LANGUAGE AND GENDER: A CASE STUDY IN SOCIAL SEMIOTICS OF THE LEXICON OF THE GIKUYU LANGUAGE

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Abstract
This study examines the place and role of language in gender in a social semiotic framework. It studies the extent to which the lexicon in Gikuyu language is sexist. The study achieved this through a computer based corpus of spontaneous conversational data among Gikuyu speakers. The basic argument is that Gikuyu relegates females to a subordinate position in which their roles and function are suppressed in favour of the males. The thesis describes and uncovers the subtle aspects of the Gikuyu society as an important component to help explain the place of women in the society. The findings of the research include a description and interpretation of language in relation to gender. The possible cause of such a bias in words was investigated, various connotations observed and statistical analysis and interpretation conduced. Lastly, the study evaluated the whole society including the words and their relevance, application, implications, and suggestions for further study. The study concludes that Gikuyu language needs to redefine and exclude certain terms that hamper women’s development and that have created negative perceptions of the female and her image especially while promoting the male at the expense of the female.

Keywords: Language, Sexism, Lexicon, Social Semiotics.