Original Research Article

Metaphor and Health Communication: Use of Metaphor in HIV and AIDS Discourse

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Abstract

Language plays a fundamental role in combatting HIV and AIDS. In Kenya, English and Kiswahili are used as the languages of communication in HIV and AIDS related issues. The literacy rate in Kenya stands at 87.4% but research has indicated that only 17% of the population speak and use English effectively while, 65% speak and understand Kiswahili. The use of Kiswahili in health communication cannot be underscored given the fact that majority of the Kenyan population can understand and interpret Kiswahili messages received in a communication string. The fight on HIV and AIDS includes use of songs and poetry. A number of Kenyan artists have invented ways of fighting this scourge in their use of music and this entails use of metaphor in their songs. One such musician is Jackoniah Oyoo who employs metaphor in his song *Merimela.* Human beings use metaphor to make sense of reality. Metaphor is defined as understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. In this scenario, a concrete or clearly organized source domain, being more clearly related to physical and bodily experience, is used to talk about a more abstract and less clearly structured target domain. Metaphorical conceptualization of concepts is so natural and at times unconscious to human beings that they do not even realize that they are using metaphor. This article seeks to examine the metaphorical conceptualization and interpretation of the metaphors used in the song *Merimela.* The ubiquity nature of metaphors makes it possible for a number of metaphors to be used in the song *Merimela.* This article reveals how metaphor reflects and structures Kenyans understanding of reality particularly the fight against HIV and AIDS.
Keywords: Conceptualization, HIV and AIDS, interpretation, metaphor and music.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Health communication is the use of language to provide individuals with important health information. Sharf (1993) notes that health communication is a vital topic of research because everyone interacts with health professionals, encounters health-related messages in the media, has suffered illness or has experienced a loved one with a life-threatening or terminal illness. Health communication had once concentrated on meeting targets of members of audiences but it has developed to turn its focus on enabling informed individual choice. Therefore, health communication has now become more functionally prominent, more empirical and a more strategic gradient of public health programmes (Williams, 1992).

Moreover, Waitiki (2010) argues that it is unfortunate that many issues, including the issues of HIV and AIDS, have often been discussed without much attention being given to the role of language. Language is fundamental in the dissemination of information that would ensure the success of both prevention and treatment of any disease. The role of communication in the fight against HIV and AIDS cannot be overemphasized. The communication of HIV and AIDS issues entails use of language. Therefore, language plays a fundamental role in combating HIV and AIDS and this justifies the study of the language used in HIV and AIDS communication.

Waitiki (2010) also observes that one way of fighting HIV and AIDS is through communication of relevant, honest and complete information. This means that the language used by the speakers and listeners should be a language that majority of the population understand and can be identified with. Therefore, this underscores the importance of using a language that is well understood by the people if communication is indeed to be effective. In Kenya, English and Kiswahili are official languages of communication. However, English continues to be used as the main language of communication in matters relating to HIV and AIDS,

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despite the fact that nearly 17% of the population speak or use English effectively (Angoya, 2002). In addition, Kiswahili has its shortcomings. One argument might be that Kiswahili is understood by more people in Kenya than those who understand English but this is normally with varying degrees of competence and intelligibility. In fact, Webb and Kembo (2000) argue that Kiswahili is spoken by 65% of the Kenyan population. This paper examines the use of Kiswahili in HIV and AIDS communication.

The lack of a cure or vaccine for HIV and AIDS emphasizes the perception that there is only one eventuality for a seropositive, death. Zishiri (2010) maintains that people associate HIV and AIDS with death. Similarly, HIV and AIDS are associated with sex and sexual intercourse. In most African communities, death and sex are tabooed concepts that should not be discussed openly. As such, HIV and AIDS might not be discussed openly in such communities. One common strategy for communicating about HIV and AIDS is via the use of songs and poetry.

Music is more appealing to listeners than posters and seminar presentations, because it entertains and educates at the same time. A number of Kenyan musicians have invented ways of fighting this scourge through their use of music and this entails the use of metaphor. One such musician is Jackoniah Oyoo (uncle Ckoniah) who employs metaphor in his song *Merimela*.

A number of songs use the descriptive language of metaphors to give a listener sensory images of what is happening. In addition, many songwriters use metaphor in order to explain the narrative they want to pass across. Moreover, Kobia (2008) asserts that Conceptual Metaphor Theory helps us to understand the major role that it plays in shaping and directing our understanding and interpretation of messages in it. Uncle Ckoniah has effectively used metaphor in his song *Merimela* to narrate the life of his best friend from primary to university level. In this regard, CMT will be crucial in shaping and directing our understanding and interpretation of messages in the song, *Merimela.*

1.1 Conceptual Metaphor

A conceptual metaphor is defined as the systematic structuring or restructuring of one conceptual target domain in terms of a source domain on to the other. Typically, target domains are abstract while source domains are concrete. Conceptual metaphors are basic and are realized in a language by linguistic metaphors. Lakeoff and Johnson (1980) assert that linguistic metaphors serve as evidence of the embodied nature of our conceptual organization. Basing our argument on LOVE IS A JOURNEY conceptual metaphor as an illustration, Lakeoff and Johnson (1980) perceive the structure of journeys used metaphorically to understand the target domain of love in English. The following cross-domain mappings explain the metaphorical expressions.

Source domain: Journey	Target: Love
Travellers	Lovers
Vehicles	The love relationship itself
The journey	Events/experiences in the relationship
The distance covered	The progress made

Aspects of language, just like other aspects of culture tend to change over time (Akuno, Oloo and Magonya, 2018). Individuals use language differently and at no point can one find two individuals using language the same way. Kövesces (2003) discusses about causes of metaphor variation and points out that metaphor may vary along social style, sub cultural and individual dimensions. The aforementioned aspects on metaphor variations justifies why this study is focusing on metaphor use on one artist, Jackoniah Oyoo's song merimela.

Kövesces (2003) further explains that many metaphors vary because of variation in human experiences. Similarly, Akuno, Oloo and Magonya (2018) assert that metaphors vary because of diverse cognitive processes people put to use for the creation of abstract thought that may also vary. This is an indicator that a person's thinking is enshrined within his immediate environment and this in turn dictates the linguistic metaphors that he uses. As a result, an individual's metaphor varies from that of the other people's. In such a scenario, in a as much as metaphor

and music has been researched by other scholars, metaphor variation gives a leeway for more research to be carried on the same area but should be based on different musicians.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the analytical research design to analyse the linguistic metaphors and the underlying conceptual metaphors in Jackonaya's song *Merimela.* This song is sang in a form of narration which is replete with varied linguistic metaphors. The song was downloaded from YouTube. It was later analysed to identify linguistic metaphors, which were in turn generated into conceptual metaphors within the confines of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

The research adopted the data compilation method as a data collection method. The song was sang in Kiswahili and Sheng. In this scenario, the researcher listened to the audio recordings of the song *Merimela* then extracted, transcribed and compiled the linguistic expressions that were used in the song.

3.0. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All metaphors are structured in terms of a mapping of experience from one cognitive domain to another. In a metaphor, there are two domains a source and target domain. A target domain in a metaphor is the actual object or topic that is being defined, structured or understood and the source domain is the more familiar or delineated domain of experience that is used to understand the target domain. In our analysis of *Merimela,* a number of metaphors were realized. They are:

3.1 LIFE IS A GAMBLING GAME

The target domain in this metaphor is *Merimela's* life and the source domain is the game of gambling. In this metaphor, life is perceived as a gambling game and whatever that comes out of this perception will be called structural similarities (Kövesces, 2010: 104-105). Basically, people recognize connections between the target and source domains and depending on the actions taken, the consequences in life are either to win or lose. We can equally compare one's life with a game of cards, or luck where one is uncertain of the outcome. This metaphor point out that "…if you play your cards right, you can do it" (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003:51). In this metaphor, life is compared to a game of cards that can go either way as it all depends on chance and luck and the outcome can go either way. In the song *Merimela,* the song starts with hope. *Merimela* was calm, disciplined, beautiful and a winner as indicated in the metaphorical expression:

> 1...*tulipoanza shule ulikuwa mpole tena mwenye adabu msichana mrembo kila mara mshindi*

This metaphoric expression indicates that *Merimela* was headed to conquer the world. She had qualities that the other people admired in a young girl and the stakes were very high. In this metaphor, *Merimela* is compared to a winning bet, just like in a game of gambling, a player is capable of detecting early enough when he is likely to win.

On the other side of the game of cards, one is capable of losing. In this case, one can use the linguistic expression; the odds are against me among the others. In the song *Merimela,* things turn upside down for *Merimela* as the following expressions indicate:

> 2…*kwa darasa la saba kipenzi merimela kaanza geuka….na wewe kakuali ingilia mapenzi kiholelaholela*
> 3….*kila mwaka ni mimba kila mwaka abortion ikawa mtindo*

The metaphorical expressions in illustration (2) above indicate the total transformation of *Merimela*; she started leading a careless immoral lifestyle. Whereas in linguistic expression (3), informs us of the deteriorating moral standards of *Merimela* compounded with numerous abortions. This eventually led her to bareness and being HIV infected. The metaphor, LIFE IS A GAMBLING GAME can also be viewed as LIFE IS A SPORT as indicated in the assertion: "Life is a (Sporting) GAME or SPORT. We went on a long holiday to get out of the rat race for a while" (Kövesces, 2010: 146). The linguistic expressions used in in this section clearly exemplify the metaphor LIFE IS A GAME OF CARDS OR GAMBLING.

3.2. LIFE IS A JOURNEY

In this metaphor, life, which is a target domain, is understood through a concrete source domain the journey of life. The metaphor shows an abstract target domain of life where one is likely to experience obstacles being compared to the more physical source domain of a journey. The concept of a journey involves moving from one point to the other and in most cases, these two points are far apart. In addition, every journey has a start and destination. Kövesces (2010) explains how the mappings can be interpreted by constituent elements of the source domain and those of the target domain. Kövesces (ibid) also indicates that the metaphor, LIFE IS A JOURNEY can be explained in the following way:

A Source: Journey	B Target: Love
The Travellers	The Lovers
The Vehicle	The love relationship itself
The journey	Events in the Relationship
The distance covered	The progress made
The obstacles encountered	The difficulties encountered
Decisions about which way to go	Choices about what to do

In this set of mappings, one is able to see the correspondences between the source and target domains. In the early years of *Merimela*, that is the start of her journey of life, she was feeling high and living at the first lane of life. At one point, she almost went crazy. She would not take in instructions from even her close friends. This is evident in the following illustrations.

> 4 ...*ukiamua uchill, unasema ni ndoto*

> *Utumie mipira, ukasema si tamu*
> *...panga uzazi, ukasema ni hectic*
> *Heri upate uokovu, ukakataa ni mapema*

According to illustration (4), *Merimela* was moving very fast in her love life as such, she was too occupied to take in any advice. She would not abstain, practice safe sex, family plan and/or get saved because

for she wanted to enjoy life (*anavunja mifupa*). Here, her journey of life was at its peak. Later on, she encountered a number of obstacles as illustrated below.

> *5…akakwachua mimba*
> *…akadanganywa toa kitu kidogo akafanya abortion*
> *daktari akasema beba mimba huwezi…*
> *na uchungu ya machungu, umepatwa na virusi*

The Illustrations in data set (5) indicate a number of obstacles that *Merimela* faced in her journey of life. She was impregnated and procured abortions severally that led to her bareness that in turn destroyed her marriage. In addition, she was infected with HIV. These linguistic expressions indicate that *Merimela* life was going through a difficult phase in life. Shokr (2006) argues that obstacles in life involves one encountering difficulties due to one making wrong choices in life. The LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor gives the target domain the image-schema structured by its source domain since it is based upon both knowledge and image (Kövesces, 2010). This assertion explains the relationship of the LIFE IS A JOURNEY metaphor and the UP DOWN image schemata as evident in the common expressions being up or low in relation the journey of life. Using the image schema of life, we can conclude that *Merimela`s* life initially up and then after school, she was extremely low.

3.3. A PERSON IS A CONTAINER OR THE HUMAN BODY IS A CONTAINER Metaphor

The metaphor conveys the source domain as a container aspect of the human body. Here, the concrete notion of the physical body (blood and fresh) is used to comprehend the target domain, an individual. The target domain is the abstract notion of a person's specific thoughts and appearances (Kövesces, 2010). In the song *Merimela*, the songwriter uses THE HUMAN BODY IS A CONTAINER metaphor in the following instances.

> 6. *….wakafunyanya quencher*
> *….wadosi na fukara ukaonja Merimela na mima ni kawaida*
> *Ukakuwa ni dustin, ya kutupa takataka*
> *ATM machine, kila kadi yaingia*
> *Ukakuwa daladala, kila mtu akupanda*

The illustrations in data set (6) clearly exemplify the A PERSON IS A CONTAINER metaphor. In this metaphor, *Merimela* is understood as a container. *Merimela* was transformed to a prostitute who any man would drink 'quencher' from her pot, her container would serve both the rich and the poor, and soon enough, she was transformed to a dustbin, a container that would receive any kind of dirt. The songwriter continues to narrate how *Merimela's* body was used as a universal ATM machine that would accept any card. This brings forth another metaphor, LIFE IS A MACHINE. In this case, the clearly and organized source domain of a machine is used to understand the abstract and less organized target domain, Life. The songwriter compares the ATM machine to understand the life of *Merimela*. A universal ATM machine that would indiscriminately accept ATM cards was used to describe *Merimela's* Prostitution as she would accept anyone (*…kila kadi yaingia*). Lastly, *Merimela* was used as a vehicle that would carry all passengers within her reach. The linguistic expression *Ukakuwa daladala, kila mtu akupanda* would still be analysed in terms of THE HUMAN BODY IS A MACHINE metaphor that is capable of moving from one place to another at the same time it is prone to tear and wear. It is evident that after *Merimela* had gone through the entire life cycle, she was damaged beyond the physical repair. As a result, she was declared barren and was seropositive. However, the songwriter encourages *Merimela* not to give up with life by saying:

> 7. *Usilie Mela mama, Usilie Mela mama*
> *Fanya tizi, fanya tizi*
> *Unanafasi ya kuishi usilie*

The linguistic expressions in data set 7 gives an encouragement to *Merimela* not to give up with life despite the fact that she is seropositive and barren. In this case, she is referred to as *Mela* which might be used metaphorically to refer to a transformed and new *Merimela*. The songwriter encourages her to walk towards transformation as she has a new lease of life. The medical therapy that the seropositives undertake is metaphorically referred to as 'exercising' (*fanya tizi*) and this is sure way of downgrading the mental anguish that the seroposives go through once they are infected. This is an indication that despite the fact that one is infected with HIV, he/she can lead a normal life. The foregoing discussion can be compared with the assertion; "…after his/her life broke down, x got it to work again or restarted it" (Kövesces, 2010: 297). In conclusion, LIFE IS A MACHINE metaphor gives us hope that the human body can equally be reformed and transformed after breaking down due to the stresses of contracting HIV.

3.4 LIFE IS A PRECIOUS POSSESSION

This metaphor uses the source domain of something precious to understand the target domain of life. In this regard, life is understood as a gift from a supreme being. Life should be used daily and, Life is worth Living. In the song *Merimela*, LIFE IS A GIFT metaphor is used in the following instances:

> 8. *Merimela kipenzi rafiki wa karibu tangu hapo zamani*
> *Tulipoanza shule nasi tukiwa watoto ulikuwa mpole*
> *tena mwenye adabu msichana mrembo kila mara mshindi*
> *sifa nazo urembo ukaenea kwote ukipita ni whispers*
> *bado naikumbuka siku ulionialika kwa harusi*
> *ukanieleza umshahitimu umepata mchumba*
> *kazi umeshapata na mshahara unapata na itakuwa sherehe*

The illustrations in the data set 7 illustrate the metaphor LIFE IS A PRECIOUS GIFT. In this case, the songwriter illustrates the precious moments that they had shared with the young girl, *Merimela*. They were great friends and *Merimela* was polite, respectful and brilliant. *Merimela* was extremely beautiful and she was famous far and beyond. In fact, she was always a winner. The singer continues to narrate that *Merimela* successfully completed her school, was employed and had arranged for a beautiful wedding. In the metaphor, LIFE IS A GIFT, the precious things in life are used to understand the domain of life. As such, success, beauty, good health, money, power and possessions are used to describe and understand the domain of life. This discussion is in line with the argument; "…Life as being the most precious commodity. Something that we cherish, take care of, something precious, underestimated by others, valuing and admiring life, a wonderful, beautiful and clear thing…" (Kövesces, 2006:84). In this regard, the songwriter uses LIFE AS A GIFT metaphor to describe the wonderful time that they shared with *Merimela*. In this regard, the fight against HIV and AIDS calls for responsible and careful living despite that fact that contracting HIV would mean one might not experience the wonderful and beautiful thing that is referred to by ((Kövesces 2006).

The foregoing discussion can be summarised using an assertion from Kobia (2008) who points out that metaphor can influence one's thinking and perception about a certain issue and may shape one's behaviour especially with regard to HIV and AIDS. In this regard, *Merimela's* song can be used to encourage listeners not to lose hope in life as contracting HIV is not a death sentence. The linguistic metaphors used in the song can also be used to admonish adolescents from making wrong choices while travelling in their journey of life.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that language plays a fundamental role in combatting HIV and AIDS in Kenya. In addition, the use of Kiswahili in health communication is essential given the fact that majority of the Kenyan population can understand and interpret Kiswahili messages. Metaphor is prevalent in the songs that promote the fight on HIV and AIDS as human beings use metaphor to make sense of reality. The ubiquity nature of metaphors makes it possible for a number of metaphors to be used in the song *Merimela*. This article reveals that metaphor reflects and structures Kenyans understanding of reality particularly the fight against HIV and AIDS. As a result, LIFE IS A GIFT metaphor highlights the importance of responsible living as life is taken as a most precious commodity that one can possess. Therefore, Kenyans are advised to live responsibly and protect themselves from contracting HIV and in case they are infected, they need to exercise caution and lead healthy lifestyles.

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