Language and Gender Identity Marking in Litungu Music and Dance

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Abstract

As a social institution, music and dance can be viewed as sites for social action i.e. for the construction of social phenomenon, including identity (Malchiodi, 2006; Coleman, 2005; Leuthhold, 1998). Yet with respect to Litungu (lyre) music and dance (henceforth LMD) - among the Bukusu people of Western Kenya - research on how the litungu players, singers, and dancers (de)construct gendered identities is yet to be done. Litungu music is one of the traditionally male-dominated social institutions, yet - as a result of globalization - it is one of the sites that have received a lot of influence from other forms of music within and across other cultural groups. This raises the question as to whether LMD has changed or not, especially with respect to gender issues. Against this background, this paper takes a linguistic perspective to investigate the shifting Bukusu identity in the context of music and dance. Specifically, we investigate how language is used to construct gender identities in the context of LMD. Using a descriptive design, both primary and secondary data is analyzed using Fairclough's (1995) approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA). The findings of this study form the basis for reflections on the nature and future of LMD on the one hand, and how language is used in the context of music and dance on the other hand.

Key Words: *Bukusu, Change, Gender Identity, Language, Litungu*

Introduction

Music and dance play a very important role in everyday life of the African people, whether social, economic or political. Litungu music and dance is associated with the Bukusu of Western Kenya. The current paper investigates the representation of gender identities in the context of LMD. Specifically, we investigate how language is used to (de)construct gender identities. To achieve this, the study focuses on the nature of interactional contexts among the Bukusu, in line with the study objectives, which are: to identify and describe the language resources that are used in LMD to (de)construct gender identities; to examine how language resources are used in LMD to (de)construct gender identities, and finally, to discuss the implication of the (de)construction of gender on the future of LMD. We argue that given the increasing globalisation that has swept the world in the recent years, the context of LMD has changed, and that the changes can be gleaned from the way gender identities are represented. Based on this we intend to show that change as a result of globalisation does not only result in the betterment of the circumstances of the subjugated gender (Tamale, 2020), but it also engenders change in the social institutions.

Previous research in the area of gender studies has demonstrated a gradual change not only in theorisation on gender but also in gender relations. There has been a marked shift, on the one hand, from approaching gender from a general perspective to the understanding of gender as a context-based phenomenon (Federer, 1997). On the other hand, instead of considering gender as a fixed category, recent studies have tended to view gender as dynamic or as an act of 'doing' (Coates, 1997) that is negotiable (Wabende and Nganga (forthcoming). Development in theorisation on gender has taken place hand in hand with development in gender relations. Tamale (2020) argues that gender relations in precolonial Africa intersected with the colonial perspectives to gender and that through education, law and religion, gender relations were hierarchized with men taking a superior position and women being considered inferior and pushed out of the formal space. This position, as Tamale (2020) observes is gradually changing: women are no longer passive receivers of assigned roles;

rather, women have stepped up the fight to change their circumstances (Mama, 1995). Thus, we argue that changes in the circumstances of women can result in change in the social institutions.

We choose to analyse gender identities in the context of LMD because it is one of the key social institutions among the Bukusu people where traditions are displayed, accepted and/ or rejected, and transmitted. Though the context of LMD is male-dominated, participation is not restricted to males only. It can, thus, be one of the sites where the nature of interaction among women and men can be analysed. As one of the most important social institutions, LMD is one of the sites where cultural influences are most likely to be tried and adopted and/or rejected. CDA is ideal for this project as it not only allows us to dig behind language for naturalised gender relations with the aim of 'denaturalising' them, but it also enables us to show what the changing gender roles reveals about the nature - and the future - of LMD.

In the following section, we review previous works that relate to the current study.

Literature Review
The general trend in gender identity research can be said to follow two main focal paths. On the one hand, there is an attempt by women to (de)construct traditionally-assigned gender roles and to negotiate and redefine their situations (Tamale, 2020). On the other hand, there is an attempt by researchers to redefine the concept of gender to make it suitable for the analysis of the present-day gender issues. Refinement in the concept of gender has yielded interesting findings, key among them is that gender is no longer a homogenous and stable category, but a dynamic and fluid concept i.e. an act of doing (Coates, 1997). The two research paths that have developed hand in hand show- and indeed raise the need to investigate - the social institutions in which gender finds itself; these institutions are changing, partly due to changes in perspectives related to gender.

For women, especially in Africa, subordination has roots in pre-colonial Africa and it was compounded during colonialism, where religion, law and education 'reinvented notions of "men" and "women" in Africa' and 'the way [men and women] related to each other' (Tamale, 2020: 4). During this time, women were shoved out of public life, and the tension between them and their male counterparts sharpened via hierarchization of identities (Tamale, 2020:5). Efforts by women to remove the shackles of subjugation have intensified as a result of the growing wave of globalization that has swept the world for some years. The aim of the current project is to ascertain the implications of the change in gender relations among male and female participants – as represented via language – on LMD as a social institution.

Gender has been defined as a category marked by culturally-appropriate femininity and masculinity that are part and parcel of social control (Felderer, 1997). This implies that different cultures have different ideals (and associated attributions) related to femininity and masculinity (Federer, 1997) and the gender-related ideals determine the identity of a cultural group. Gender has also been understood as representations based on differentiated role models and assumptions and such representations can lead to gender stereotypes that vary from context to context (Federer, 1997). These representations are (re)produced - via verbal and non-verbal communication - in social institutions such as the family, media among other institutions (Federer, 1997). Recent studies based on the Austinian performative capability of speech, view gender in terms of 'doing' (Coates, 1997) i.e. gender involves 'doing and or contesting femininity or masculinity.

The gender question has a relationship with the social institutions. For instance, Tamale (2020) argues that colonialism engineered 'new structural drivers of inequities' in Africa. With this, land was commodified, Christian values emphasized, the value system altered, to the disadvantage of women. One consequence of this was that women were alienated and robed off the power and means to articulate their needs. Another consequence is that most social institutions continued to (re)produce masculinist tendencies through language and discourse. The masculine tendencies have in many ways effectively prevented and, in many cases, smothered feminine voices in those contexts. We argue that

as women continue to negotiate with their male counterparts, such negotiations are in no doubt integral to the changes in the operation within social institutions.

Recent years have seen women transforming their status from being passive receivers of cultural roles and whatever goes on around them to active participants in the appropriation of roles and shapers of their own circumstances. In line with changes in the situation of women, research has urged the need to change colonialist narrative by first unpacking the term gender through debunking of certain biased ideas about men and women (Tamale, 2020). Together with the shift in gender roles - especially in Africa - research has articulated the need for an approach that takes diversity of experience, power and resistance into account (Peake and Trotz, 1999). This calls for research that takes the context-based histories and tries to explain how these histories can help in dispelling biased notions of male and female (Mama, 1995). Attempt should also be made to foster inclusivity in public domain and to recognize dynamics in gender transformation as key in the struggle.

While social norms constrain behavior of either gender, neither of the gender –as research has shown - fully accepts the 'gender specific role attributions and expectations (Federer 1997: 372). As gender-based inequities are perpetuated through social institutions, change in gender configurations as a result of resistance to inequities has implications for the social institutions. Such implications can be subtle i.e. through the choice of theme or emotion to express. For instance, with respect to the Caribbean experience, the poets and creators of new fictional genres have not only highlighted the oppressive experiences but they have also emphasized emotions such as pain and anger (Mama, 1995). Implications can also be major i.e. they can lead to emergence of new forms that are more inclusive of both genders. In the current study, we argue that with respect to LMD, such changes are likely to result in hybrid forms. These implications can be gleaned from the way the litungu players and dancers represent gender identities.

In the following section, we discuss the theoretical framework that is used in this study.

Theoretical Framework
The study applies Fairclough's (1995) approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA). Following Gramsci (1971, 1985), Fairclough identifies power as 'hegemony'. In this approach, social and cultural forces are taken as hegemonic i.e. they are tied up in struggles of power, with the dominant forces struggling to drive and control major social and cultural changes in society. For instance, with respect to LMD, we argue that there is an attempt to influence gender relations via tools such as globalisation of discourses. The less dominant social and cultural forces do not take up changes without a struggle, and power struggles are constructed in the discursive practices of social institutions that serve to sustain hegemonies (Fairclough, 1995).

The struggle to drive social and cultural change is also in part an attempt to control discursive practices of social institutions. In this, pitted against the less dominant social forces, the dominant social forces struggle 'to modify existing institutional discursive practices [in order to engineer] social and cultural change' via globalisation of discourse (Fairclough, 1995:128). There is need to investigate hegemonic projects through a 'critical method of discourse analysis which can show how [globalisation]of discourse is received and appropriated by those who are subjected to it, through various forms of accommodation and resistance which produce hybrid combinations of existing and imposed discursive practices' (Fairclough, 1995:129). We argue that the resultant hybrid formations can reveal not only the state of the subjugated, but it will also show the nature of social institutions to which discursive practices belong.

As part of discursive practices, hegemonic struggles operate within different domains and across different practices that serve to naturalise certain power relations (Fairclough, 1995). Within these practices are certain discourse conventions that position subjects in certain ways. For instance, LMD traditionally served to reinforce the superiority of male gender, a view that is contested via globalisation. The aim of a linguistic analysis is to denaturalize these taken-for-granted beliefs, assumptions and ideas (Fairclough, 1995) and to lay bare the nature of power relations as a step

towards understanding the nature and future of social institutions. This is where the current study comes in.

In the following section, we discuss the methodology adapted in this study.

Data and Method

The current study, we investigate what the representation of gender relations during globalisation reveals about the nature and future of LMD. Data were collected from Chwele and Kanduyi in Bungoma County, Western Kenya. We purposely selected the two sites because they are mainly occupied by the native Bukusu speakers. We also purposively selected 2 litungu players (male and female) who are 60 years and above to participate in the study.

This paper is part of a wider project on language use in the context of LMD. For this paper, we use 4 Audio (and video versions of) recordings, 2 collected from each of the study locations. Video versions were also collected as we intended to analyse the visual aspects that enrich verbal aspects. To supplement audio and video data, two-hour in-depth interviews were conducted with the two identified litungu players. The aim was to find ethnographic information around the LMD. The observation method was also used during performance, and during interviews. We also collected online LMD data that were used to (dis)confirm aspects of performance in video recordings.

Data were transcribed and analysed at the level of content to identify discursive structures that revealed gender relations in LMD. Gendered data pieces were analysed following Fairclough's (1995) three-step method i.e. description, interpretation and explanation.

In compliance with the ethical requirements, research permit was sought from NACOSTI (National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation); approval from the Bungoma County commissioner was also sought; participants' signed consent was adhered to and finally, the data used in the analyses were de-identified.

In the following section, we analyse data using Fairclough's (1995) approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA), and in line with the study objectives.

Data Analysis

In the analyses, we look at the language resources used in LMD to (de)construct gender identities among the Bukusu in the shifting environment, and the implication of the (de)construction of gender identities on the future of LMD.

(De)constructing Male and Female roles

Discussions in LMD revolve around the family and the roles assigned to family members. Examples in our data show the changing role-relationships between men and women in the social unit of the family. We analyze excerpts below to show how language resources are used to (de)construct gender identities and the implication of the (de)construction of gender on the future of LMD.

Excerpt 1: song *Okhalila ta, bora uhai* (Don't cry as long as there's life) by David Barasa.

01 Wife: (*wailing*) *kusakhulu kuno baye kwasutile epaundi yase,*
      This old man has taken my pound (chasing the husband as she shouts)
02   *mala ese munju mbamo sindu siosi ta*
      Yet there is nothing in the house
03   *babana bakikonile khola ndiena*
      The kids slept hungry, what do I do?

The lexical item **ku**sakhulu 'a husband' (emphasized using the augmentative *ku-*) reveals a husband, and in this case the doer of the action. With **kw**asutile epaundi 'he has carried a twenty-shilling coin', the accusation and the culprit are revealed. The word *kwasutile* 'he has carried' also emphasized using the augmentative *kw-* (on kw-asutile) and uttered in the context of a scuffle in which the wife tries to get her coin back indicates the use of force by the husband and the wife. In a context where women were known to submit to the will of men, the enactment reveals a change in

roles i.e. women are no longer passive receivers of actions from their male counterparts. Other than taking up ownership of property, shown in *eyase* 'my', women are also breadwinners as shown in *ese munju sindu mbamo* 'I have nothing at home' and *babana bakikonile* 'kids slept hungry'.

A man converses with his wife in excerpt 2:

Excerpt 2: song '*pressure*' by David Barasa and Wabwile Barasa

01	Husband:	*sasa we mwanamke mbona unashika simu yangu? ... ina password*
		woman, why are you touching my phone? … it has a pass word
02	Wife:	*Mbona unaniuliza hivyo? Umeniacha hapa na njaa… na Watoto…*
		Why are you asking me? You have left me here hungry with the children
03		*ata school fees aujalipa*
		you have not even paid school fees.
04		*renti ujalipa .... Unalisha wanawake wengine… unanipea pressure*
		you have not paid rent … you feed other women …. you give me pressure.

The exchange between a wife and her husband is made up of questions. With the use of the noun *mwanamke* 'woman' (instead of *mke wangu* 'my wife'), the husband signals a social distance between husband (himself) and his wife. The social distance is further indicated by the use of the noun *password* (for lack of an equivalent Bukusu word for a code), which shows that the husband does not trust his wife. With *mbona unaniuliza hivo?* 'why do you ask?' the wife asserts herself, taking a male role. This is contrary to the norm i.e. a typical Bukusu wife does not question the husband. With *umeniacha hapa na njaa* 'you've left me hungry', *ata school fees hujalipa* 'even you haven't paid fees' *ata rent hujalipa* 'you have paid rent', the wife outlines conditions that the husband has to fulfill to be allowed to pose a question. In other words, it is only a man who meets his obligation that can be respected, and can thus claim privacy. With *unalisha wanawake wengine* 'you are feeding other women'- the reason for failure to foot the bill on the part of the husband is revealed i.e. infidelity. Traditionally, infidelity among women is widely talked about but not men's; women are also barred from talking about their husband's sex-life, and they are not expected to even question their infidelity.

Excerpt 3: song '*pressure*' by David Barasa and Wabwile Barasa

01	*ese nema ekura, endalo ya ekura yino,*
	I vied; on the day of voting
02	*nabona barano bong'ene, ese nanyola barano bong'ene,*
	I saw five only; I only got five votes
03	*omukhasi wange, nende mayi wange, wandaye wange mulala*
	my wife, my mother, one of my sisters
04	*nende mulamwa wange, nende kukhu wange,*
	together with my sister in-law and my grandmother
05	*ata papa wange sekamba ekura ta, uuwii lelo ndwala*
	even my father did not vote for me. Uui I am sick nowadays

The musician enacts his experience with the voters having vied for a political seat. He registers his disappointment at the votes he gets with the expression *nabona barano bong'ene* 'I saw only five'. The co-occurrence of the noun phrases- *omukhasi wange, nende mayi wange, wandaye wange mulala, nende mulamwa wange, nende kukhu wange* 'my wife, my mother, one of my sisters, my sister in law and my grandmother'- reveal the list of voters. Made up of women only, the list reveals the changing role of women i.e. women vote, and thus, they do take part in political decision making. Women express their support for a close family member, while men do not - as evidenced in this instance by the father.

Excerpt 4

01	*Weweee mimi ni bwana wa wenyewe*
	You, I am someone's husband.
02	*wacha kuniangalia saaaaana*
	Stop staring at me

A man warns a lady not to stare at him. With *mimi ni bwana wa wenyewe* 'I am someone's husband', the musician reveals firstly, the intention of the lady i.e. to seduce him. Secondly, it reveals his strategy to avoid falling into the lady's trap i.e. introducing himself as a married man. With *kuniangalia saana* 'staring at me', the musician reveals one of the strategies of seduction. Apart from revealing one of the reasons why men become unfaithful, the musician also shows that women have taken up one of the traditional male roles i.e. it is male members who seduce female members of the community.

Excerpt 5: song, '*my dear*', by David Barasa

01   *My dear aaah my dear aah*
02   *You don't have airtime*
03   *Send me please call me*

The husband identifies his wife using codeswitching *my dear*. With *send me please call me,* the man takes up the role of providing airtime for his wife so that she can call whenever she wants to. This is contrary to traditional marriage situations that forbid open expression of affection. i.e. Bukusu men do not allow women to call them to express their love whenever they are out of the home.

Excerpt 6: song, *baba Matatizo* (Matatizo's father)

01 X: *Ati wanaume siku hizi wanaoleka. Ni ukweli kweli?*
        That these days men get married? Is it true?
02 Z: *wanaoleka?*
        Do they get married?
03 X: *hee heeee Hujaona ama hujaambiwa.*
        Hee heee haven't you seen? Haven't you been told?
 04   *Baba matatizo ameoleka hapatikani nyumbani*
        Father of Matatizo is married; he cannot be found at home

With the noun *wanaume* 'men', the musician identifies a husband. Traditionally men build houses and ask women to join them in marriage. Thus, *wanaume wanaoleka* 'men get married' reveals a change in roles i.e. women marry men. In the short exchange the speaker Z expresses his surprise by asking *wanaoleka* 'do they get married?'. Speaker X responds with questions *hujaona* 'haven't you seen?' *hujaambiwa* 'haven't you been told?' Then with *baba matatizo* 'Father of Matatizo', speaker X provides an example of a man that gets married, and with *hapatikani nyumbani* 'he cannot be found at home', he indicates the consequence of a man getting married. The term *nyumbani* 'home' refers to the space occupied by his legitimate wife. The word *hapatikani* 'he cannot be found', metaphorically refers to the man's inability to provide the basic needs for the family. This instance does not only illustrate the changing roles but also the changing definition of a home.

01   *Hata majirani wameanza kutucheka*
        Even the neighbors have started laughing at us
02   *Ati hao baba yao*
        Saying their father
03   *alienda kazi*
        went to work
04   *kazi gani?*
        which work?

The musician explains the whereabouts of the estranged husband. He cites from what the neighbors say, and this is introduced by *hata majirani wameanza kutucheka ati* 'even neighbors have started laughing at us. With *alienda kazi* 'he went to work', the neighbours euphemistically refer to marriage in terms of work. The musician uses the question *kazi gani?* 'which work?' to criticize the man in question. Traditionally, a woman leaves her home and joins a man to make a family. A man becomes an object of ridicule when he leaves his home and lives with a woman, and this is shown by

wameanza kutucheka 'they have started laughing at us'. This is an indication of the shifting gender identities.

Excerpt 7: song '*Mwambu ne Sela*' by Wanjala Mandari

01 *mukhana womwami chinyanga chilikhulia nesesi chilindia*
   daughter of the king, days will eat you up and I will be eaten up (literal translation)
02 *baye menyanga nge Mwambu ne Sela*
   please live in peace as did Mwambu and Sela
03 *yaba basimana nebanyola sititi bele bakabana*
   they loved each other and shared the little they had
04 *walebe bange khola ndie*? (crying)
   my relatives, what do I do? (crying)
05 *Mandari nalilile, ekitale yakhwonkanga*
   I, Mandari I am crying because you got spoilt in Kitale town.

The Bukusu woman is culturally defined as a conservative, dependent, patient and persevering; a person who can take in almost anything unpleasant from her husband without complaining. However, given the changing environment, this relational thinking is no longer holding as she exercises her agency, making use of the power within to redefine herself. This is observed in the litungu metaphorical song *Mwambu ne Sela.*

The song in excerpt 7 above is a case where the husband is crying bitterly lamenting about his wife who decided to abandon him because of his low social status that couldn't afford her comfort living. In explaining the shift in the social situation over time, he uses the metaphor of *Mwambu ne Sela* (Bukusu ancestors) who loved each other and lived harmoniously despite the changing economic situation; they learned to peacefully share the little they had. Unlike the ancestors (specifically women) who persevered, his wife has left him; he blames modernization as the cause- *ekitale yakhwonkanga* (Kitale town spoilt you). It is demonstrated through this excerpt that Bukusu women have/ are constantly redefining their identity to that of dominance, where they are able to make independent decisions in the new social space that has come with globalization. Now that the man can't fight/ resist the inevitable, he signs up- *mukhana womwami chinyanga chilikhulia nesesi chilindia* (daughter of the king, days will eat you up and I will be eaten up too (*lit transl*) meaning- "after all, you and I will all die"). The husband also cries, asking for help- *Mandari nalilile* (Mandari I have really cried). It is unusual for a Bukusu man to cry; crying is associated with women who are said to be the 'weaker gender'. This is therefore, a sign of injured masculinity in the face of change. The singer has successfully used comparison as a strategy to create two Bukusu worlds, the traditional and more conservative, and the modern, where the two Bukusu women have different identities, with the modern woman not taking anything lying low without a fight, as she exercises agency. When the man feels helpless, he gives up and blames it on the 'other'.

Excerpt 8: *Ochukha busie* (You pour/loose/waste flour) by David Barasa

01 *wang'alile oima lifwa nabone baye*
  I have seen you are serious looking for death
02 *onywa no mela notimia kumutoka nespiti… omukhulundu wikisa nonywa busa*
   you drive very fast while drunk with alcohol… priest you hide and take alcohol
03 *ewe takitari okona nebalwalwe boo… ewe mwalimu owelesia basomi bisombo*
    doctor you sleep with your patients… teacher you impregnant your learners
04 *ewe baba wila khumukhanawoo… ewe kichana wila khunamulekhwa…*
   father you inherit your daughter in-law… young man you inherit a widow…
 05 *wang'alile oima lifwa nabone baye*
    I have seen you are serious looking for death

As women strive to occupy new social spaces of freedom and independence, a position that defies the established norm among the Babukusu, men's identity is also slowly shifting, taking up an identity that culturally never defined them. In excerpt 8, the man is portrayed as a looser, one who is reckless

and irresponsible. The metaphor- *oima lifwa* (looking for death) is used to describe the immoral practices that men are involved in, which eventually not only cost them their livelihood but their very lives. Thus, as women in the Bukusu community redefine their identities, men are also, unknowingly doing the same, but to the position of subjugation, which is contrary to the Bukusu norm.

From the examples from our data it is evident that various linguistic strategies have been used in the (de)construction of gender identities; these include the use of metaphors, short exchanges, scenarios, questions, emphasis, co-occurrence of phrases, self-praise and self-evaluation, augmentation and code switching. These strategies have been used by women to negotiate the changing spaces as they take up traditionally prescribed male roles. This is observed in their redefined identities that include; Bukusu women being in charge as bread winners, managing family affairs, standing up for their rights and wellbeing, questioning their husbands, seducing men, being educated and empowered, active participants in social, economic and political decision making, dominant, hence taking up roles that were traditionally male oriented.

As women are taking up new spaces, men are also finding themselves in unfamiliar social spaces, where their masculinity is injured as they take up new identities of dependency and subordination. Having found themselves in such spaces, men have had to give up and/ or accept the changing spaces.

With time, and given the shifting spaces, the Bukusu community is slowly but surely coming to terms as it adjusts to be in tandem with the changing spaces. Based on the happenings, the future predicts a space, where the males and females can talk freely about issues that bedevil them, regardless of their defined gender roles.

Discussion

LMD as a social institution closely interacts with the social, cultural, economic and political life of the Bukusu people. This social space has for long served (among other functions) as a site for the (de)construction of gender identities, which are represented through language use. In this section, we analyze both verbal and non-verbal discourses within the LMD context in a bid to achieve our set objectives.

Traditionally, *litungu* playing was associated with the male gender and not the female gender. This is observed in excerpt 9:

Excerpt 9: The researcher *S* interviewed a male *litungu* player *D,* born in 1957 and bred in Chwele, Kabuchai constituency, Bungoma County.

Pic 1: Online Source, the respondent D playing litungu
Retrieved 21/7 2023 at 3.45pm

Excerpt 9

  01 S: *wamia wae litungu?*
          where did you get the lyre?
  02 D: *Papa. Lia kuka.*
          my father. It was my grandfather's.
  03 *papa kaba saiti kapila ba Suti Namachanja nebali khubwami Mumia*
        he played for leaders such as Suti Namachanja of King Mumia,
  04 *halafu Paskari ano nende Naftari wa Muyeku ano.*
        then Paskari, and Naftari of Muyeku
  05 *nonoo papa niye wabapilanga nga omupeni*
        my father was their lyre player
  06 *ata ese nakhafwa babana base basoleli balipa.*
        when I die my sons will play
  07 *babechukhulu base basoleli bakharebenge bali ne kuka wapanga yuno kaba nanu*
        my grandsons will ask after my music.
  08 *efwe basoreri kumi na mbili. Seng'ene oupa*
        out of the twelve sons I am the only one who plays it.

In response to the question about where *D* got the lyre from, he uses emphasis by intensifying expressions that foreground the male gender as being dominant in the social site of *litungu* playing: expressions such as *khu papa* (**he** got the lyre from **his father**), …*Suti Namachanja nebali khubwami Mumia …Paskari… nende Naftari wa Muyeku (*he played it for the Bukusu **renowned male leaders**)*; …babana base basoleli balipa…(***his sons** will play after he is gone), *babechukhulu base basoleli bakharebenge….(*my **grandsons** will ask after my lyre playing), *basoreri kumi na mbili. Seng'ene oupa (*Of the **twelve sons** I am the only one who plays the lyre). Emphasis on male gender shows how dominant, respectable and highly esteemed men are in this community.

Emphatic language use is also observed when the same lyre player is asked whether dancers can be given the lyre to play; emphatic language use here shows the special/ privileged position of the lyre player in the Bukusu community, a position that cannot be compromised, a position that is a reserve for men. This is illustrated in excerpt 10 below:

Excerpt 10

  01 S: *nebakhina bano obahusisha orie. Upa wabaa litungu*
        how do you involve dancers? Do you allow them to play the lyre?
  02 D: *Litungu. Muwe litungu? Litungu lie kumwima. Liiase ese upa sengene. Ese omupeni.*
         Lyre. You're asking whether I should give him/her the lyre? The lyre is for tradition.
         It is mine. It is me alone to play. I am the lyre player.

By emphasizing the exclusive possession and the playing of the lyre in- *Litungu lie kumwima. Liiase ese upa sengene. Ese omupeni* (The lyre is for tradition. It is mine. It is me alone to play. I am the lyre player)- further underscores the unique position held by the traditional men lyre players in the Bukusu speech community.

Excerpt 11

  01 S: *Kimisilo kilio*?
        Are there any rituals?
  02 D: *Eeh omundu wesikhasi saatila khwitungu ta.*
         Yes. A woman is not allowed to touch it
  03 *omulosi wase wemunju niye mbolela ndi anula litungu elio umbelesie.*
         it is only my wife who can unhang and give it to me
  04 *lakini nenja esafari seaamba ta samwene obukula*
        but she can't take the lyre and give it to me when I am going on a journey, I pick it myself.

In excerpt 11, it is shown through the metaphoric use of the negation verb phrase *saatila khwitungu ta* (cannot touch the lyre) to imply that a woman is not only prohibited from touching the

lyre but more so, from playing it. This further illustrates the dominant male gender construction through the context of LMD, against the subordinate female position that is associated with evil and bad luck.

Excerpt 12:

  01 S: *lasima omupeni kame mukholo fulani?*
         must the player come from a specific clan?
  02 D: *...ta... sino sipawa busa... Wamanya manguliechi?*
        No. This is a talent... Do you know Manguliechi?
  03 *ndi naye khupicha andicognisa ese khukupa litungu. Nachayo nakonayo*
   I am with him in a photo. He recognizes me as a lyre player. I went and spent at his place.

In excerpt 12, the lyre player uses self-praise, a speech act that involves positive self-evaluation as he asks *Wamanya manguliechi? (*Do you know Manguliechi?). Manguliechi is a renowned Bukusu orator, hence knowing him and being associated with him means that one is a very respected person in the community. He then goes ahead and says, *Ndi naye khupicha andicognisa... Nachayo nakonayo (*I am with him in a photo. He recognizes me … I went and spent a night at his place). In this excerpt, self-praise is not only used to make explicit the relationship between the participant and Manguliechi, but more importantly to draw attention to the dominant position held by the lyre player (through bragging) in the Bukusu community, which is derived from the existing social structure that provides a higher social position for the male gender.

The same strategy of self-praise is observed in excerpt 13, when asked about whom he plays the lyre for:

Excerpt 13:

  01 S: *upila litungu nanu?*
         whom do you play for?
  02: D: *bali khupa busa erekoti ya kwanza BBC yapila ebweneyi.*
      my first record was played at BBC.
  02 yakhabili nanja khuloma lubuksu kabisa oulila busa lubukusu ali nanu wapa ino
     for the second, I started talking in Lubukusu, people asked 'who played this'?
  03 *bali makhanu... aloma lubukusu bulai sana ne amenyile wae. Nebambima.*
     It is Makhanu… he sings in very good Bukusu, where does he stay?... they looked for me.

Self-praise is used by the lyre player to cement his privileged position of dominance as he says *erekoti ya kwanza BBC* (my first record was played at BBC); BBC is a renowned international media house that not just anybody can do their recording. Self-praise is also observed in …*nanja khuloma lubuksu kabisa ... nanu wapa ino...* (I started talking in (true/ real) Lubukusu, people asked 'who played this'? Being so articulate in one's linguistic performance is a reserve for a few, and he feels that he is one of them, he claims to be so good to the extent that his audiences had to ask about him. It is also observed in *aloma lubukusu bulai sana ... Nebambima* (he sings in very good Lubukusu … they looked for me). Self-praise is used here to foreground the dominant position held by the male lyre player. This is in line with the Bukusu social structure, where traditionally, litungu was a reserve for men and whoever had the skill, held an exclusive position in the community.

Male litungu players command respect in the community, they are regarded as people with wisdom who that can offer counsel. This is observed by Z when asked about whether he is respected as a lyre player. He still uses the strategy of self-praise that is observed in the tone of the text.

Excerpt 14

  01 S: *bantu bakhuria khubela ewe omupeni?*
        Are you respected because you are a lyre player?
  02 D: *Ese eshima bamba, oumbona busa obona ali makhanu icha wikhale ano.*
     I am respected. Anyone who see me shouts saying makhanu come sit here
  03 *bali makhanu lelo saabonekha ta. Mulange eche. Isma eyo ndi nayo buli abundu.*

they say we rarely see him these days. Call him. I am respected everywhere

04 *baandanga bali omukambisi. Likhuwa nelionekha bandeba mala nababolela*

they call me the counsellor. When there is an issue, they seek my counsel.

The texts used by the litungu player such as *eshima bamba* (I am respected), *oumbona busa obona ali makhanu icha wikhale ano* (whoever sees me, calls me to sit with them), *makhanu lelo saabonekha ta* (we rarely see Makhanu), *mulange eche* (call him to come), *Isima eyo ndi nayo buli abundu* (I am respected everywhere), *baandanga bali omukambisi* (they call me the counsellor); they all show self-evaluation in a positive way, hence placing the player in a position of dominance in the community, a position that is revered.

From the foregoing*,* it is evident that *litungu* playing is a site for men and not women as illustrated through the respondent *D.* However, over time, and with modernization, Bukusu women are becoming more and more liberal; hence, currently we have women players. This is observed in the following excerpt:
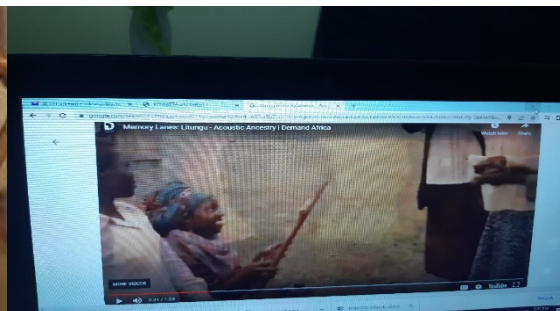
Excerpt 15

01 S: *Omundu wesikhasi anyala kapa litungu?*
        Can a woman play the lyre?
02 D: *Musibukusu abele omundu wesikhasi sakhupa litungu tawe.*
        traditionally, a woman was never allowed to play the lyre.
03 *lakini lelo bapa busa. Aliyoo omukhana oupanga litungu bulayi sana*
    But currently, women play. There's a lady who is a very good lyre player.

The respondent's sentiments are confirmed, where *N*, a young Bukusu girl is seen confidently playing *litugu.* The shifting spaces that have come with globalization and modernity, have empowered women to take up spaces that were traditionally a reserve for men.

Pic 2: Online source, retrieved 23rd July 2023 at 4:15pm. N playing litungu   *Pic 3: Online source, retrieved 23rd July 2023 at 4:20pm. People dancing as N plays litungu*

The female player admits that "…*it is unusual for women to play this kind of instrument. Mostly it is men who play…coming into this kind of instrument is unique…I play it and my family joins in…*" *(Online source, retrieved 23rd July)*. By admitting the exclusivity of this social space -*coming into this kind of instrument is unique*- but at the same time venturing into it shows how the modern Bukusu woman is defying the norm by negotiating her own space. The fact that the family joins in the dance as she sings - *I play it and my family joins in*- also shows the shift in community social structure, an indication of tolerance and/ or acceptance of the inevitable, given the changing times.

The shift in gender identities in the context of LMD is also observed in the dance. *Litungu* dance among the Babukusu involves *kamabeka* (shoulders). Dance moves that involve shoulders are considered as being decent, moral and socially acceptable in all contexts and by all ages. Likewise, the mode of dress for the Bukusu woman is expected to be modest in the sense that it covers her body well. However, the traditional Bukusu conservative woman has now redefined herself. Given the changing spaces, she has also negotiated the same in order to fit in. Consequently, instead of the woman shaking the upper part of the body which is considered more descent and morally acceptable,

she emphasizes the lower part/ waist (David Barasa, song, *Pressure, Online source, retrieved on 23rd July 2023*), which is sexual and immoral. Likewise, the mode of dress is not only modern, but also indecent in the sense that the woman leaves her body exposed/ half naked, which is against the Bukusu norms that demand that women be descend/ modest in their dressing. This is observed below:

Pic 4: Online source, retrieved on 23rd July 2023 23rd 10. 42 am. Shaking the lower side.
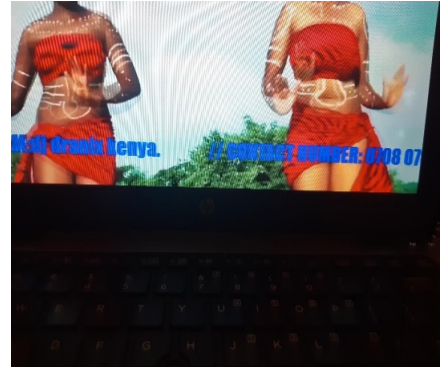
Pic 5: Online source, retrieved on July 2023, at 10. 50 am. Exposed body

This reflects the shifting gender identity, where the Bukusu woman has redefined herself as an independent, and modern woman who no longer cares about the long-established cultural norms. Incidentally, it appears as if the society is slowly but surely acknowledging and embracing these changes. This is observed in the way crowds (especially men) get excited as they watch and/ or join in song and dance.

In the current study, we argue that as women continue to negotiate with their male counterparts, such negotiations are in no doubt integral to the changes that are taking place within social institutions, and in this case, within the LMD context.

Implication of the (de)construction of Gender Identities on the Future of LMD
With the (de)construction of gender identities in the context of LMD (as observed in the foregoing discussions), and the changes that have come with globalization, it is likely that with time, the privileged position held by the *Omupeni/ litungu* player, may no longer hold. This is because, initially, this social site was a preserve for very few respected men in the Bukusu community, men with wisdom, men who were considered as the custodians of the Bukusu cultural knowledge (Wafula, 2012).) However, in this age of modernization and in the advent of Christianity, what was considered taboo to women and young men has shifted as both young men and even women are playing the *litungu;* these is a category of people that do not possess the characteristics that the culturally adored *Omupeni* had, neither do they play the instrument with the same agenda- that of providing counsel in the community and for generational knowledge transfer- for a majority, it is an entrepreneurial venture that is used for entertainment.

As the Bukusu woman negotiates within the existing environment that has a combination of the conservative and the liberal, and in the attempt to define her own space as she redefines her identity, the Bukusu community is slowly but surely coming to terms, hence accommodating what was initially seen as contempt of the Bukusu cultural norms. This is observed in the way the young girl plays the litungu in the presence of family and friends who join in happily singing and dancing, without reservation (*see Pic 3 above*). This is a pointer to the future of *litungu*, in which what was considered as taboo may never hold, given the unfolding changes in the various social institutions.

The redefinition of who males and females are in the Bukusu community through the context of LMD is observed in the changing contexts within which these performances are done. When the elderly *litungu* player *D* is asked about when he does play the instrument, see excerpt 16 below:

Excerpt 16:

    01 S: *masharti ke litungu*
       what preconditions are involved?
    02 D*: Ese litungu sekhupa busa ta. Bananga. Lazima banange. Sendura busa ta*
       I don't just play *litungu*. They invite me. I must be invited.

The *litungu* player explains that he only responds to invites, and the theme is determined by the occasion. This conservative space that aligns with the Bukusu cultural norms is shifting so fast that current *litungu* players sing on any theme, and anywhere; including social places like clubs, where culturally, women were forbidden. Having negotiated their space, women no longer abstain from such environments but instead, they are seen not only being involved in LMD but they do so half-naked. This is a pointer to the futures of the Bukusu LMD as a social space, which is slowly deviating from the long-established norm in the face of change. The redefined Bukusu woman is not bound within the existing cultural norms but instead, she fights for her space as she exercises her agency. This in the long run is likely to be the norm.

From the foregoing discussions, there seem to be a growing appreciation, praise and acceptance of the reconstructed identities, especially that of women, in the Bukusu community. This is observed in the context of Bukusu LMD, where, instead of the crowd (mainly composed of men) show no contempt for the indecently dressed dancing Bukusu women; they are all excited, cheering and encouraging them, seemingly drawing positive image construction in them. Given this, the future of LMD as a social site seem to be compromised (in the face of continuous gender identity redefinition) with regard to the functions that it was culturally meant to perform. Likewise, with the (de) construction of gender identities as observed in the context of LMD, men and women are entering a social space that allows for more negotiation and collaboration, with each gender being involved in decision making for their wellbeing; this is despite the traditionally set norms that speak otherwise.

Conclusion

The study sought to identify and describe the language resources used in LMD to (de)construct gender identities; examine how language resources are used in LMD to (de)construct gender identities and discuss the implication of the (de)construction of gender on the future of LMD.

Taking the linguistic approach, and using Fairclough's CDA, the study established that there are various linguistic resources that are employed in the context of LMD to (de)construct gender identities among the Bukusu of Kenya. Given the shifting social environment in the face of Christianity and modernity, the long established traditional social-political roles no longer hold as women are seen to constantly contest their identity, as they negotiate the new environment, thereby redefining and constructing a new identity that is far removed from the norm. As women enter into this new space of empowerment, independence, dominance and decision making; men are left with no choice but to accept the inevitable, as they are also caught up in unfamiliar space of subordination.

Important to take note is the fact that as much as these changes are contested by the male gender, the community at large is seen to be accommodating and complying with the inevitable. Given this, the Bukusu community is bound to transmute into a space of more alliance and corporation between the two genders as the gender gap narrows, giving way for a fair society.

Thus far, the study recommends for similar studies in other speech communities that make use of the lyre music and dance. Such studies will give us a glimpse into the place of language in gender identity marking in the context of LMD, and the future of this social space in various communities.

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