

THE SOCIAL SEMIOTICS OF LANGUAGE AND GENDER IN GIKUYU LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Language plays a very significant role in the maintenance of sex role stereotypes. Recent research suggests that gender nouns such as man are not generic terms referring to humans but often refer exclusively to the male. The use of such terms in various role contexts serves to deny females identification in these contexts and stereotypes the females and males. This paper investigates the nature and context of what has now come to be regarded as sexism in language, for example, Gikuyu language. This paper examined the place and role of language in gender in a social semiotic framework and the extent to which the lexicon of the Gikuyu language is sexist. The study that constitutes the major framework on which this paper is based achieved this through a computer-based corpus of spontaneous conversational data between Gikuyu speakers. The basic argument is that languages such as Gikuyu relegate females to a subordinate position to a subordinate position in which their roles and functions are suppressed in favour of the males. The conclusion is that language needs to redefine and exclude certain terms that hamper women's development and that have created negative perceptions of the female and her image especially while promoting the male at the expense of the female.

Keywords: Language, Sexism, Social Semiotics

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