ties her possession on her inner garment you get them not.

The literal meaning of this idiom is that the old lady ties her possessions on the inner garment. It is not standard civil practice for one to keep (tie) her possessions at the inner clothing. The idiomatic meaning of this expression does not correspond to that of the literal meaning of the constituent parts.

This idiom does not refer to the literal meaning of tying possession on the inner garment, but requires the hearer to metaphorically broaden the reference to the expectations of relevance. The inner garments are private clothing which are worn inside one's outer clothing. It is bad practice for one to expose one's inner garments to other people since they are private dress. For the old lady to tie her possessions on the inner garment is testimony to the fact that it should not be seen by the public neither is it supposed to benefit any other person. The implication of this utterance is that of unwillingness to give, contribute or share out what one possesses.

The hearer of this idiom tries the literal meaning of the words of the idiom "khuboela khusitweya" for the implications of relevance and upon not deriving enough contextual clues provided by the utterance access the encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the concept encoded by the words of the idiom. This pragmatic adjustment results in the formation of ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the encoded literal meaning. The hearer would access the meaning encoded by the idiom "khuboela khusitweya" by metaphorically broadening it to the context of the utterance. The idiom "khuboela khusitweya" is a metaphorical extension of "keeping away from people's reach." The idiom "khuboela khusitweya" is therefore a metaphorical extension to communicate meanness or selfishness.

The referent is not ready to part with what belongs to her and what belongs to her may still not be visible because it is hidden. The referent is therefore unwilling at heart to give assistance or play any charitable role. It is testimony of the referent's selfish and stingy character, that unwillingness at fellowship and sharing. The hearer of this utterance metaphorically broadens the literal meaning of the words "tie" and "inner garment" to the metaphorical meaning of "hide in the privacy." The broadening process is triggered by the search for relevance. The meaning of the tie and inner garment differs linguistically from the encoded concept or literal meaning. The communication the speaker derives from this utterance is broadened metaphorically to mean selfish, mean or stingy.

Consider the following idiom:

33. *Khurundukha libimba* (To burst/break the boil)

To breathe sigh of relief

Victorine nga kombakhibwi enju, libimba lyewe lyarundukha

GLOSS: When Victorine was built a house, her boil was burst/ broken

The idiom means that the referent sighed relief when eventually the burden that was weighing down heavily on her emotions was removed. Psychologically, the referent's emotional state had been strained and stressed because a certain matter was disturbing her mind. This scenario had eaten into her emotional state of being, taken away her happiness and generally denied her cheerfulness. A boil literally is that painful swelling on the body that causes a lot of discomfort. The victim is in pain and is quite uncomfortable until that boil ripens and breaks or bursts since at times no amount of medication may fully suffice. Drugs may only be a temporal solution to the problem.

The hearer of this utterance would first try to derive the meaning of the idiom from the literal understanding of the words that compose it and as a result of not deriving implications that are relevant to the intention of the speaker, access the encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the concept encoded by the words of the idiom "khurundukha libimba" giving access to a range of encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the "bursting of the boil." This pragmatic adjustment results in the formation of ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the literally encoded concept. Working out

meaning from this perspective, the hearer would metaphorically broaden the utterance while enriching it with context to arrive at the meaning encoded by the words of the idiom. This idiom means to have a sigh of relief. The literal meaning of the utterance may not be so intelligible because it talks about the breaking or bursting of a boil. It is not until the metaphorical perception is reached within context that the hearer begins to make sense. From a literal perspective, a boil can be a very uncomfortable thing, not until it is broken would the pain or suffering stop.

It is therefore the depth of the encoded communication that is sensible to the hearer but this can only be arrived at by linking the literal discomfort of the boil and the pain to the internal feelings of the individual affected. The metaphorical perception is traced from the feeling of having a boil and what that condition entails. It is from the uncomfortable feeling and the eventual relief when it (boil) breaks or bursts that the implication of the utterance is reached.

This signals the end to the suffering since the root cause of it has been identified and subsequently removed or solved. By extension, the utterance looks at life from a bigger picture point of view and intimates that the things that eat into our states of being must be removed or solved in order for us to enjoy and experience happiness, cheerfulness and tranquility.

Consider:

34. Khulilila mulisi (To cry in the smoke)

To shed crocodile tears or to fake/ feign sympathy

Nga omukholi we bukhala, Jacob Juma kabwa kumurundu, babene ndebe ye sibala balilila mulisi. (When businessman, Jacob Juma was shot, the government cried in the smoke.)

From a literal perspective, when smoke gets into one`s eyes, one`s tears come out or roll out unconditionally and involuntarily, one has no choice because one is in a smoky environment. One can never hold back the tear in a smoky environment. The hearer of

this utterance therefore works out its relevance from this literal perspective before metaphorically broadening this perspective to the context of its utterance.

When one walks out of a smoky hut wiping his eyes off tears and joins those on the outside who are genuinely shedding tears, an observer may not differentiate the genuine tears from the fake ones. It is therefore not true that those who shed tears most could be really affected or touched by the situation at hand. This could be a mere smoking screen to fool those around that they also are empathizing with the situation.

In the example above, the government is also shedding tears in a smoky environment. It would appear as though those in the government circles are really touched by the heinous unnatural incident. Whether this is just “crying in the smoke” is unraveled when the circumstances surrounding businessman, Jacob Juma’s death together with the context of the utterance are unveiled and understood.

‘To cry in the smoke’ therefore is metaphorically broadened to rest on the implicated premise that one crying in the smoke may not be genuinely doing so, they just play to the public gallery. When one cries in the smoke then one is feigning or faking the feelings.

In the comprehension of this idiom, the hearer would first try the literal perception for the derivation of the implications of relevance. The literal meaning of the words of this idiom “khulilila mulisi” (to cry in the smoke) meaning, the referent was crying from a smoky environment. This however, does not give the hearer enough implications from the context provided to warrant relevance. The hearer would then access the encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the words of the idiom’ The hearer would metaphorically broaden the meaning of the words of the idiom “khulilila mulisi.” This pragmatic adjustment results in the formation of the ad hoc concepts broader in denotation than the encoded concept. Working out meaning from this broader perspective assigns the idiom “khulilila mulisi” the implied meaning of faking or feigning sympathy or concern when in the real sense of it you should be celebrating the situation.

Consider:

35. Khuchekhela engila (To laugh at the road)

To be easy-going to have no principles / to be loose/ to have loose morals

Nafula saali omukhana omulayi tawe, akeenda achekhela engila. (Nafula is not a good girl, she walks laughing at the road).

From a compositionality point of view, the idiom 'Khuchekhela engila' would literally mean walking on the road while laughing. In normal everyday life, one who laughs at the road would be thought of being mentally sick because it is not ordinary that one just laughs at the road neither can it be mistaken for cheerfulness or is good-natured. This is a pointer to a certain psychological weakness. This utterance requires some inference and metaphorical broadening to infer meaning. From a cultural point of view, girls in this society are supposed to be reserved and generally be of good moral standing. This society cherishes the girl's good moral standards.

It is upon this implicated premise that the hearer of the utterance broadens and metaphorically works out the meaning of the idiom. The word 'road' is metaphorically broadened to mean the members of the public or equally still, the road users. The subject of the idiom is omitted but reference is made to a woman whose morals are really guarded and cherished. When a woman laughs at or on the road then her moral standing is in question. The word road is metaphor for the public.

The "road" is a public domain for all and sundry, therefore a woman who laughs from or at such a public domain will not be upholding the societal cultural norms and would be regarded as loose in morals. The hearer of this idiom would first engage the literal understanding of this utterance "khuchekhela engila" for the implications of relevance and fail to attain the intention of the speaker as dictated to by the context of the utterance. The hearer would then access the encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the words "khuchekhela engila." Following a path of last effort, the hearer would consider a subset of the encyclopaedic entries associated with the concept encoded by the utterance "khuchekhela engila." The encoded concept is metaphorically to the cultural context

used to broaden the encoded concept of “khuchekhela engila” to the ad hoc concept of loose morals or lack of principles.

Consider the following:

36. Khukhwikhala khwifumo (To sit on a spear)

To court danger\ to be ignorant or stupid about an imminent problem\ looming danger

Omukhongo owe sisomelo sya Khasoko kabimbanga bikhola bibi bya basomi bamurerela kumusango.

The principal of Khasoko High School was covering students` indiscipline only to realise it when they burnt the school.

Literally a spear is a sharp object used for piercing either an animal of prey or an enemy when at war. It is not therefore within the ordinary domain of every day usage to sit on the sharp point of a spear because it would penetrate your skin, pierce through you, cause injury or end your life. It is an object of death. In the comprehension of this idiom, the hearer of this utterance “khukhwikhala khwifumo” would first try the literal meaning of the constituents of the idiom and fail to derive the expectations of that would make the utterance relevant. The hearer would then access the encyclopaedic assumptions associated with the encoded concept of the words of the idiom string “khukhwikhala khwifumo.”

The hearer of this utterance would broaden the meaning of the words ‘sit on a spear’ to metaphorically imply “courting danger” which is the equivalent of sitting on a time bomb which sooner or later may detonate and cause untold destruction. ‘Sit’ is therefore metaphor for in-action, inactivity or not playing an active role in the management of affairs. It is taking the back seat. ‘Spear’ is metaphor for danger, potentially explosive and that that can easily be used against you and cause untold suffering or even death.

This idiomatic expression is accurately captured from a cultural contextual perspective used by the older members of the society to refer to the girl who may be pregnant. In this expression the spear is the cultural reference for pregnancy which like a spear is potential for danger. It is not obvious that a girl who is pregnant will deliver successfully thus an allusion to the potential danger just like the implications of the spear.

## 4.2 The opaque idioms

Karimi (2013) observes that the opaque idiom is the most difficult in terms of comprehension since none of the encyclopaedic assumptions made accessible by the constituent parts separately or in combination help in the identification of the speaker's meaning. It is not therefore easy for the hearer to understand the intention of the speaker from the meaning of the component parts. This type of idiom cannot therefore be understood away from the cultural reference. This implies that some words in the language have special usage with a culturally attached signal. Karimi (2013) further points out that since the constituent parts of the opaque idioms provide no clue to the intended communication or meaning of the speaker, this category of idioms are learnt like phrases or new concepts.

Idiom	Translation	Meaning
Khukhinila khusilindwa	To dance on the grave	To express faithfulness to the deceased
Khukhuula lusuli	To uproot the protruding stick on the hut	To declare the absence of the man in the home
Khuulia embwa	To eat a dog	To seal a covenant
Khukhala eye lirumba	To cut of the hump	To bestow honour and respect
Khukhwima chinyuni chifwe	To stand until the birds die	To show courage\ to withstand the pain of circumcision
Khutumya kamayika	To make cross the cooking-stones	To stamp your authority as a man in a home/ the first beating of a wife
Khufuna sikele	To the leg	To impregnant a girl out of wedlock
Khukalukhasia lirango	To change the thigh	To have an alternative plan/ to marry another wife
Khulia chimbeba	To eat the rats	To be unfaithful in marriage
Khulia kumurwe kwe swaa	To eat the head of an ant	To be intimate friends/ bosom friends.

Consider the following:

37. Khukhinila khusilindwa (To dance on the grave)

To express faithfulness to the deceased (in their marriage life)

Nga omusakhulu Matifari kafwa, maayi kakhinila khusilindwa

GLOSS: When old Matifari died, mother danced on the grave

The idiomatic reading derived from the utterance expresses faithfulness in marriage life. In this culture incidentally, it is only the widow who dances on the grave of the deceased husband and not vice versa. This idiomatic expression is opaque because there is no relationship in terms of meaning between the component parts of the idiom and the communicated meaning of the idiom. Arriving at the interpretation of the idiom is difficult. The idiom ‘dancing on the grave’ is an expression of happiness in a metaphorical way, though in grief. The referent is proud of her achievement of having kept herself faithful throughout the marriage period. The idea of “dancing on the grave” is peculiar but it is important from a cultural perspective since it expresses a cultural value that marriages cherish. This idiom is therefore culture specific.

A dance literally is performed in celebrations and other merry making occasions. A gravesite and a grave for this matter is a place of grief, engulfed in a sombre atmosphere. The dance executed on the grave is however, performed to mark a life of faithfulness and respect of the performer to the departed, communicating an unfailing message of love and faithfulness before the mourners or the public qualifying a life well lived. A widow who was promiscuous may not participate in this honourable dance in respect of the deceased husband on his grave since it is culturally believed and held that she would drop dead since she would be bestowing a curse upon herself.

In the interpretation of this idiom, the hearer would take the literal meaning of the constituent parts as the standing point. The words of the idiom may provide no clues to the encoded meaning of the idiom.

The idiom “Khukhinila khusilindwa” therefore is an expression of honour and faithfulness of the widow to the deceased husband.

Consider the following:

38. Khukhuula lusuli (To uproot stick atop a hut)



Expression of the absence of a man (manhood) in the home

Nga Sibala kafwa , lusuli khu nju lwakhulibwa

GLOSS: When Sibala died, stick atop the hut was uprooted

The literal meaning of the constituent parts of the idiom does not express the idiomatic meaning inferred. This idiom is therefore opaque. The hearer of the utterance makes no connection between the literal assignment by the grammar of the language and the expression of its meaning. In understanding the idiom, the hearer invokes the cultural perspective for derivation of relevance. Among the Babukusu, when a man builds a hut, a stick is visibly positioned atop it. This stick, normally from a particular type of tree is significant of the presence of the man in the home. It is symbolic of a man (manhood) in a home. When this man passes on, his significance as well as the significance of the stick ceases. The stick remains atop the hut as long as the man is alive, however, when the man passes on, his role comes to an end and the stick must be removed to signify the demise (herald a new beginning, that of his absence). This symbolic stick is normally uprooted at night and in secrecy and carefully hidden never to be discovered by anyone.

In understanding this idiom, a stock of some cultural knowledge has to be sought. The idiom “khukhuula lusuli” means uprooting the manhood of the deceased is significant of the man`s absence from that home. The stick is symbolic of manhood.

Consider the following:

39. Khulia embwa (to eat a dog)

To reach an agreement or to seal a covenant

Babukusu ne Barwa nga babanilanga khu lwakha, balia embwa

GLOSS: When the Babukusu and Kalenjin were fighting over the border, they ate a dog. It is difficult to comprehend the idiom from the literal understanding of the constituent parts. It may also not be fathomable talking about eating a dog. Dogs are not edible in this culture. The idiom therefore requires some cultural mindset for understanding. When the Bukusu and the Kalenjin neighbours were warring over the boundary separating them, they with time eventually chose to stop the enmity that punctuated their relationship by reaching a common understanding. They therefore symbolically held a dog across the disputed boundary site, cut it once into two pieces and buried either pieces on the side of their allotment swearing at it. They swore never to cross the boundary points to either side and therefore ended up building consensus for understanding and lasting peace. A covenant was sealed.

The hearer therefore derives meaning in the idiom from a cultural understanding that to eat a dog is an expression of understanding, consensus building and navigation through and around a thorny issue.

It is the swearing (oathing) part of it that marks the climax of the covenant and the participants walk away convinced that reneging on the covenant reached is the equivalent of eating a dog, an animal culturally not edible.

Consider the following:

40. Khukhala eye lirumba (to cut of the hump)

The part is significant of the whole/ expression of honour and respect

Nyongesa nga kaaba ne siselelo Kakhilila Wasike eye lirumba

GLOSS: When Nyongesa had a wedding he cut Wasike of the hump.

From the literal perspective, the constituents of the idiom have no connection with the idiom meaning. “Khukhala eye lirumba” (to cut of the hump) does not literally express the speaker’s intended meaning. The opaqueness is compounded more by the ellipsis in the expression. The words of the idiom have an ellipsis “khukhala eye lirumba.” The statement of the idiom does not tell the hearer what it is that is to be cut.

The hearer of this idiom may not correct interpret the implication of it until he engages a cultural perspective for guidance. It was common practice among the Babukusu to exchange invitations especially so for those who had cultivated very close friendship ties. On such visits, it was common practice that a bull was slaughtered in respect and honour to the invited or visiting friend. To such a high level visitor, a certain part of the slaughtered bull was reserved as it was significant of the whole. This very special part was the hump which when hived off and given to the visitor then it was the equivalent of the entire or whole animal. The elliptic information is the “meat” culturally cut is significant of the whole animal slaughtered.

When therefore an important and respected visitor is given a piece of meat cut from the hump, it is a culturally understood subject that whoever is given the piece is respectable and he will go away believing he was given the whole animal. This idiom cannot therefore be understood plainly from the literal predisposition.

Consider the following:

41. Khukhwima chinyuni chifwe (to stand and the birds die)

To valiantly bear the pain of circumcision

Wafulakeema embalu chinyuni chafwa

GLOSS: Wafula stood the machete and birds died.

This idiom is opaque since the constituent parts of it do not conform to their grammatical or compositional meaning. It is difficult to understand the speaker’s intention from the literal meaning of the component parts of the idiom. The idiom, “Khukhwima chinyuni chifwe” bears no relationship in terms of compositionality to the output idiom meaning “to valiantly bear the pain of circumcision.” The hearer would have expected the birds to have died when the referent stood but that is not the case.

Among the Babukusu, circumcision is culturally a highly esteemed practice and a lot of value is attached to it. They regard it as a transition to manhood or an important rite of passage marked through a lot of excitement. In the course of the ordeal, one is expected to face it valiantly with no semblance of fear noticed as it would be shameful

since all and sundry would be present to witness this very important transition to manhood. It is this valour that is culturally spoken of as having,” stood and the birds died.” In the actual sense no birds can die out of such an occurrence.

Consider the following:

42. Khutumya kamayika (To make cross the cooking stones)

To stomp authority as a man in the home (the first beating of the wife).

Wetang`ula katumya Wairimu kamayika nyo barishana mwimenya liabwe.

GLOSS: Wetang`ula crossed Wairimu cooking stones so they respected in stay one another.

The literal meaning of this utterance, “to physically cross the cooking stones” does not appeal to the idiomatic reading, “to stomp authority or the first beating of a wife.” The utterance`s comprehension may not even appeal to the figurative assignment. The hearer of this idiom should be knowledgeable in the culture of the idiom`s origin, for the idiom appeals to the cultural context of this people. Among the Babukusu, a husband is expected to be accorded respect in all circumstances by the wife. They believe this may not be obvious until the husband elects to initiate it, by beating up the wife even on no mistake. It is believed that unless that is done, the man would never earn respect and honour in the home. This would mark the man`s point of stomping authority in the home.

The seriousness of it is observed upon the passing on of the wife who was never “made to cross the cooking stones.” In such circumstances the deceased would still be made to cross the cooking stones before the body is laid to rest otherwise the situation would still demand that the cultural practice is done.

Consider the idiom below:

43. Khufuna sikele (to break a leg)

To make a girl pregnant (out of wedlock)

Nalianya kafunile Susana wa Kibisi sikele

Nalianya has broken Susan of Kibisi a leg (Nalianya has broken Susan Kibisi`s leg)

The literal meaning of this idiom “To break a leg”, would be probably that the referents were playing and either accidentally or deliberately, Nalianya took a heavy object, hit and broke Susan`s leg. However, the idiomatic meaning is far from this literal reading. This idiom is therefore opaque since the constituent parts of it do not express the meaning and therefore the intention of the speaker.

The hearer of this idiom should understand the cultural context of this utterance to correctly assign it meaning. LuBukusu language being generally a language of euphemism has a way of speaking meant to cover and avoid vulgarity. It is also a test on maturity in language when one communicates at a given standard. From a cultural reading of the Babukusu, when one breaks the leg of so and so then one would have so and so pregnant. From the Babukusu cultural reading, when one`s leg is broken then one`s movements are curtailed since one is immobilized. It is only the girl`s leg that is broken and not the boy`s since this culture does not permit the boy`s leg to be broken in such circumstances.

Consider the idiom below:

44. Khulia chimbeba (to eat rats)

To be promiscuous in marriage

Wangila kalomana no mukhasi sikila kalia chimbeba (Wangila quarreled the wife because she ate the rats)

In the cultural context of the Babukusu, rats are not edible components. These are rodents known for destruction. The meaning of this idiom is “to be promiscuous or unfaithfulness” in marriage. The meaning of the constituent parts of the idiom do not correspond to the meaning expressed or communicated by the idiom string. This idiom is therefore opaque since there are no clues derived from the words that make up the idiom. The encyclopaedic assumptions made accessible by the words of the idiom do not help the hearer access the meaning expressed by the speaker. The hearer may not access the meaning of this idiom in terms of interpretation unless it is learnt as a phrase or a new concept.

The level to which the encoded concept are processed in arriving at the ad hoc concepts that the speaker intends as the communication of the intention of the utterance is constrained by the search for relevance.

Consider the following:

45. Khukalukhasia lirango (to change the thigh)

To marry another wife /to have an alternative plan

Wangila kachenjile lirango sikila bamenyila bila omwana (Wangila changed the thigh because they have stayed long without a child).

The idiomatic meaning of this utterance is “marrying another wife.” This idiom is opaque because there is no link between the idiom meaning and the constituent parts. The hearer of this idiom “khuchenja lirango” (to change the thigh) tries the literal interpretation for the implications that would make the utterance relevant. However, the hearer on finding no implications of relevance tries accessing the encyclopaedic assumptions encoding the concept of the words of the idiom “khuchenja lirango.” The idea of pragmatic adjustment that should yield the ad hoc concepts broader than the encoded meaning of the idiom string does not yield any plausible interpretation neither is the case of metaphorical extension or broadening. The interpretation of opaque idioms is through the cultural aspects learnt like phrases or new concepts.

In the comprehension of this idiom, the goes back to the culture for the interpretation. From the culture of this people, the idiom “khuchenja lirango” means marrying another wife. In this culture, the ordinary marrying of another wife is not the equivalent of “changing of the thigh.” An individual ‘changes the thigh’ because of certain weaknesses in marriage as opposed to just marrying another wife for the sake of it. There are known problems in marriage that would warrant a man to “change the thigh.” Included are lack of off-springs from that marriage (barrenness), quarrelsome woman, laziness among others.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has stated the comprehension processes of the two categories of idioms: the semi-opaque and the opaque. These idioms have been classified to their characteristic aspects peculiar to their classification for ease of analysis and comprehension. Each category was found to bear its own uniqueness. The idioms in the semi-opaque category still appeal to metaphorical broadening and context to communicate their implicated meaning. The opaque idioms communicate their implicated meaning on the basis of their cultural context.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This research investigated how the idiom in LuBukusu is comprehended, its pervasiveness and use in this language notwithstanding. This research was conducted within the framework of Relevance Theory by Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson (1986 &1995). Relevance Theory offers a framework for systematic analysis and interpretation of the idiom in LuBukusu.

#### 5.1 Summary and Conclusion

Data for this research (primary) was collected by the researcher in a number of ways (see section 11. On methodology chapter one) in addition to the researcher`s intuition as a native speaker of LuBukusu. Most of the research was done in the University of Nairobi Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library (secondary) for theoretical mapping. The research set out to investigate on the types of idioms in LuBukusu, identify the comprehension process of the idioms in LuBukusu, state the role of context in processing idiom meaning and finally state the theoretical adequacy of Relevance Theory in handling idioms in the LuBukusu language.

This research found out that the idioms in LuBukusu can be classified into the four categories of transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque and opaque. These different types of idioms have different approaches in their comprehension process unique to each category. Lastly, Relevance Theory`s comprehension procedure effectively explains the idioms in the LuBukusu language in line with their various types each with its own unique approach. From this research we adopt Fromkin`s observation on the idiom that: “Idioms must be entered into the lexicon or mental dictionary as single items with meaning specified and speakers must learn the special restrictions on their use in sentence. Most idioms originate as metaphorical expressions that establish themselves in language and become frozen in their form and meaning.” Newman, (1988:10) points out that idioms are contextual and cultural based.



## **5.2 Findings.**

The research in tandem with the objectives found out that the LuBukusu idiom can be classified into four categories namely: transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque and opaque, all conforming to their characteristic features. The transparent idiom is so termed because of the link it has in terms of interpretation to the literal meaning of its component parts. The semi-transparent idiom is identified from the it has with the literal meaning that is interpreted through metaphorical broadening and the context of the utterance. The semi- opaque idiom has link with the literal constituents that compose it. Its meaning is derived through metaphorical broadening, context and some level of cultural understanding.

The opaque idiom has its meaning completely removed from the literal constituents that make it up. The principle of compositionality is totally violated in this case with the meaning of the communication deriving straight from the cultural appeal. The idiomatic meaning in this case is derived from the cultural inference of the source language since meaning of this type of idiom is culture specific. Finally, the research found out that the Relevance Theoretical framework adequately explains the comprehension of the idiom in LuBukusu language.

## **5.3 Recommendations**

This research on the comprehension and interpretation of the idiom in LuBukusu is not a finality in itself. The study used Relevance Theory in the comprehension and interpretation of the idiom in LuBukusu. There is need to interrogate further on other pragmatic theories with the idiom since this research work focused on the idiom in LuBukusu using the Relevance Theory by Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson (1986& 1995). The classification used in this study is the brainchild of Vinogradow (2008:33). There are other possible approaches to classification. It would therefore be prudent for that diversity.

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**APPENDIX**

**1. AN INVENTORY OF LUBUKUSU IDIOMS (CHIBIIMBI)**

EBIIMBI (idiom)	TRANSLATION	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT	MEANING
Khusalwa makalama	To be born looking or facing up	To be born with a silver spoon in the mouth	To be lucky in life
Khukwa ne nyungu	To fall with a pot	Fail to rise to the occasion	Unable to sire/ impotent
Khuchenja lirango	To change the thigh	Have an alternative plan	marry another wife/change tact
Khulia embwa	To eat a dog	To make a covenant	Reach consensus or seal a deal
Khuonela esitere emusia	To survive at the edge of finger-nail edge	To survive by a whisker	be lucky to be living
Khukhesianila bikhandakilo	To greet with the feet or heels	Bury the hatchet	Swear by/ reach consensus
Khukhupa kumukongo	To beat you the back	Turn a blind eye to/ turn your back against	Disagree/ deny conjugal rights
Khukwa ne khukhwinyokha	To fall and pick yourself up	Through thick and thin	Try all means
Khukwa mubikele	To fall in the legs	To submit to	To ask for forgiveness
Khulia siikwe (opp. Spend thrift)	To eat leopard style	Spare for a rainy day	Use sparingly

Khukhala sikhopa ne nyama	To cut the skin and the flesh	To blow out of proportion	To exaggerate
Khumufuna sikele	To break her leg	Put her in the family	To impregnant
Khusamila eloo	To bark near the hole	Be on the death bed	Be in critical condition
Khukhuupa kumukhono mufubo	To beat a hand in the hole (Collection\trapping hole for white ants)	To embezzle public resources	Misuse public resources
Khukhupao khabiili	To beat there twice	Live to blow a thousand candles	May you live to prosper
Khukhwibenela muunda	To bleed in the stomach	To contain pressure	To persevere
Khukhwikhala khu ndebe	To sit on the chair	Sit on the throne	Be in charge
Khulia emuuma	To eat a ball-like thing/object	To rea consensus	Agree to work together as a unit
Khukhwima chinyuni chifwe	To stand until the birds die	To be lion hearted	Face circumcision ordeal courageously
Khukhwikhala khwifumo	To sit on the sharp edge of the spear	Sit on a time bomb	Reference to a girl pregnant out of wedlock
Khubwaana kumulilo	To light the fire	To whip up emotions	Arouse emotions/ to incite

Khusuta lutaha/ ekhumbo	To carry one's wing/ elbow	To put on airs	Be proud
Khukwa lukara	To be ring-like	Stunted in growth	Stagnate in growth
Khukhwesa bikele	To pull the legs	Drag/ pull one's feet	be reluctant/ lose interest
Khuchekhela engila	Laughing at the road	To be easy going	Have loose morals/character
Khukhala emoni	To cut an eye	To wink at	Stern look/ stern warning
Khukonela engoro	To sleep with the back of the head	To nag	To allow no peace/to nag
Khurundukha libiimba	To burst the swelling\boil	Breathe a sigh of relief	Settle scores\sigh of relief,deliver a young one
Khukwa chitaru	To fall three	To go into fits	To have epileptic fits
Khukhuula kamaika	To uproot the cooking stones	Be fed up with\part ways with	Divorce/to part ways
Khulia silulu	Eat the bitter thing	Take an oath/ hutch a secret	To take an oath
Khukhwikhebukha	To look back on one`s shoulders	Have periods	Have monthly periods
Khulumilakho	To bite fingernails	To scheme for	have interest for

bitere	on		
Khukhwalukha	To break the shell and come out	To hutch out/to pass out	To graduate from
Khukhuula lusuli	To pull out the stick protruding on a hut	Pull down the flag of	confirm death of
Khuliila Khusiili	To eat on a knoll	To be open handed	Generous/open handed/ welcoming
Khuboela khundukhu	To fasten/ tie on the hips	Tight fistcd	To be mean or selfish
Khukhwakanana embwa	To meet a dog	To be unlucky	Bad luck/bad omen
Khukhwisabila enyuma	To wash from behind	To swear by	Deny association/ Involment
Khukhwinyokhela kumukhono kumubi	To wake up on the bad hand	Woke up the wrong side of the bed	be irritable or quarrelsome
Khuamba silukhi	To be caught in somebody`s house	To be caught in a compromising situation	To be caught with somebody`s wife
Khufwa siyobo	To die like a Kalenjin	To play cards next to one`s chest	to be secretive
Khulia chimbeba	To eat rats	have extra-marital affairs	To have extra-marital affairs
Khukhinila	To dance on the	Express righteousness	Confirm



khusilindwa	grave		faithfulness to the deceased husband
Khubonela mumechi	To see through water	To foresee	To foresee/foretell
Khulilila mulisi	To cry in the smoke	Have no way out	Be helpless or defeated/to regret
Khukhala ye lirumba	To cut the meat of the hump	Stand in for a whole animal	significant of the whole animal
Khukhupa eng`oma	To beat the drum	To raise an alarm	To sound a war drum
Khukhupa ekhombi/lulwika	To blow the trumpet/horn	To alert or summon	To announce
Kkukhwiyalila bisanja	To lock yourself up with dry banana leaves	Be vulnerable	helpless/vulnerable
Khunyanya elomo	To chew a word/a talk	To lay facts bare	Be explicit/ break down
Khunaba engubo ye kamakhendu	To sew a garment out palm leaves	To extend an olive branch	To signal peace or ceasefire
Khurusilia kwa ndiangu	To take out through the hind door	Last respect to the deceased	Treatment of childness deceased person
Khung`ona etiang`i	To craft a plan	To hatch a plan	To hatch a secret

Khumupila ekwangwani	To beat for a plan	Work behind scenes	To hatch a plan clandestinely
Khulila bikele	To eat with the legs	Spend lavishly	To be extravagant
Khukhupa kamalya	To beat marriages	Have hot pants	Walk in and out of marriages
Khurangisha endaa	To put the stomach first	To front the stomach	Have greed/ self- centredness
Khulia simony	To eat a whisper	Confide in one another	Confidential talk over beer for few cofidants
Khung`ona ekokwa	To make a platform	to have a platform	Secret talks for many people
Khukhupa lia Nandutu	To beat you what is Nandutu`s	To have a sweet tongue	To lie/cheat
Khusamba sikhakayu khumoyo	To kick the hoof on the stomach	Take/eat to one`s fill	Drink/take a lot of milk
Khumubolela lye khusini	To tell one that of the liver	To take to the bossom	To confide in
Khurundukha libimba	To burst/break the boil	Let the cat out of the basket	To reveal
khufwa ne bunyasi mukhanwa	To die with grass in the mouth	Fight to the bitter end	A strong person is never beaten with hands down
Khutumya	To make cross the	To stamp one`s	The first beating of

kamayika	cooking stones	authority	a wife in marriage
Khuchukha liloba mumoni	To pour soil/sand in the eyes	To sweep under the carpet	To deceive
Khumupa ekalakuni	To entangle do like [khureka lwe mbwa]	To entangle	To entice
Khukhuula lukusuma	To uproot 'lukusuma [a rare type of mashroom]	Be born with a silver spoon in the mouth	To be lucky
Khukhupa sifuba	To beat the chest	To chest thumb	Blow one`s own trumpet
Khumurakho sifuba/sireng`amo	To put the chest on him/her	Have a tough stance	To allow no breathing space/
Khuboela khusitweya	To tie one to the inner clothing	To make run round in circles	To dominate one
Khukhwima khuaywa	To stand on an axe	To withstand	To take up the challenge
Khukhupa chinjala muunda ne khukhomba	To push the fingers in the stomach and lick	Leaving from hand to mouth	Be in a state of want/vulnerable state
Khukhwima tungelele	To stand alone	Stand to be counted	Be left alone or stand your ground
Khulonda lukele khulwanda	To follow the footprints on the rock	To look for grey hairs	To keen on minor details

Khukhupa kamakhemu	To rove eyes all over	Run round in circles	To be in a state of indecisiveness
Khulia sifubi	To eat like an orphan	Have a roaring appetite	To eat a lot
Khulila kukweevyo	To struggle fending	Living from hand to mouth	Man eateth where he worketh
Khulia kumurwe kwe swaa	To eat the termite`s head	Birds of a feather flock together	Inseparable
Khurema nikwo wimilekho	To cut the tree you are standing on	Look before you leap	Avoid careless commentary
Khubakalamo sekhuli khulia emuma tawe	To air is not eating	Commenting on an issue is not passing a verdict	An observation is not decision making on behalf
Khukhalangila aatikha	To fry from a broken point	To have a raw deal	To expect nothing from the deal
Khuuna kumurembe	To visit`kumurembe` a type of tree early in the morning	Take an oath	Swear by the Bible
Khulia sinamunyu	To eat hyena style	Spendthrift	To misuse
Khun`gona ekitayi	To make turn taking	To take turns	To have merry go round
Khukhwingila mafutare	To enter backwards	To be vigilant	Be alert/look out for danger
Khuswena	To step on the	Be in the saddle	Be firmly in

khwiyika	cooking stone		charge of the affair
Khutumya kamayika	To help cross cooking stones	To stamp authority	To assert one`s position in marriage
Khura kumukhono khwirango	To place the hand on the thigh	To curse	To administer a curse on a biological child
Khukhupa kumukhono aasi	To beat the hand down	To curse	To curse
Khukhwinyosya kamakumba	To awaken the bones	To renew or rejuvenate ties	To strengthen the ties/relationship
Khukhala sibembe	To cut a thicket	Consensus building	Warring groups can only come together through some inducement
Khukhwifula kumurembe	To undress on the 'kumurembe' tree	Swear by	To swear by the name of God
Khukhupa endaa	To beat the stomach	To administer a curse	To curse
Khukhwiboa lukhola muunda	To tie yourself a banana fibre string	To pass through thick and thin	To perservere
Khuuna musifwo	To aim a spear where it rests	To hit the nail on the head	To reveal/ to disclose
Khufumbusya ekhisi	To reveal the antelope`s hiding place	To provide a hint	To start off the issue

Khukhwaya mwikha	To graze downwards	Live the last days	To move towards the terminal point
Khukhwikhebukha sebuli buri tawe	To look back is not cowardice	Take stock of happenings	Evaluation of oneself is not a weakness
Omwana we khumukongo	The child of the back	Born out of wedlock	An outsider child
Sikhupa mwasi	That which beats the leg	Exciting evening talk	Sweet evening talk
Khukwisabila enyuma	To wash hands from behind	To wash your hands off something	Wash ones hands off a matter
Khuakha omukhana	To apply oil on a daughter	To marry off a daughter	To marry off a daughter
Khukhwilola oli okhalifwa	To look at yourself as if you will not die	Putting on airs	Have a lot of pride
Khutekha kumurwe	To cook the head	To make serious considerations	Seriously think over a matter
Khuba ne kumurwe	To be with a head	To be bright	Being bright