

SEXUAL INTERCOURSE EUPHEMISMS IN THE GĪKŪYŪ LANGUAGE: A COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS APPROACH

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The research on which this paper is based set out to identify the sexual intercourse euphemisms used in Gĩkũyũ, a Bantu language spoken in Kenya, then discuss the semantic and lexical processes used in those euphemisms, and, finally, point out the specific metaphors that underlie these latter. To achieve these objectives, the research used data collected (using an interview schedule) from 20 native Gĩkũyũ speakers. The euphemisms were assigned to their corresponding semantic and lexical processes, and then discussed in terms of their correspondences between the source domain and target domain, two key concepts of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The specific metaphors behind those euphemisms were discussed. It transpired from this discussion that men generally looked at sexual intercourse more as WORK, A GAME, WAR, FOOD and UTILITY, while women looked at it mainly as a form of COMPANIONSHIP.

1. INTRODUCTION

Different cultures use various linguistic devices in the formation of euphemisms (Warren, 1992: 128). Following Crespo-Fernández (2006) and Zizheng (2005), such linguistic devices may be categorized into semantic processes (metaphor, metonymy, personification, ideophone, circumlocution/periphrasis, hyperbole, particularization, and understatement/meiosis) and lexical processes (borrowing, substitution/synonymy, use of vague words and expressions, use of stories from religion and the use of technical terms/technicisms). Sexual intercourse is one of those sensitive topics that people fear talking about in almost all cultures (Baldo, Aggleton & Slutkin, 1993), and one which is therefore talked about euphemistically using one (or more) of these processes.

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While many studies have been done on euphemisms within the frameworks of rhetoric, lexicography, semantics, sociolinguistics, fuzzy theory, and pragmatics (Fan, 2006), little research has been done on euphemisms within that of Cognitive Linguistics (CL). As a central part of the interdisciplinary field of Cognitive Science (Alm-Arvius, 2008), CL is a school of linguistic thought that provides an approach to studying human imagination in which language reveals systematic processes at work (Evans & Green, 2006). This is an approach to language study that is based on our experiences of the world and the way we perceive and conceptualize them (Ungerer & Schmid, 1996).

In the realm of Cognitive Linguistics, metaphors are “devices that allow us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 117). The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) proposed by Lakoff & Johnson (1980) is a commonly used cognitive model in CL. In its broadest sense, the CMT defines metaphor as “a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system” (Lakoff, 1993: 203); that is, a mapping of conceptual correspondences from a source domain (the realm of the physical or more concrete reality) to a target domain (the taboo of sexual intercourse, in this paper). Within the cognitive tradition, metaphor is thus understood as a device with the capacity to structure our conceptual system, providing at the same time a particular understanding of the world and a way of making sense of our experiences. In an updated interpretation of metaphor, Lakoff (1993: 208) says:

The metaphor is not just a matter of language, but of thought and reason. The language is secondary. The mapping is primary, in that it sanctions the use of source domain language and inference patterns for target domain concepts.

The direct relevance of the relationship between metaphor and euphemism in this paper lies in the fact that many euphemisms are metaphor-based (Ungerer & Schmid, 1996).

Crespo-Fernández (2008: 96) observes that although there seems to be a substantial body of research on the metaphorical conceptualization of the taboo of sex (see Lakoff, 1987 and Murphy, 2001, among others), relatively

little attention has been paid to the conceptual metaphor as a euphemistic device. That is why the present study decided to fill this gap by first identifying the semantic and lexical processes involved in the creation of euphemisms for sexual intercourse in Gĩkũyũ and then discussing the specific metaphors that underlie these latter.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Data collection procedure

The present study is mainly a qualitative analysis of responses which a sample of twenty (10 male and 10 female) speakers of Gĩkũyũ gave to the following interview question: “There are words that Gĩkũyũ speakers avoid mentioning because they cause discomfort or are considered inappropriate and offensive. Name any 5 polite words in Gĩkũyũ that are used to avoid mentioning sexual intercourse and explain why each of the words is used.”²

The twenty respondents were purposively sampled native speakers of Gĩkũyũ who could read and write in English and Gĩkũyũ. The study considered this sample to be representative because a larger one would not necessarily have given varied interesting data, as Rubin (1987: 118) would argue. And so would argue Ritchie, Lewis & Elam (2003), who suggest that qualitatively inclined samples should “lie under 50” (p. 84). Gender was used as an independent variable since, according to Gathigia & Ndũng’ũ (2011), it is one of the variables that influence the usage of euphemisms.

2.2 Data analysis procedure

The respondents’ responses will be arranged in several tables: Table 1 will report the euphemisms of sexual intercourse in Gĩkũyũ as mentioned by the 20 native speakers and Table 2 will categorize the euphemisms into conceptual domains.

² The full interview schedule is given in the appendix.

3. THE SEXUAL INTERCOURSE EUPHEMISMS IDENTIFIED IN GĪKŪYŪ

From the respondents, the study collected 44 euphemisms used in Gīkūyū for sexual intercourse expressions. They are reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Euphemisms of sexual intercourse in Gĩkũyũ as mentioned by 20 native speakers

	GĨKŪYŪ	GLOSS	NTM		SP	LP
			M	W		
1	<i>Kūmaita</i>	to pour	9	8	MET	
2	<i>Gũkomania</i>	to sleep / lie with each other	6	8	MET	
3	<i>Kūonana kīmwĩrĩ</i>	to see each other bodily / physically	4	9	MET	
4	<i>Ngwatano / kūgwatana</i>	holding of / to hold each other	5	4	MET-UND	
5	<i>Nguĩko / ngwĩko</i>	traditional mock sex activities for the unmarried	5	3	MET	
6	<i>Kūguĩkana / gwĩkana</i>	to do each other	3	2	MET	
7	<i>Kūheana</i>	to give each other	2	2	MET	VWE
8	<i>Kūrĩa irio</i>	to eat food	2	1	MET	USR
9	<i>Ndathano</i>	shooting each other	2	1	MET	
10	<i>Gwetha ciana</i>	searching for children	1	2	MET-MTN	
11	<i>Ita</i>	war	2	1	MET	
12	<i>Nūndano</i>	wrestling each other	2	-	MET	
13	<i>Kūmenyana</i>	to know each other	1	1	MET	USR
14	<i>Kūnogorana / kūnogora mwĩrĩ</i>	to massage or relax each other / to relax the body	2	-	MET-MTN	

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15	<i>Kũheana mbakĩ / gũkundania mbakĩ</i>	to give snuff to each other	1	1	MET	
16	<i>Kwendana</i>	to love each other	1	1	MET	
17	<i>Gũkoma na mūtumia</i>	to sleep with a woman	1	1	MET-CIR	
18	<i>Kũgwatania ũrugari</i>	to give warmth to each other	1	1	MET-UND	
19	<i>Gũkenania kwa mũthuri na mūtumia</i>	(of a man and a woman) to make each other happy	-	2	MET-CIR	
20	<i>Irío</i>	food	1	1	MET	
21	<i>Kũrĩana</i>	to eat each other	1	1	MET	
22	<i>Gũthecana</i>	to pierce each other	1	1	MET	
23	<i>Kũroora mũgũnda</i>	to inspect the land	1	-	MET	
24	<i>Kũhutania</i>	to touch each other	1	-	MET	
25	<i>Gũtwarithia mũithikiri</i>	to ride a bicycle	-	1	MET	
26	<i>Mũkanyano</i>	pecking each other	1	-	MET	
27	<i>Gũthiĩ toro</i>	to go to sleep; to lie with	1	-	MET-UND	
28	<i>Gũthiĩ ũrĩrĩ</i>	to go to bed	1	-	MET-UND	
29	<i>Gũthambania</i>	to wash each other	1	-	MET	
30	<i>Kũigua wega</i>	to feel good	1	-	VWE	VWE
31	<i>Gwĩkenia</i>	to make each other feel good	1	-	MET	VWE
32	<i>Kũigana thĩ</i>	to put each other down	1	-	MET	

33	<i>Kūingīrana</i>	to enter each other	-	1	MET	
34	<i>Gūcocera</i>	to ride / peddle	1	-	MET	
35	<i>Mūdū mūrūme gūtonya mūthiĩ</i> <i>ita harĩ kaingo ka mūtumia</i>	(of a man) to put the one that goes to war (penis) into the lady's thing	1	-	MET-CIR	
36	<i>Kūgwatithania</i>	to fertilize each other	1	-	MET	
37	<i>Kūhinganīria bata</i>	to satisfy each other's needs	1	-	MET	VWE
38	<i>Wīra</i>	work	1	-	MET	VWE
39	<i>Kūhehio</i>	to be made wet	-	1	MET	VWE
40	<i>Kūrīa kīgwa</i>	to eat sugarcane	1	-	MET	
41	<i>Gūtūgūta</i>	to slash	-	1	MET	
42	<i>Gūcamania</i>	to taste each other	1	-	MET	
43	<i>Kūruta mbiro</i>	to remove soot	1	-	MET	
44	<i>Ūhoro wa mūdūrūme na mūdū</i> <i>mūka</i>	the things of a man and a woman	1	-	MET-CIR	
Tot.			71	55		

KEY:

NTM: Number of Times Mentioned, **M:** by male respondents, **W:** by female respondents, **LP:** Lexical Process, **SP:** Semantic Process, **MET:** Metaphor, **USR:** Use of stories from religion, **VWE:** Vague word and expression, **UND:** Understatement, **MTN:** Metonymy, **CIR:** Circumlocution.

Table 2: Conceptual domains for sexual intercourse

Conceptual domains:	Number of euphemisms	% of euphemisms in
Sexual intercourse is:	per conceptual domain	each conceptual domain
COMPANIONSHIP	12 euphemisms	28%
WORK	6 euphemisms	14%
A GAME	8 euphemisms	18%
WAR	5 euphemisms	11%
FOOD	4 euphemisms	9%
UTILITY	9 euphemisms	20%
Total	44	

The conceptual domain *companionship* covers the following euphemisms: *gūkomania* (No. 2 in the table above) ‘to sleep with each other’; *kūonana kīmwīrī* (No.3) ‘seeing each other bodily / physically’; *kūmenyana* (No. 13) ‘to know each other’; *kūheana mbakī / gūkundania mbakī* (No. 15) ‘giving snuff to each other’; *ngwatano/kūgwatana* (No. 4) ‘holding each other’; *kwendana* (No. 16) ‘to love each other’; *kūhinganīria bata* (No. 37) ‘to satisfy each other’s needs’; *gūcamania* (No. 42) ‘to taste each other’; *kūhutania* (No. 24) ‘to touch each other’; *kūguīkana \ gwīkana* (No. 6) ‘to do each other’; *kūingīrana* (No. 33) ‘to enter each other’; *kūheana* (No. 7) ‘to give each other’; and *ūhoru wa mūdūrūme na mūdū mūka* (No. 44) ‘the things of a man and a woman’. The conceptual domain *work* covers the following: *wīra* (No. 38) ‘work’; *gūtūgūta* (No. 41) ‘to slash’; *kūruta mbiro* (No. 43) ‘to remove soot’; *kūroora mūgūnda* (No. 23) ‘to inspect the land’; *gūthambania* (No. 29) ‘to wash each other’; and *kūgwatania ūrugarī* (No. 18) ‘to give warmth to each other’. The conceptual domain *food* covers *irio* (No. 20) ‘food’; *kurīana* (No. 21) ‘to eat each other’; *kūrīa kīgwa* (No. 40) ‘to chew sugar cane’; and *kūrīa irio* (No. 8) ‘to eat food’. The conceptual domain *game* covers *kūnogorana / kūnogora mwīrī* (No.14) ‘to massage or relax each other’; *nūdano* (No. 12) ‘wrestling each other’; *gwīkenia* (No. 31) ‘to make oneself feel good’; *kūigana thī* (No. 32) ‘to put each other down’; *gūtwarithia mūithikiri* (No. 25) ‘to ride a bicycle’; *ngwīko / nguīko* (No. 5)

'traditional mock sex activities for the unmarried'; *gūcocera* (No. 34) 'to ride / to peddle'; and *gūkenania kwa mūthuri na mūtumia* (No. 19) 'of a man and a woman making each other happy'. The conceptual domain *war* covers *ndathano* (No. 9) 'shooting each other'; *gūthecana* (No. 22) 'to pierce each other'; *mūkanyano* (No. 26) 'pecking each other'; *mūndū mūrūme gūtonyia mūthiī ita harī ka mūtumia* (No. 35) 'of a man putting the one that goes to war (penis) into the lady's thing'; and *ita* (No. 11) 'war'. The conceptual domain *utility/function* covers *kūmaīta* (No. 1) 'to pour'; *kūigua wega* (No. 30) 'to feel good'; *kūhehio* (No. 39) 'to be made wet'; *gwetha ciana* (No. 10) 'to search for children'; *gūkomania* (No. 2) 'to sleep with each other/ lie with'; *kugūthiī toro* (No. 27) 'to go to sleep'; *gūthiī ūrīrī* (No. 28) 'to go to bed'; *gūkoma na mūtumia* (No. 17) 'to sleep with a woman'; and *kūgwatithania* (No. 36) 'to fertilize each other'.

4. SEMANTIC AND LEXICAL PROCESSES USED IN THE FORMATION OF SEXUAL INTERCOURSE EUPHEMISMS IN GĪKŪYŪ

4.1 Semantic processes

Though semantic processes may be both extra-linguistic and linguistic, this paper reports only the linguistic ones.

4.1.1 *Metaphor*

Lakoff & Johnson (1980: 5) define *metaphor* as a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system. That is, it is a set of conceptual correspondences from a source domain (the realm of the physical or more concrete reality) to a target domain. Through conceptual metaphor, the source domain (euphemistic expression) is mapped systematically to the target domain (taboo expression). Metaphors shape and structure our perceptions and understanding, lending a framework within which our experiences are interpreted and assigned meaning. Wheeler (1994: 21) claims that metaphor is not only a specific figure of speech but also, in its broader sense, the foundation of language itself.

In the present study, the metaphor is the most powerful (i.e. the most frequently used) process in the formation of sexual euphemisms in Gĩkũyũ. The very high frequency of use of metaphorical euphemisms in this study confirms Crespo-Fernandez's (2006: 96) argument that the use of metaphor stands out as the most prolific linguistic device of referent manipulation. It also proves that the use of metaphor fits the purpose of euphemism particularly well.

4.1.2 *Metonymy*

In Cognitive Linguistics, *metonymy* is a means of semantic enrichment or elaboration (Peirsman & Geeraerts, 2006: 274)³. According to Radden & Kövecses (1999: 21), metonymy is a mapping from part to whole, whole to part, or part to part. (This definition implies that synecdoche is a kind of metonymy.) Whereas both metaphor and metonymy involve the substitution of one term for another, the latter works by the contiguity (association) between the two concepts, while the former works by the similarity between them (Fass, 1998). For instance, in the euphemism *gwetha ciana* ('searching for children'), we are able to associate *ciana* ('children'), the products of sexual intercourse, with the target domain.

4.1.3 *Understatement*

An understatement is a statement which, somehow, because it is conspicuously less informative than some other statement, can be used to express the meaning of the more informative statement (Israel, 2006: 143). For example, the euphemisms *kūgwatania ūrugari* ('to give warmth to each other') and *gũthiĩ toro* ('to go to sleep' or / 'to lie with') exhibit

³ Other cognitive linguists who have defined *metonymy* are Barcelona (2000) and Croft (1993: 347), who look at metonymy as linking one sub-domain to another sub-domain within the same domain, and Ibáñez & Campo (2002: 58), who have argued that metonymy amounts to two kinds of operation: domain expansion (source-in-target metonymy) or domain reduction (target-in-source metonymy). Ibáñez has even rejected part-to-part metonymies by claiming that they can be reduced to either domain expansion or domain reduction.

understatement of the target domain of sexual intercourse.

4.1.4 Circumlocution

Circumlocution refers to the roundabout, verbose way of speaking or writing to express an idea. The phrases *ūhoro wa mūdūrūme na mūdū mūka* ('the things of a man and a woman') and *gūkenania kwa mūthuri na mūtumia* ('of a man and a woman making each other happy') are not only euphemistic but periphrastic.

4.2 Lexical processes

Two common lexical processes used in the creation of euphemisms, and which are exemplified in the euphemisms gathered in this study, are *use of vague words and expressions* and *use of stories from religion*.

4.2.1 Using vague words and expressions

Vague words and expressions can blur the undesirable associations of tabooed words and produce euphemistic effect (Shi & Sheng, 2011: 1177). A word can only function as a euphemism if its interpretation remains ambiguous, that is, when the hearer can understand the utterance both literally and euphemistically. Ambiguity is, therefore, inevitable when we speak euphemistically (Nerlich & Domínguez, 1999, p. 78). Crystal (1987) argues that generic terms fulfil their euphemistic function in a satisfactory way, thanks to their intrinsic vagueness. This is the case of *kūigua wega* ('to feel good') and *kūhinganīria bata* ('to satisfy each other's needs') in our data; the two phrases are quite vague. Unless they are spoken in a context that makes it clear one is talking about sexual intercourse, it would be difficult to relate the two meanings specifically to sex.

4.2.2 Using stories from religion

Some Gĩkũyũ euphemisms for sexual intercourse have a religious origin or inclination. One good example from our data is *kūmenyana* ('to know each other'). This looks like a biblical reference to the book of Genesis 4:1, where

the idea of “knowing” is used as a euphemism for sexual intercourse: it is said there that Abraham knew Sarah and, as a result, she conceived.

5. THE SPECIFIC METAPHORS BEHIND THE EUPHEMISMS IDENTIFIED

From the 44 euphemisms in Table 1, the study identified six conceptual domains for sexual intercourse (see Table 2). By invoking the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, all euphemisms that share the same theme were coded and grouped under the same conceptualization. Six conceptual categories were identified: COMPANIONSHIP, WAR, GAME, WORK, UTILITY/FUNCTION, and FOOD.

5.1 Sexual intercourse is companionship

Table 2 shows that *sexual intercourse is companionship* was the most common conceptual metaphor, making up 28% of the total metaphors of sexual intercourse (see Table 2). The idea of companionship is morphologically marked by the reciprocal morpheme {-an-}, as in the verb *kūonana* (‘to see each other’) in the following example:

(1) *Kūonana kīmwĩrĩ*- ‘to see each other bodily / physically’

Here, there is mutual reciprocity expressed by the usage of the reciprocal morpheme {-an-}. And in the examples below, the effect of the sense of touch during sexual intercourse as the male and the female genitalia come into contact is clearly discernible.

(2) *Kūhutania* - ‘touching each other’,

(3) *Ngwatano or kūgwatana* - ‘to hold each other’,

(4) *Gūcamania* - ‘to taste each other’

(5) a) *Kūheana* - ‘the act of giving each to the other’

b) *Kūheana mbakĩ / gūkundania mbakĩ* - ‘the act of giving snuff to each other’

(6) *Kūmenyana* - ‘to know each other’,

(7) *Kwendana* - ‘to love each other’,

- (8) *Kūhinganīria bata* - 'satisfying each other's needs'
- (9) *Gwīkana* - 'doing each other'

The above metaphors emphasize the gratifying nature of sexual intercourse; sexual intercourse is designed to be pleasurable and to bring people close together.

5.2 Sexual intercourse is war

Consider the following examples:

- (10) *Gūthecana* - 'to pierce each other'
- (11) *Kūingīrana* - 'to enter each other'

Although, the metaphors in (10) denote reciprocity, the woman has no piercing tool with which to pierce the man, or to enter the man. This conceptual metaphor responds to an overall view of sexual intercourse in terms of hostility, violence and dominance (Beneke, 1982:16). This cognitive association assumes the existence of a more specific conceptualization in which the penis is seen as a tool to attack with, maim or kill an adversary (Gathigia & Ndūng'ũ, 2011: 53). According to Crespo-Fernández (2008:103), the lover is the enemy while the penis is the weapon.

5.3 Sexual intercourse is a game

Sexual intercourse is "sanitized" by referring to it as:

- (12) a) *Kūnogorana mwīrī* - 'to relax the body of each other',
b) *Kūnogorana* - 'to massage or relax each other'.

It is also mitigated by the usage of the term *ngwīko*, which, in the traditional community of the Gīkūyū people (the Agīkūyū), was a sex sport that would take place during the full moon on a day set aside by the community, as described in (13):

- (13) *Ngwīko* (or *nguīko*) - 'mock sex activities for the unmarried'.

According to Kenyatta (1938), during the *Ngwĩko* cultural practice, the boys would be prepared by their uncles and grandfathers, and the girls by their aunts and grandmothers, on how to restrain themselves. The *Ngwĩko* would be accompanied by ritual songs and dances at night. The initiates, stripped to the waist, would get lost in intoxication of ecstasy and pleasure as they enacted scenes and used words of love-making. It was, however, a social taboo to have sexual intercourse on such an occasion. Langacker (1997: 241) argues that such sociocultural activities play a crucial role in the formation of euphemisms. Langacker (p. 241) also notes that cognitive and cultural considerations are so closely connected that metaphor stands out as the main device in cultural construction.

Sexual intercourse as a game also adds a jocular and mechanistic nature to the way sexual intercourse is perceived by some Agĩkũyũ. Consider the following example:

(14) *Gũtwarithia mũithikiri* - ‘riding a bicycle’.

The metaphor in (14) shows more explicitly than the preceding ones how sexual intercourse is a game, that of riding a bicycle. The metaphor most likely alludes to the pedaling-like motion made by the man in the sexual act. The metaphor in it constitutes a good source domain for the expression of disrespect towards women. It gives the man a position of control and dominance over the woman: the man is the rider and the woman the bicycle. (Interestingly, this particular metaphor was pointed out by female respondents.)

5.4 Sexual intercourse is work

Here are the metaphors that illustrate this conceptualization of sexual intercourse as work.

- (15) *Gũtũgũta* - ‘to slash’
- (16) *Kũruta mbiro* - ‘to remove soot’
- (17) *Gũthambania* - ‘to cleanse or wash each other’

- (18) *Kūroora mūgūnda* - 'to inspect the land'
 (19) *Kūgwatania ūrugarĩ* - 'to give warmth to each other'

In the metaphor in (15), the male is the one who undertakes the work of slashing, while the female is the victim. (This metaphor could also fall under the conceptualization of sexual intercourse as a war.) In (16), the removing of soot evokes an image of sexual activity as energy-consuming as removing soot. This metaphor was originally coined to refer to a man having sex for the first time after getting circumcised. But today this connotation of "sexual debut" has been lost. In (17), sexual intercourse is referred to as cleansing since, traditionally, when a man died, one of his closest age mates was supposed to inherit the widow and her children in a cultural practice commonly referred to as *gūthambania*, because the Agĩkũyũ believed that sexual intercourse with the widow would chase death from the family. (The tradition is no longer practised, though.) The metaphor in (18) alludes to work to the extent that one normally inspects the land to check on its productivity. In (19), the metaphor refers to the warmth generated when a man and a woman come close to each other in bed. Interestingly, metaphor (19) can also fall under the conceptualization of sexual intercourse as a war.

5.5 Sexual intercourse is utility / function

This conceptual mapping conceives sexual intercourse as a natural and routine activity that fulfils a utilitarian function. This mapping also considers pleasure and passion as essential components. This is illustrated in the following examples.

- (20) *Kūmaita* 'to pour or ejaculate'
 (21) *Kūhehio* 'to be made wet'
 (22) *Kūigua wega* 'to feel good'
 (23) *Gwetha ciana* 'searching for children'
 (24) *Kūgwatithania* 'to join or come into contact'
 (25) *Gūthĩĩ ūrĩĩ* 'go to bed'

The metaphor in (20) fits well with Murphy's (2001: 21) point of view that the penis is a "mechanical device engineered to pour liquids and can thus be included in the sexual-intercourse-as-a-machine conceptual equation". A vague expression for sexual intercourse which is based on sexual gratification is (22) above. The implication is that sexual intercourse is designed to be pleasurable. In other words, the metaphor and its concomitant meaning underscore the inextricability of sexual intercourse and pleasure. The metaphor in (23) shows that the domain of sexual intercourse is also conceptualized as the act of creating children. Metaphor (24) is also based on procreation. This metaphor as our conceptualization aptly underscores, seems to stress utility or function rather than pleasure as we have argued in (22) above. Biologically, the sperm and the egg come into contact for fertilization. Therefore, the source domain of journey is not only used to express the target domain of sexual intercourse, but also to reason about it in terms of a different domain of experience. In traditional Agikũyũ society, sexual intercourse was geared towards procreation; children were valued as the end product of the sexual act.

5.6 Sexual intercourse is food

Owing to the importance of food in our life as a source of sustenance and pleasure, it is not uncommon for food to be used as a source domain mapping for sexual intercourse. This is illustrated in the following metaphors.

- | | | |
|------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| (26) | <i>Irio</i> | 'food' |
| (27) | <i>Kũrĩa irio</i> | 'eating food' |
| (28) | <i>Kũrĩaana</i> | 'eating each other' |
| (29) | <i>Kũrĩa kīgwa</i> | 'eating or chewing sugarcane' |

Eating and food are common sources for naming sexual organs and sex-related actions (Gathigia & Ndũng'ũ, 2011)⁴. Kövesces (2006: 156) is of the

⁴ The relationship between food and sexual intercourse is extensively discussed by Allan & Burridge (2006: 190), who argue that food is often the prelude to sex, since "eating and love-making go together". Other linguists who also discuss the pervasiveness of the food/eating metaphor for sexual intercourse are Hines (2000)

view that sexual desire is hunger and points out that appetizing food is normally used to conceptualize sexual intercourse.

6. CONCLUSION

This study sought to account for the interpretation of euphemisms of sexual intercourse in Gīkūyū using the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. It first discussed four semantic processes of euphemism formation, namely metaphor, metonymy, circumlocution/periphrasis and understatement/meiosis, and two lexical processes, namely, the use of vague words and expressions and the use of stories from religion. Then, it categorised the 44 metaphors identified by the respondents into six conceptual domains: companionship, work, a game, war, food, and utility.

The study observed that the female respondents tended to conceptualize sexual intercourse as a companionship, while the male ones tended to look at it more as work, a game, war, food and utility. A plausible reason for this gender-based difference in conceptualising sexual intercourse is the fact that for men sex is about feeling powerful in order to boost their egos, while for women it is more about being treated differently, loved and appreciated, as suggested by Moore & Doreen (1993, p. 57). They argue that the traditional view of man is to be the “hunter” and initiator of sexual activity, and the one with the more powerful and demanding sex drive.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The purpose of this interview schedule is to get your views on euphemisms of sexual intercourse in Gĩkũyũ. Any information that you give will be treated with confidence and will only be used for the success of this academic research.

Your name (optional)

Age

Your sex

☐

Male

☐

Female

There are words that Gĩkũyũ speakers avoid mentioning because they cause discomfort or they are considered inappropriate and offensive. Name any 5 such polite terms in Gĩkũyũ that are used to avoid mentioning sexual intercourse and explain why each of the words is used.

Sexual Intercourse euphemism

i. _____

Why?.....

ii. _____

Why?.....

iii. _____

Why?.....

iv. _____

Why?.....

v. _____

Why?.....

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(Any other) _____

Why?.....

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