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Sociological Dimensions of Power in Mdumange Songs: The Analysis of Tanzanian Orature Using Discourse Perspectives

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Abstract:

Like other forms of creative arts, African orature has the capacity to reveal social realities with the purpose of improving living standards. Among the social reality that is being revealed in African orature is the concept of power. This paper presents sociological dimensions of power relation revealed in African orature especially through mdumange songs. These songs are being performed by both men and women during ceremonies of marriage, political campaign and religious celebrations. Specifically, the data has been collected from the Sambia community in Tanzania. The paper begins by outlining some basic thoughts of power relation as pioneered by scholars from the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Basing on the CDA principles, the paper consecrates much on explaining different categories of power relation as seen through the analysis of Mdumange songs. In short, the analysis has shown that according to Sambia worldview, power relation can be structured into two basic categories: (i) the supernatural vs performers and audience; and (ii) power relation on the basis of members of the family. Finally, the paper ends up by concluding that among the Sambia community of Tanzania power relation is a major phenomenon where subordination and class struggles are revealed. Thus, the performances of several genres of African orature including mdumange songs perpetuate the existence of several forms of social inequalities as well as suggesting alternative way of eliminating them.

Keywords: Mdumange songs, orature, critical discourse analysis, power and ideology

1. Introduction

Power is the basic concept in the study of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Hence, it has been discussed by various scholars with different perspectives. Such scholars are like Fairclough, Wodak and van Dijk. According to Fairclough (1989 & 2003) power is a kind of commodity which can be won and exercised only in social struggles. This means that, power is viewed not as something that dominant members of society have over subordinate members but in terms of the relationship between power and resistance. Linda *et al* (2004) adds that looking at Foucault's perspective it can be claimed that resistance is the counterpart to power. Also, this perspective holds that human being is able to exercise power relation not only through language use but also through arrangement of duties and responsibilities in a particular context. In this paper, power relation will be explored through the use of different forms of resistance.

Another theory of power relation from CDA perspective is the one which has been expressed by Wodak (2001 & 2002) who claims that language indexes power. From this paradigm, we learn that power does not derive from language but language can be used to challenge power, subvert it, and even to alter distributions of power among different members of the society. As far as this theory is concerned, the writer will discuss the use of linguistic devices to explore aspects of power relation in mdumange songs. Generally, as also noted by Widdowson (1995) and Wodak (2002) CDA is centrally interested in language and power because it is usually in language that discriminatory practices are mirrored. Wodak explains that the concept of power is indispensable part of any CDA. He further elaborates that power, history, and ideology are three indispensable concepts of CDA. The third theory of power relation relating to CDA that will be used to analyse aspects of relation in mdumange songs is that of Van Dijk. Van Dijk (2000) defines power in terms of control. This scholar maintains that groups have power if they are able to control the acts and minds of other group. Groups may have more or less control over others. The power of dominant groups may be integrated in laws and rules of the society.

2. Sociological Dimensions of Power Relation in Mdumange Songs

The study involved the analysis of drum songs collected from a particular community in Tanzania. Such drum songs are called Mdumange songs and they are practiced among the Sambia community found in Tanzania. From the

analysis it has been found that there are two sociological dimensions of power relation as revealed through the use of mdumange songs. These dimensions included the use of supernatural forces and the use of members of the family.

2.1. The Power Relation among Performers, Audience and Supernatural Forces

Performers believe in a number of ideologies. During our study, we noticed that there are traditional and modern forms of ideologies that affect the Sambaa worldview. These includes the traditional, Islamic and Christianity religions. Basing on this ideology, the performers believe that they cannot perform better without the help from the power of God. As a result, they usually recite prayers to ask for the help. The text quoted below elaborates well this point:

Kiswahili	English
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sisi tukianza ngoma • Jambo la kwanza • Ni lazima tumuombe Mungu • Kwa jinae la babae • Na la mwana • Na la roho mutakatifu • Wale ndugu zetu islamu • E ndugu zetu islamu 'Swalie mtume 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When we start drum • The first thing we do • We should pray for God • In the name of father • And the name of the child • And the holy spirit • Our friends Muslim • Our friends muslim pray for the prophet

Table 1

The quotations written above indicate that the performers of mdumange songs do acknowledge that God is the supreme power of the world as he is the creature of the universe. Furthermore, the texts justify the ideological view that, God determines the fate of everything including human being. Hence, before mdumange songs could be performed the performers make a special prayer as a symbol of polite request to God. They are requesting for help and protection. In addition to that, the performers do mention the names of other supernatural forces especially the Ghosts called 'mzimu' in Sambaa language. They specifically mention Sheuta' ghost as seen here under;

Kisambaa	English
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tamba, tamba, tiase nkoba tiase muungu, mzimu wa Sheuta neugone ntongo. • Tamba, tiase nkoba tiase muungu • Mzimu ee kagone eeeee • Uja wa Sheuta neugone ntongo • Tamba, tiase nkoba tiase muungu • 6. Mzimu ee kagone eeeee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We pray for you, the medicine, the god, Sheuta's ghost should rest in peace. • We pray fo yuou, the medicine and the god • The ghost should rest eeeee • That of Sheuta should rest in peace • We pray fo yuou, the medicine and the god • 6. The ghost should rest eeeee

Table 2

The linguistic device 'we' represent performer and his group while the words 'nkoba, miungu, mzimu wa Sheuta' represent the supernatural forces. From this quotation, the performer and hs group does not have any power, but the supernatural is the powerful one. That's why the performer and his group cannot do anything without the help of the supernatural power. This belief becomes the main ideological tool that act as a generating force regarding their dreams, ideas and action. In this context the study of power relation has enabled us to notice the performer and his group is getting blessing from supernatural forces by showing great respect during performance of mdumange songs. The text informs us that Sheuta is the founder of the Sambaa community. He is the supreme ancestor. Thus, God and Ghosts are taken as more superior as they control ideas, dreams and actions of the community.

2.2. Power Relation among Family Members

This type of discourse is mainly based up on three major pillars of family: mother, father and children. In fact, father and mother occupy higher status than the children. Due to their higher status, the two parents are responsible for safeguarding the interests/rights of their children. Hence, children are considered as weak since they need to be protected by their mothers, fathers as well as the whole community.

Kisambaa	English
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ng'wana ni mdodo ee aalilia unyumba aa e • Ng'wana ni mdodo nane aalilia unyumba aae • Ukishemlinda ee mame utakoma ubishi • 4.Ukishemlinda iwe mamee utakoma ubishi ng'wenye 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child is not matured, is crying for marriage • The child is not matured, is crying for marriage • you mother if you don't take care of her you will suffer the quencequence • 4. you mother if you don't take care of her you will suffer the quencequence

Table 3

The text above shows the weak position of the children as well as the strong status of their parents. The text clarifies that children had no sexual right as a result they need to be protected by their parents and the whole community at large. Generally, the Mdumange songs insist that children had a special status because the sustainability of family/nation depends on children.

On the other hand, the performance of *Mdumange songs* shows that among the Sambia community father is more powerful than the wife/mother. He is the one who is responsible for taking care of the family. Women are weak because they cannot take care family matter. The following mdumange song clarifies the point:

Kisambaa	English
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mghoshi auko nyika 2. Amwe kuja vyakwe weangu 3. Imi kunu kaya 4. Na wanangu shakaza 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the husband has gone to town 2. he celebrates in a luxury life 3. I, here at village 4. with my children we are in trouble of poverty

Table 4

The above verse denote that the power of the father is originating from being able to handle family responsibilities. Thus, the Mdumange songs portray women as incapable of handling their duties without the support of the husband/father.

Likewise, in Mdumange songs it's mentioned that another source of men's power over women is the act of hard working. That's why even men are not interested to marry lazy women. In the stanza quoted below this point is made very clear:

Kisambaa	English
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mkazangu haima weangu 2. N'muighae na kwawe 3. Tate du anighamba mueke 4. Awee awo wana 5. Mkazangu hadaha ima 6. N'kunda n'muighae na kwawe 7. Tate du anighamba mueke 8. Ateghua vya nine akwe 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My wife does not farm Mke wangu halimi jamani 2. I should divorce her 3. My father told me not to divorce 4. So that she may take care of children 5. My wife is not capable of farming 6. I want to divorce her 7. But my father has forbidden me to divorce 8. He says, the wife has just inherited her mother's laziness

Table 5

From the above stanza we learn that the wife is seen as inferior while the father is considered to be superior. It's from this perspective where the father has the right to divorce his wife if she is not capable of working hard. Furthermore, the stanza indicates the special status of the children in the family. As the artists argue below most of time wife reject to break the marriage just because she fears the hardship that might occur to them in her absence:

Kisambaa	English
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1: Niikaia wangu ee ee ee 2: Niikaia wanangu ee ee ee 3. Mghoshingwa ni beyu 4. Ajiia hotei 5. Niikaia wanangu ee 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I stay here just because of my children 2. I stay here just because of my children 3. though my husband is parasite 4. he ate at restaurant/hotel 5. I will keep on staying for my children

Table 6

The Mdumange song written above shows that children hold the stability of the family. On one hand, wife with children is being tolerated by her husband and on the other hand wives with children feels more difficult to break up their marriage. Once again, women with children are considered to be stronger than those without children. Those without children are easily being divorced. This ideology makes the writer of this article to conclude that children had the power of making their family grow and sustain for long time. Thus, a family without children is seem to be more powerless than the one with children.

As a powerless subject, wife/woman is also taken as the new comer in the family, and had no right of possessing children. After maturity she has to be married where she is shifted to men's family, there after she can further be dispelled to the former family. Furthermore, the father/husband has the right to own and dispossess children from their mothers.

Kisambaa	English
1. Hati n'ng'wanangu uzan'hoka	1. If it's the children, you have taken them from me
2. Kwa kuti baba hunifanyanya	2. It indicates that you don't care for me
3. Imi se n'dahe tabia za mzi	3. I am un able to tolerate the behavior
4. N'kunda niite na kwetu	4. I want to go home

Table 7

The quotation above justifies that children belongs to father. As a result, the wife/mother can be deprived her children as the case may be. Due to this ideology, at various occasions mother get more status based on their children especially during marriage ceremonies. The depriving of the children indicates that the father is not taking care of his wife. Hence, women without children are easily divorced than those with children.

On the other hand, the power of father is categorically affected by the economical status of the same. This denote that according to the Sambaa worldview the father is viewed from two perspectives: (i) good father and (ii) bad father. Good father has the power to take care of his family, while bad father is economically powerless as he cannot even afford to meet basic needs of his dependants including his children.

Kisambaa	English
1. E hati una hea wana waahumuia lungu ee	1. if you had money, they could not eat poor food
2. Kuti una hea nanga waahumuia togwa ee	2. if you had money, they could not eat poor food
3. Una ndima ani wana waahumuia togwa ee	3. what work do you perform, as your children
4. Kuti una ndima wana waahumuia lungu ee	4. If you had a work child could not eat poor food

Table 8

In order to show the power of men over women, the Mdumange songs also indicate that the father is not only a leader of the family, but also, he is portrayed as the knowledgeable person in the society:

Kisambaa	English
1. Ho tate baba Mayai nane	1. Father, brother Mayai
2. Ng'wenye aateia ngoma	2. He knows the drum
3. Uyo Mayai baba	3. That father mayai
4. Ng'wenye aateia ngoma	4. Himself know how t perform mdumange songs

Table 9

The song above shows that the father is a person with an up to date knowledge. He possesses the skill to perform mdumange songs, and as a result he uses this knowledge to give various commands to other family members. For example, children are directed to be committed to religious teachings and they should also keep their husbands. Finally, the mdumange songs among the Sambaa community elaborate the way men/husband exercise their power over women/wife by way of sexual harassment. This is seen where we notice that the husband has the right to punish his wife without reasonable cause.. In the following stanza, women use language to raise their voice against this kind of sexual harassment:

Kisambaa	English
1. Kisa cha kutoighwa	1. The reason for me to be beaten
2. Sindati n'chielewe bwana	2. I am not aware of
3. Ae ae baba	3. Ae ae father
4. Labda ukaaghie kwenyu	4. I will keep on asking unless you ran away to your home

Table 10

It's obvious that, power relation between men and women has enabled the performers of mdumange songs to create a particular mode of thinking. This mode of thinking corresponds to what made Foucault (1972) think that power and ideology cannot be separated. Also, the women do resist the subordination of men over them through the use of language. Again, we notice that language has been used as a tool for both dehumanizing and emancipating human subjects.

3. Conclusions

This paper has demonstrated the way power relation is organized through the use of Mdumange songs. Taking these songs as forms of African orature enables the researcher to acknowledge the link between art and the society. Thus, it has been elaborated that for better understanding of the concept of power the notion of context needs to be considered. This is because no text stands alone without a connection to a certain context. Its from this knowledge where Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) suggests that texts relate to other texts by representing within their own utterance the voices of other

texts. In doing so, we have found that the voices of the text in mdumange songs are hostile to one another. However, it has been found that other voices are completely in harmony relation to others.

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