

A Linguistic Analysis of HIV/AIDS Messages in Kenyan Primary School Textbooks

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Abstract

In Kenya, government agencies, line ministries and Non-Governmental Organisations have for several decades now made concerted efforts aimed at prevention of HIV/AIDS through increased awareness about the risk of transmission and promotion of positive behaviour change. One such effort was the introduction, in 2003, by the Kenya Institute of Education, of the integrated HIV/AIDS syllabus in both primary and secondary schools. This study was conceived with the objectives to identify and analyse the language used in primary school textbooks in order to determine its suitability in communicating the HIV/AIDS message, and to provide empirical data on the kind of language used. Six class seven textbooks used in three compulsory subjects in six per cent of primary schools from Nakuru Municipality, and the views and comments of ten class seven teachers yielded the data. The data were analysed according to the Mills (1995) model of stylistic analysis. The findings were that most of the HIV/AIDS related concepts feature in science textbooks, and that of all stylistic forms, transitivity choices are the most popular with textbook writers. The study also established that the stylistic forms used have a bearing on how the readers process and interpret the information presented in the text. The study recommends that to make the integration of HIV/AIDS messages a successful venture, textbook writers need to consider what is the appropriate amount of information on HIV/AIDS in each subject and the suitable stylistics (style of language usage in different contexts) for the level of the reader. It is hoped that the implications

of the study will be useful to teachers, textbook writers and the general society.

Introduction

According to the Kenya National AIDS and STI Control Programme (NASCOP) (2001; 2007), Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), the condition that is caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), is a serious health, social, economic and development problem particularly in many developing countries around the world, and many governments, faced with high infection rates, have declared it a national challenge. In Kenya, most people contract HIV through heterosexual contact while a significant proportion of mothers pass the virus to the child during pregnancy, delivery and breastfeeding. It is estimated that five to 10 per cent of infections in developing countries like Kenya is acquired through blood transfusion (NASCOP, 2001). After President Daniel arap Moi of Kenya declared HIV/AIDS a national disaster in 1999 at an HIV/AIDS symposium, the National AIDS Control Council (NACC) was formed to guide the control efforts and mitigate the impact of the epidemic. Against the reality of a fast growing epidemic (from the 26 cases reported in 1983 to a peak of 13.5 per cent prevalence rate in 2000) (NASCOP, 2001) and the prohibitive cost of Antiretroviral drugs (ARVs), efforts were primarily directed at prevention through increased awareness about the risks of transmission.

AIDS Education was introduced as a subject in primary schools in Kenya in 1999 to help learners acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes that would assist them avoid risky behaviour that would expose them to HIV/AIDS infection. The Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) produced the first AIDS syllabus in 1999 (KIE, 1999). Religious and political leaders protested, arguing that this move amounted to the introduction of sex education in schools, which they said was unacceptable (Chukwu, 2003). In response to this, a new mode was adopted by the Ministry of Education in 2003 whereby HIV/AIDS concepts were integrated within other teaching subjects in both primary and secondary schools.

The critics of AIDS Education continued to argue that the teaching of HIV/AIDS content would be more harmful than beneficial, especially to the primary school child. This was because, in their view, no language would be appropriate to communicate the relevant concepts to children in an acceptable manner. This study, then, set out to analyse the language used in primary

school textbooks stylistically, in an attempt to address these concerns as well as to fill the gap observed by World Bank (2004: x) that "HIV/AIDS education is a newly recognized challenge to the education sector and, as a result, very few programs have been put in place long enough to be formally evaluated." Specifically, the study seeks to provide empirical data on the language that is used in textbooks and to assess its suitability in communicating the HIV/AIDS message to the primary school reader. The study helps to determine whether education as an interventional programme for HIV/AIDS transmission is making any positive contribution to the society. The findings have implications that are of benefit to teachers, textbook writers and the society in general.

Methodology

KIE has recommended five core subjects in the primary school curriculum: English, Science, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Kiswahili. Since this study used a Content Analysis approach, only those subjects that would provide the required linguistic data were sampled, i.e., English, Science, and Social Studies. Mathematics would not have provided linguistic data while Kiswahili would have required translation hence bringing in a new dimension to the study. Therefore they were left out. After a survey that revealed what textbooks most primary schools use, the study selected a sample of two textbooks in each of these three subjects. The six textbooks were *Primary Science* (Nyoro and Muguti, 2004), *Explore English* (Ngugi and Njoki, 2004), *Understanding Science* (Karanja *et al.*, 2004), *Comprehensive Social Studies* (Ondieki, 2004), *Primary English* (JKF, 2004), and *Our Lives Today* (Kamau, 2004). The study purposefully used class seven textbooks because pupils in class seven had been exposed to the integrated curriculum for the longest time by 2007, when the study was carried out (apart from class eight, whose textbooks, however, focus more on revision). The first step in data collection involved reading and identifying all sentences and phrases with explicit HIV/AIDS messages in the six textbooks. Avoiding repetition as much as possible, a final list of 39 phrases was compiled. These phrases formed the corpus of phrases that was coded, analysed, and on the basis of which the linguistic stylistic features were established. Five schools (six per cent of the target population) from across the five zones in Nakuru Municipality were randomly selected. Two class seven teachers from each of the five schools were selected to form a sample size of 10 teachers. Teachers participated in the study both because they are able to contextualise their views in their wider experience, and because they mediate the transmission of HIV/AIDS messages

from the textbooks to the students. These respondents were then interviewed orally and individually based on the sampled texts. Each interview was conducted and tape recorded separately and later transcribed. These responses were then classified according to the objectives of the study after which explanations were given and conclusions drawn from the findings.

Findings and Discussion

In terms of the textbooks that schools were using as main class texts for the different subjects, the study established that for English, 60 per cent of the schools used *Explore English* as a main class text while 40 per cent used *Primary English*. For Science, 80 per cent used *Primary Science*, while 20 per cent used *Understanding Science*. In Social Studies, 60 per cent used *Comprehensive Social Studies* while 40 per cent used *Our Lives Today* as illustrated below (Fig 1).

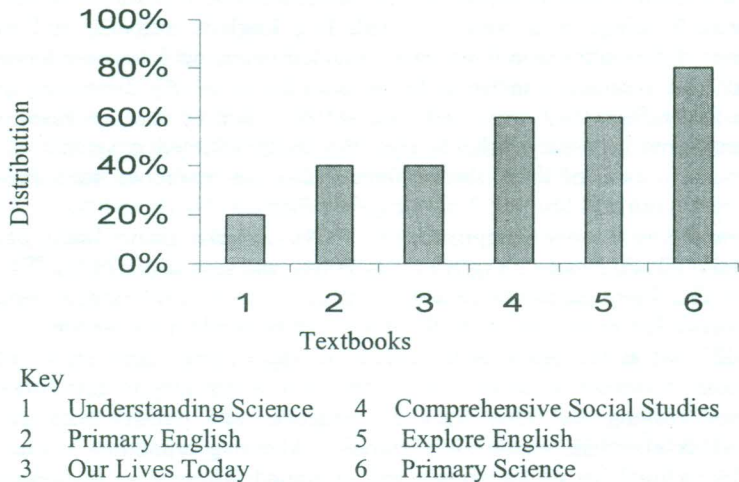


Figure 1: Textbooks distribution amongst the sampled schools

The study established that there was disparity in terms of the number of HIV/AIDS messages each textbook contained. The amount of HIV/AIDS messages differed on the basis of subject area as well as individual textbooks. Some textbooks and subject areas have scanty information while others are

more informative. For instance, English textbooks had the least HIV/AIDS related messages with both *Explore English* and *Primary English* contributing three phrases each which translated to 8.6 per cent of the total 39 phrases identified. Social Studies was the next with *Our Lives Today* contributing 12.8 per cent while *Comprehensive Social Studies* contributed 9.6 per cent. The highest number of HIV/AIDS related messages were found in Science where 12 phrases each were identified in *Primary Science* and *Understanding Science* which translated to 30.2 per cent. Below is a pie chart illustrating how much each textbook contributed in compiling the corpus of phrases.

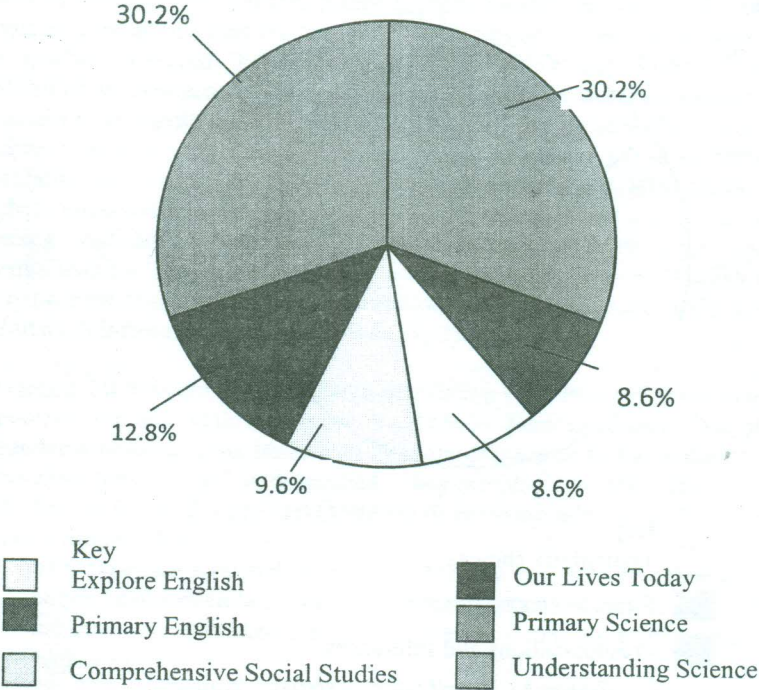


Figure 2: Proportion of HIV/AIDS related messages by subject and textbook

The phrases were then coded into various stylistic categories which include transitivity choices, euphemisms, and presuppositions and inferences. Out of the 39 phrases, 31 were coded under transitivity choices, which translates to 79.3 per cent; nine phrases (13.4 per cent) under euphemisms; and five (7.3

per cent) under presuppositions and inferences. Transitivity is the set of options whereby the speaker encodes his or her experience of the external world and that of the internal world of his or her consciousness. It is concerned with the representation of who acts (agent) and who is acted upon (affected) as described by Mills (1995). Euphemisms are indirect expressions which are usually used as substitute for blunt precision while presuppositions and inferences assist a listener to arrive at an interpretation of the utterance. The figure below illustrates the quantitative analysis of the identified linguistic stylistic forms.

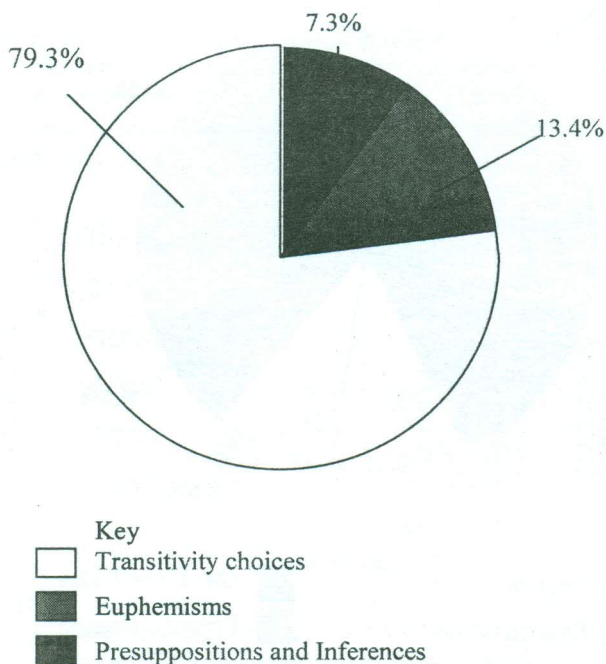


Figure 3: Distribution of stylistic features

In this study, the phrase/sentence was chosen as the primary object or unit of inquiry. This is because the textual information in the textbooks under study is in form of sentences. First, sentences that contain the HIV/AIDS messages/information as per the objectives of the study were identified and then coded under the various linguistic stylistic forms, depending on their functions and structure. For this to be achieved, the study first describes the

sources of these phrases in terms of how much the research population used them and how much HIV/AIDS information is found in each text. This way, the study is able to provide empirical data on the kind of language used in these texts.

(a) Textbooks Used in Primary Schools to Communicate HIV/AIDS Concepts

The study established that in English, 60 per cent of the research population used *Explore English* as the main text while 40 per cent used *Primary English*. It was established that teachers prefer *Explore English* because of the simple language used as this enables the reader to understand more easily. However, one teacher observed that *Explore English* "offers very little as far as HIV/AIDS is concerned." This turned out to be an accurate observation because the text only contributed 8.6 per cent of the phrases identified. The teachers interviewed criticised *Primary English* as a more advanced textbook especially the section dealing with designing posters on HIV/AIDS. The teachers observed that the reader is only given tasks without any explanation, meaning that he/she has to draw from prior knowledge. This inhibits communication. The research further established that *Primary English* does not contribute much in terms of information on HIV/AIDS since only 8.6 per cent of such information was identified (Fig 2).

In Science, 80 per cent of the research population used *Primary Science* as the main class textbook while 20 per cent used *Understanding Science*. Two of the respondents however took issue with *Primary Science* in as far as the content of the dialogue provided is concerned. They wondered whether children can really discuss the myth of sexual cleansing of someone infected with HIV as in the observation below:

The experience related in *Primary Science* can only be relevant to pupils who understand curses, witchcraft, etc. Our school is in an urban set-up and many of our children may not make sense out of such information.

(Science teacher, School 2)

Reservations such as the one expressed in the above claim implies that there is need for textbook writers to consider the social/cultural and linguistic level of their readers as they design the content. The teachers however credited the use of pictures and diagrams in *Primary Science* which they felt were captivating. This study also established that the textbook has given a fair amount of details which are "simple and relevant"; an observation that is attested to by the fact that the text contributed 30.2 per cent of the phrases identified. *Understanding*

Science was criticised as a textbook that has over-summarised concepts. For instance, Myths and Misconceptions, according to a respondent, were not concepts the students were familiar with, and therefore needed more explanation. Furthermore, the students are asked to design posters about myths about HIV/AIDS, in respect to cause, spread and cure. However, according to a teacher:

There is a lot of assumption that learners must have come across the information either in previous classes or through the mass media; an assumption which may not always be the case. Many times the teacher has to come in and clarify information which is unclear or difficult.

(Science teacher, School 5)

Teachers interviewed, arguing from experience, claimed that *Understanding Science* is not sufficiently clear and cannot be relied upon fully. The teacher's assistance is needed if the reader is to understand HIV/AIDS concepts clearly.

In Social Studies, 40 per cent of the schools use *Our Lives Today*. According to teachers interviewed who use the text, "The book offers generalised statements" as far as HIV/AIDS issues are concerned. One teacher pointed out that many textbook writers make assumptions that either the reader will understand relying on knowledge from other sources or the teacher will be there to explain. He pointed out the following example:

Example 1

HIV/AIDS has led to the death of many people who would be creating wealth.

(Phrase 33)

In this example, the teacher feels that it may not be easy for the readers to understand the HIV/AIDS message in it unless the teacher explains, especially considering the linguistic, social and cultural context within which the phrase occurs. Teachers interviewed observed that HIV/AIDS concepts have not been discussed adequately in this text. This study could only identify 12.8 per cent of the phrases containing a HIV/AIDS message from it. Writers of textbooks should make sure to provide contexts that will communicate the content clearly to the targeted readers. This notion was echoed by a respondent as mentioned here below:

A lot of information is left out, since only statements related to HIV/AIDS are issued in the Social Studies text. In such cases, I think the learner needs to know much more than what he/she is

offered by the book. For instance in *Our Lives Today*, for a pupil to understand the idea of “generating wealth” and relate it to HIV/AIDS, he/she will need more knowledge than what is provided.

(Social Studies teacher, School 4)

Sixty per cent of the schools in the research sample use *Comprehensive Social Studies* as a main class text. According to teachers interviewed, HIV/AIDS concepts are clearly explained in this text using simple language. There are also picture illustrations which the teacher characterised as captivating. However, textbook writers should take into consideration the aspect of precision of meaning. One of the teachers interviewed said:

Most Social Studies books have pictures of the infected in hospital beds or homes. While pictures are captivating, this I feel can create the impression that all HIV positive patients are bedridden. Writers therefore should be very careful not to leave room for misunderstanding or misinterpretation of their examples.

(Social Studies teacher, School 5)

This study established that the information on HIV/AIDS is sketchy in this textbook, which was attested to by the fact that only 9.6 per cent of the phrases were identified from it.

(b) The Corpus of Phrases Selected from the Textbooks

The study identified all phrases/sentences within the sampled texts that have information on HIV/AIDS. This research finally came up with a total of 39 phrases, sourced from all six textbooks. Since some information was similar in different texts, repetition was avoided when compiling the final list of 39. These are the ones we call “the corpus of phrases” in this paper. They are shown below:

1. AIDS is a disease which can spread through sharing of needles and syringes.
2. The killer disease
3. This was done as a precaution against the spread of HIV/AIDS.
4. Design a poster illustrating how to help people with HIV/AIDS.
5. Design a poster illustrating what causes HIV/AIDS.
6. Design a poster illustrating myths about HIV/AIDS.
7. Slimming disease
8. The curse
9. People with HIV/AIDS suffer from several different diseases from time to time because their resistance to infection is weakened.

10. Be safe!
11. Was made clean by another uncle
12. Avoid risky behaviour that may lead to further infection with HIV/AIDS!
13. He died of the curse.
14. Is HIV/AIDS real or just a myth?
15. HIV/AIDS has no respect for age, race, religion or profession.
16. Do not be one of them!
17. She is now coming to live with us.
18. People who are infected by HIV virus are said to be suffering from AIDS.
19. People infected with AIDS should always take a balanced diet.
20. AIDS has no cure but there are medicines to help those infected to live longer.
21. People infected with HIV/AIDS have weakened immune system, but may look healthy.
22. Anybody can get infected with HIV/AIDS.
23. Anytime we handle an AIDS patient we have to avoid infection.
24. We can help those infected with HIV/AIDS, live longer by giving them love and care.
25. People infected with HIV may feel isolated and may suffer shock, anger, fear, depression, etc.
26. AIDS is real and can infect anybody exposed to it.
27. AIDS has no cure as of now.
28. Sex with anyone of any age does not cure AIDS, it only spreads it.
29. AIDS is a disease caused by a virus called HIV.
30. Shaking hands with a person suffering from AIDS cannot spread HIV but only spread through contact with body fluids which have the virus.
31. Challenges to African economies include controlling the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS.
32. Many highly trained people are being killed by AIDS.
33. Effects on the challenges to African economies: HIV/AIDS has led to the death of many people who would be creating wealth. Many African countries are working hard to deal with HIV/AIDS.
34. A lot of money and time is spent caring for HIV/AIDS patients.
35. People heal faster when they experience love around them.
36. People suffering from HIV/AIDS need a lot of support from family members.
37. Faithfulness in marriage prevents getting HIV/AIDS.

38. Marriage enables one to have one sex partner to be faithful to in order to avoid getting sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS, gonorrhoea and syphilis.
39. One out of seven people in Kenya is HIV positive.

The study established that since the curriculum expects that HIV/AIDS concepts be integrated within all teaching subjects, all textbooks mention at least something related to HIV/AIDS. The difference lies in the treatment that the subject matter is given by the different textbook writers. This is clearly seen through the disparity that this research observed in terms of how much each textbook contributed in compiling the corpus of phrases. This study also observed that the concepts are given more prominence in the Science texts compared to textbooks in other subjects. This is well illustrated by the fact that phrases from Science texts translate to 60.4 per cent compared to 39.6 per cent realised from both English and Social Studies texts. One of the teachers interviewed expressed the view that teaching of HIV/AIDS concepts was more effective when it was treated separately as a subject on its own.

Some information is given in statement form. Probably, instead of just mentioning in a sentence, they should deal with HIV issues in a topic, to ensure it is explained clearly and so easy to understand like it used to be done in the other curriculum, where it was well covered since it was a subject on its own.

(CRE / S/Studies teacher, School 3)

Another suggestion by one of the interviewees was that instead of treating HIV/AIDS concepts as part of another major topic, for instance "Health" as done in *Primary Science*, they could be discussed in a separate topic so that they are given adequate coverage by the textbook writers. He says:

To educate the learner better, HIV/AIDS concepts should be treated separately instead of being integrated. Some texts like *Primary English* offer very little and therefore rely heavily on what learners already know.

(English / S/Studies teacher, School 1)

Considering that this research established that some textbooks for instance in English and Social Studies do not give HIV/AIDS adequate coverage, the above views cannot be dismissed. They could be a pointer towards some of the solutions that could lead to effective coverage of HIV/AIDS issues in school textbooks.

(c) Linguistic Choices in the Corpus of Phrases

The phrases containing HIV/AIDS related messages (the corpus of phrases) were then coded into various linguistic choices (stylistic categories) which include transitivity choices, euphemisms, and presuppositions and inferences. While there could be other stylistic features adopted in these texts, for instance those that focus on words or discourse, this research purposefully selected these features because they target the phrase/sentence which is the main method of writing in textbooks meant for the primary school reader. As Mills (1995) has observed, an analysis of language items in isolation, for example words only, is insufficient and so stylistics needs to turn to an analysis of larger-scale features in order to be able to describe the meaning of texts. She further observes that words only make sense in relation to their context and their co-text (Mills, 1995). This section therefore identifies and describes these stylistic features as used in the corpus of phrases and also within the textbooks. By analysing examples of language use, this study hopes to show that language use can present and perpetuate a particular view of a concept. For instance, the fact that sentences/phrases make sense in relation to their co-text, context and history of their usage (that is, the background knowledge needed for their making sense) is brought out. Textbook writers need to take this into account because it is only when content makes sense that it can be viewed as being communicative.

(i) Transitivity Choices

This is the set of options whereby the speaker encodes his experiences of the external world and that of the internal world of his/her consciousness. Transitivity is concerned with the representation of who acts (who is an agent) and who is acted upon (who is affected by the actions of others) (Mills, 1995). As far as this study is concerned, HIV/AIDS is the agent while the HIV-infected person or others close to him/her are the affected. This is well illustrated through the sentence below:

Example 2

People suffering from HIV/AIDS need a lot of support from family members.

(Phrase 36)

In the above statement, the people suffering from HIV/AIDS are presented together with their family members as the ones affected by the agent which in this case is the HIV/AIDS. This way, the speakers' experiences of the external world and that which he/she believes in are clearly embedded within the

statement and this is indicated through this style of writing and through the content. This study thus views such usage as appropriate to the primary school reader. Transitivity choices also express how actions are represented, what actions appear in a text, who does them and to whom they are done (Mills, 1995). This can be illustrated through the sentence below:

Example 3

People who are infected by the HIV virus are said to be suffering from AIDS.

(Phrase 18)

In the sentence above, it is clear what the agent is (AIDS), what the action is (infection), and to whom the action is done (the person suffering). This view of transitivity forms a coherent world-view and can quite easily be translated into concerns about the ways in which language and ideology are interrelated; a concept that even a young reader in class seven would make sense of. The use of transitivity is also seen in expressions that make it possible for characters to make more general statements about the way they view their position in the world and their relation to others. This is as illustrated below in:

Example 4

People heal faster when they experience love around them.

(Phrase 35)

This is a general statement referring to what is the general belief in as far as the position of the infected and his/her relation to those close to him/her at the time of need is. Systematic use of transitivity helps readers to distinguish between world-views, for instance where the agency is attributed to inanimate objects rather than people. In some cases such a choice may embody a view of the world whereby the agent in some sense is the recipient of actions rather than the instigator. Mills (1995) argues that in such cases, choices about agency embody a view of the world whereby these characters operate within but not on nature.

Example 5

Many highly trained people are being killed by AIDS.

(Phrase 32)

In the sentence above, the inanimate object AIDS is the agent, it is the agent of death, and thus is viewed as a "killer." In distinguishing such world-views,

readers are able to determine whether a character is the “passive” victim of circumstances or is actively in control of the environment and therefore making decisions and taking action (Mills, 1995). Such usage challenges the young reader to think beyond the denotative meaning. In transitivity choices, there is the implication in sentences that the agent has the ability to take action and avoid being a passive victim of the prevailing circumstances as illustrated in the example below:

Example 6

Do not be one of them!

(Phrase 1)

In discussions of transitivity, there is a range of choices which are available and these revolve around three sets of choices: material, mental, and relational. In this system, processes can be categorised into those elements which can be observed in the real world and which have consequences. This option is called material. An example is as in the phrase below:

Example 7

She is now coming to live with us.

(Phrase 17)

Those elements which involve actions that take place in the mind are mental; for example, “She thought about the situation.” This research did not find a mental option in the phrases identified but the study recommends it would be appropriate to incorporate it as well since it would enrich language use and create diversity.

Options relating two elements together are relational, for instance:

Example 8

AIDS is real and can infect anybody exposed to it.

(Phrase 26)

The example above is a clear summary of the existence or reality of HIV/AIDS and that no one is safe from its threat. Since the facts can be observed in the world around us, the choice is material while at the same time it is connecting the disease and the person infected and so it is relational. Example 8 illustrates the many relational choices established in this study. It should however be noted that material choices are further classified into “material action intention” and “material action supervision” (Mills, 1995).

With material action intention, the agent has a clear will to do something as illustrated by the sentence below:

Example 9

We can help those infected with HIV/AIDS live longer by giving them love and care.

(Phrase 24)

The clear will in the above phrase is “helping” the infected through love and care. On the other hand, there is material action supervision where things are not done intentionally. For instance in:

Example 10

Anybody can get infected with HIV/AIDS.

(Phrase 22)

The action of “getting infected” is not intentional. It should however be noted that through this transitivity choice, verbal processes where things are not done intentionally are captured. Mills (1995) further observes that when we make choices between the different roles participants might take, these decisions are shown syntactically through transitivity choices and that this system of analysing linguistic options in texts is primarily concerned with the roles of human participants. She argues that a broad distinction therefore should be made to differentiate conscious actors who are perceived as beings capable of thought, communication, plans and actions, from everything else in the world, organic and inorganic, animate and inanimate. It is therefore the contention of this study that transitivity analyses can yield insights into reading a text. Transitivity choices like other linguistic choices have a range of meanings dependent on the context in which they occur and the presuppositions which the reader brings to bear on the interpretive process. As can be observed from the examples, it is evident that primary school textbook writers adopt material and relational choices to the exclusion of mental. The study observes that no mental choices were found in the texts. This is probably because such would require the reader to use interpretation processes which might be too complicated for him/her unlike in the case of relational and material choices. All these choices can be made appropriate by providing examples which can be brought down to the level of the reader. The examples also demonstrate that systematic use of certain types of transitivity choices can help the reader to distinguish between different world-views, thereby getting the meaning.

Out of the 39 phrases identified in the texts, 31 were coded under transitivity choices and this translates to 79.3 per cent. The study established therefore that some stylistics, for example transitivity, is particularly popular with primary school textbook writers. Teachers who were interviewed argued that simple and straightforward method of writing as presented through transitivity choices is the best for class seven readers and by extension to all primary school readers. This is because such texts are easier to understand, since the reader can easily identify the actor, the acted and the world-view presented. It is only then that language use in a text can be described as being suitable.

(ii) Euphemisms

Euphemisms are indirect expressions which are usually used as substitutes for blunt precision. Almost all cultures have certain notions or things that people try to avoid mentioning directly even when there is such a term in the language (Zhenqiang, 2006). The issue of HIV/AIDS is one that people in Kenya do not want to address directly, probably due to the main mode of transmission (sexuality) which is still considered by many local cultures as a taboo subject. Thus, expressions that refer to the issue indirectly have been developed and different people use them differently depending on what aspect of the disease they want to refer to. For instance, a speaker may refer to the disease as “the killer,” as can be seen in the example below:

Example 11

The killer disease

(Phrase 2)

This way the speaker will be describing the disease from the perspective of its consequences on the infected, thereby avoiding direct reference. On the other hand, another speaker/writer may refer to the disease as indicated by the example below:

Example 12

The slimming disease

(Phrase 7)

In such a case, the speaker/writer will be describing the disease from the perspective of what it does (the damage it causes) to the infected persons. This kind of indirect reference makes it sound less blunt and probably less threatening. Euphemisms are used in most cases for the purpose of avoiding taboos, or avoiding hurting other people (Mills, 1995). For instance, a phrase

such as example 12 above would be used to imply that the effects of the disease are grave, they cause death and therefore the victim is helpless when faced with such a predicament. At the same time, this indirect expression is in a sense exonerating the infected person from blame. HIV/AIDS is a dreaded disease. Many people have attributed the disease to all sorts of causes for instance witchcraft, curses, sorcery and so forth, as seen in the example below:

Example 13

He died of the curse.

(Phrase 13)

“The curse” here suggests that the sufferer is just a helpless victim of the menace and so exempted from blame, as there are powers beyond him/her which are involved. This way, the feelings of the victim are protected and the unpleasantness of the subject matter is avoided. While it could be humane to view the matter this way, it is important to note that this does not aid communicative effectiveness which should be the primary goal of every text. However, this research concurs with the observation that the person using euphemistic phrases does not claim responsibility for inventing it but is simply calling upon pre-existing knowledge which is assumed to be self-evidently true (Mills, 1995). For instance, in the example 12 above, the expression “the slimming disease” has been used to describe those infected with HIV because by the effects of the disease, the infected persons are known to grow thin. Such a phrase has an ideological message, and in such a case it is not possible to say, “It’s not true” or “I don’t agree” because the phrase is simply not posed as the type of knowledge about which it is possible to disagree. Euphemisms are powerful tools whose need is both social and emotional (Ham, 2001). For instance, in this research, the use of the euphemisms cited above such as “the slimming disease,” “the killer disease” or even “the curse” allows discussions of a sensitive subject such as HIV/AIDS without enraging, outraging or upsetting anybody. The usage also protects the speaker/writer from possible offence which may occur in broaching of such a taboo subject as HIV/AIDS and by extension, sexuality. It is the contention of this study therefore that euphemisms too can aid communication effectiveness but writers need to bear in mind the aspects that would hinder communication so as to put them in perspective.

In this study, the euphemistic expressions identified are three out of a total of 39 phrases and this translates to 7.3 percent. This means that this is not a popular stylistic feature with the primary school textbook writers. This is

probably because language is the result of human cognition whose structure and functions are based on our experience. This means that to interpret euphemisms correctly, there is need to include associations and impressions which come from experience and which the primary school reader does not have, hence the avoidance of extensive use of the stylistic device in their textbooks. However, as can be seen from the discussion on the few that are used in the texts under study, they are powerful tools whose need is both social and emotional. Writers only need to avoid the pitfalls that might arise, by considering the level of knowledge of their readers and the ideological associations that might influence the interpretive process.

(iii) Presuppositions and Inferences

Phrases must be interpreted by drawing on factors other than the simple literal meaning of the words of which they consist. Presuppositions are what are taken by the speaker to be the common ground of the participants in the conversation (Brown and Yule, 1983). Since the discourse analyst, like the hearer, has no direct access to the speaker's intended meaning in producing an utterance, he/she often has to rely on a process of inference to arrive at an interpretation of utterances or for the connections between utterances. There are three aspects of the process of interpreting a speaker's or writer's intended meaning in producing discourse. These are, first, trying to work out what the intention of the writer is; secondly, using general knowledge of the world; and thirdly, determining the inference which needs to be made. This study established that the phrases identified under this category could be subjected to the three aspects of the process of interpreting the writer's intended meaning. We can examine the phrase below:

Example 14

He died of the curse.

(Phrase 13)

The intention in the above example could be to show that the dead person was innocent and probably that the circumstances that brought about this death were beyond his control. It could also be calling upon the readers to interpret it using their knowledge about HIV/AIDS. In such a case, the inference to be made is that anybody is susceptible to "the curse" and once it strikes, its victims are helpless. It is the contention of this study that there are patterns of background knowledge which are presupposed when texts address HIV/AIDS issues. Writers of textbooks need to bear this aspect in mind as they design

texts for the primary school reader because failure to associate content with relevant background knowledge will affect communication. This is well illustrated by the examples given below:

Example 15

Avoid risky behaviour that may lead to further infection with HIV/AIDS!

(Phrase 12)

The presuppositions for the phrase are:

- (a) The reader has the ability to do the "avoiding."
- (b) The reader understands what "risky behaviour" refers to.

In such a case, since the knowledge is embedded within the background knowledge necessary to make sense of the phrase, it is more difficult to contest. Therefore, the reader is expected to unpack the background knowledge and presuppositions and take issue with them. This may not always be obvious or easy. The following phrase is suitable to examine:

Example 16

AIDS has no cure as of now.

(Phrase 27)

The presuppositions for it are:

- (a) It might get a cure later.
- (b) Some people have been thinking that it has.

In such a case, the presuppositions posit the view that the cure of HIV/AIDS is an issue that has preoccupied many minds. It draws on the ideological knowledge about HIV/AIDS. Since such phrases work on the basis of assumed background knowledge, they can have a strong ideological impact in persuading people that they are indeed an accurate version of reality (Mills, 1995).

This study identified five phrases that could be classified under the category of presuppositions and inferences which translate to 13.4 per cent. This means that this stylistic feature is not very popular among textbook writers. This is so probably because of the complex interpretation processes required to arrive at meaning and which might be tedious for a primary school reader. Therefore, textbook writers should take into account these difficulties if they have to use the device or alternatively consider other more appropriate stylistics so as to

achieve the objective of communicating the HIV/AIDS message to this level of readers.

Conclusion

The study concludes that transitivity as a linguistic choice is the most popular with primary textbook writers while euphemisms are the least popular despite the latter being in a better position to address social aspects of HIV/AIDS that may be difficult to capture through transitivity. Therefore, besides transitivity which is a popular language choice with textbook writers and which seems to effectively communicate the HIV/AIDS message to the primary school reader, other stylistics too enrich the content by bringing in different dimensions of understanding. Thus, euphemisms address emotional and social needs of the content. For those stylistic forms that require complex interpretation processes to arrive at meaning, this study calls upon writers to consider carefully the target audience because this will enable them to come up with communicative texts. In summary, this study has been able to evaluate the appropriateness of messages about HIV/AIDS contained in primary school textbooks in Kenya and has thus made contribution to the assessment of this particular interventional measure in the fight against HIV/AIDS in this country.

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