Language Use and Mysticism in Inter-Ethnic Marriages: Discussion of *Ntheo-Ngasya* Rituals among the Akamba of Kenya

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Abstract
This paper explores the mystical discourse embedded in Akamba marriage rituals commonly referred to as *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals. The overall aim of the study from which this paper draws was to establish how language and mysticism are used during *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals for inter-ethnic marriages. Research has paid little attention to the interpretation and role of this mysticism in these rituals; thus, the current study sought to fill this gap. The objectives of the study were to determine how language is used by different genders during *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals for inter-ethnic marriages in Kenya; to analyse the interpretations of the mystical discourse during *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals for inter-ethnic marriages in Kenya; and to find out the interpretation and role of symbolic acts during such rituals. The study was carried out in three counties: Machakos, Makueni, and Kitui. The study purposively sampled 72 participants from three *Ntheo-Ngasya* functions. The researchers collected data through participant observation, audio-visual recording, and semi-structured interviews. The researchers tape-recorded, transcribed, and translated the semi-structured interviews for analysis. The observed data were recorded in a field notebook, translated, and analysed. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Approach was used to analyse language use in these rituals. This is because CDA views discourse as a social practice and considers social context an important aspect of discourse analysis. CDA was triangulated with Symbolic Interaction Theory and the Semantics Approach to analyse the interpretation of the mystical and symbolic acts in these rituals. Data were analysed using Thematic Content Analysis within Fairclough's CDA perspective. The analysis revealed that the mysticism used in *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals is embedded in voodoo words like *Uoi* (witchcraft), *Ndumba, Nzevu*, and *kamuti* (charms), among others. Further, the analysis revealed that negotiators embed mysticism in ritual discourse as a revered way of transmitting Akamba culture and reinforcing community identity. The study enriches gender and cultural studies on how inter-ethnic marriages are culturally organized. The findings of the study will also benefit the parents and marriage counsellors on how to effectively use language in marriage negotiations. The study documents data that can be used as teaching and learning materials for implementing the CBE curriculum in Kenya.

Keywords: Charms, discourse, mysticism, voodoo, witchcraft

Introduction

Among the Akamba of Kenya, *Ntheo-Ngasya*, an elaborate marriage ritual, has been practised and is contemporarily applied to all marriage negotiations, including inter-ethnic marriages between the Akamba and the non-Kamba. Mulwa (2012) defines *Ntheo* as a popularly important get-together in which the groom, with his kin, prepares a party for the bride's kin before a marriage

ceremony is conducted. It is the minimum requirement that demonstrates the bride 'officially' belongs to the man she is engaged to; without it, Akamba customary law deems the entire marriage null and void. Once the *Ntheo* ritual is over, it ushers in *Ngasya*. *Ngasya* is the bride-price payment ceremony, where the groom's side presents gifts and goods as bride price.

Despite rapid modernization, Ntheo-Ngasya rituals remain a cultural practice integral to the community's identity and heritage. *Ngasya* is part of a wider dowry negotiation which is preceded by *Ntheo*, a marriage vow. During *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals, the community serves food to all guests present (Ibrahim, 2018). The bride price includes various presents, gifts, and items, including animals (Ibrahim, 2018; Mulwa, 2012; Wendo, 2004). Penwill (1951) adds that bride wealth varies by place in Ukambani; thus, the current study was conducted in Machakos, Makueni, and Kitui counties to capture these regional disparities. Although bride price payment is core and mandatory to any customarily recognized marriage, some 'voices of reason' have been calling for its abandonment due to its 'commercialization' and 'dehumanization' of women (Wendo, 2004; Catron, 1996), and men treating women as 'commodities' and 'sex objects' just because they paid their bride price.

However, among the Akamba, bride price payment, culturally known as *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals, is prevalent and deeply embedded in mysticism. Few studies have examined how language expresses the mysticism embedded in these rituals and passed down from generation to generation. This gap is what the current study sought to fill. The study analysed how participants from the Akamba community use language to 'transfer' their cultural aspects as embedded in the *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals. Mainly, Akamba rituals dominated during marriage contracting for inter-ethnic marriages between the Akamba and the non-Akamba, and thus the use of mysticism was barely affected.

Inter-ethnic marriages involve people from different ethnic groups, races, or different religions, and they are practised globally, regionally, and also locally (Stevens & Schoen, 1988; Jackson, 2017). Bandyopadhyay and Green (2021) state that the prevalence of inter-ethnic marriage in up to 36 African countries (Kenya being one of them) is more prevalent than inter-religious marriages.

Various scholars have coined different names for marriages between people from these different ethnic groups, races, and religious affiliations. Some refer to them as intermarriages (Kioko & Bolllig, 2015), mixed and inter-religious marriages (Sanghamitra & Elliot, 2014), inter-faith marriages (Juliette, 2019), linguistic intermarriages (Torsh, 2019; Stevens & Schoen, 1988) and inter-ethnic marriages (Juliette, 2019). The current study adopts Juliette's (2019) 'inter-ethnic marriages' as the term to use for the current study, as it fits these marriage unions in Kenya. Thus, this study focused on how different genders use language to interact socially, and on the mystical and symbolic lexis used during inter-ethnic marriage rituals.

Mutunga (2023) states that *Ngasya* speech events typically use lexical items. The lexis that was interpreted as mystical was analysed in the current study because language transfers culture (Dwivedi, 2014; Galbin, 2014). The study also examined how language transfers ideologies during these rituals. Onyango (2015) argues that bride price has helped consolidate men's power over women, creating dichotomies of powerful and powerless speakers in these *Ntheo-Ngasya* social interactions.

Broadly, Kenya has three language groups: Bantu, Nilotic, and Cushitic; each group includes more than five languages, making Kenya a multilingual country with more than forty-two languages. The Bantu mainly include (among others) Swahili, Akamba, Gikuyu, Ekegusii, and

Luhya; the Nilotic include Kalenjin, Luo, Turkana, and Maasai; and lastly, the Cushitic include Rendille, Somali, Borana, and Gabra, among others.

The Akamba are a Bantu-speaking community in Eastern Kenya and speak Kikamba. The Bantu originated somewhere between Eastern Nigeria and Cameroon (Congo Basin). From there, they moved south towards the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo, then eastwards into Eastern Africa. According to Kapiyo et al. (2011), the Bantu also migrated to various parts of East Africa and moved north to the coast, up to Shungwaya (in Coastal Kenya), which became another dispersal point. Other Bantu communities migrated to South Africa.

The Akamba are part of the Eastern Bantu who moved from Shungwaya, then later moved westwards and occupied their present homeland in Machakos, Makueni, and Kitui counties. The Akamba were hunters and gatherers who became long-distance traders, although today many are engaged in different professions and hold formal jobs (Kapiyo et al., 2003). The Akamba practise various forms of marriage involving polygamous, monogamous, child, *Maweto* marriages among others (Kyalo, 2011, Solomon et al., 2017). The current study set to analyse how various genders use mystical language during *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals for inter-ethnic marriages.

Language and Gender

Lerner (1980) states that in the creation of patriarchy, gender is a 'costume, a mask, a straight jacket in which men and women dance their unequal dance' (p. 238) and that men and women are essentially different, thus differences in language use (Mumby, 1998). Further, gender is articulated not only by individuals but also institutionally (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Bloor and Bloor (2007) state that gender is a social construct that is shaped by institutions and still plays a part in establishing 'the nature of gendered identity' even if they do not establish the identity itself. Coulmas (2005) adds that gender is not a person's attributes.

Eagly and Wood (2012) add that gender's significance in negotiation stems from the salience of male and female identities and their social roles and contend that there is a need for women to develop new skills and build resilience and confidence during negotiations, whether in workplaces or otherwise. Shazu (2014) adds that these linguistic differences observed in men and women during social interactions can be associated with the social roles men and women assume. The current study analysed how different genders use and interpret mysticism during *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals for inter-ethnic marriages.

Mysticism and Language Use

Mysticism has been practiced and studied since time immemorial, but few researchers have examined how Akamba interpret mystical discourse as it relates to marriage-contracting rituals. Katz (1992) notes that one recurring, fundamental issue in the study of mysticism is the status of language: whether language can appropriately apply to the objects and subjects of mystical concern and to mystical experiences. Katz (1992) argues that ultimate objects and subjects, as well as ecstatic moments, transcend linguistic description. However, Hatab (1999) notes that language and mysticism are not contraries or separable, and that most interpreters separate the experience ('inner' realm) from language and expression (an 'outer' public realm).

Katz (1992) further states that the relationship between mysticism and language is more variegated and complex than once believed, yet it remains difficult to define. This means that it isn't easy to bring to the open the subterranean principles and unspoken premises of mystical discourse and easily analyse the same. As a sociolinguistic study, the study critically analysed

mysticism in Akamba language use and in relation to other cultures during marriage contracting. Most mystical discourse relates to witchcraft.

Mbondo (2011) notes that witchcraft remains an issue in the church in Kenya. 'Witchcraft' is not a 'too obvious' term to understand and thus can be interpreted as mystical and an obscure aspect. Mbondo (2011) further argues that though the Akamba preach and believe in the Christian faith, whenever they are faced with problems that are life-threatening, the same Christians resort to their traditional beliefs, particularly *Awe* (witchdoctors, seers, priest/ess) who use mystical powers to give directions on how to address the challenging issues. This mystical discourse is common during *Ntheo-Ngasya* social interactions. The scope of the current research was limited to *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals and thus did not collect data from the mystics, but analysed the mystical utterances and how the social actors express and interpret them.

Theoretical Framework

Symbolic Interaction Theory (SIT) by Blumer (1969) was used to analyse the mystical texts that are enigmatic, as they have extended hidden meaning (are symbolic). Blumer (1969) argues that humans form 'meaning' in two ways. First, people attribute meaning to objects, events, and phenomena; second, they impose a physical attachment on events and objects. Thus, meaning is a condition that emerges as a result of the interaction of group members and not an intrinsic feature of the object. As a result of interaction, people create meaning, and this meaning allows people to produce some of the facts forming in the sensory world. These facts reflect how people form meaning and rest on personal perceptions that change over time (Berger & Luckmann, 1996).

According to Blumer (1969), symbolic interaction rests on three core principles: the meaning principle, the language principle, and the thinking principle. Meaning is the centre of human behaviour while language provides a meaning to humans by means of symbols. Symbols differentiate human social relations from animal communication. Humans assign meaning to symbols and express it through language. Consequently, symbols (words, acts or objects) form the basis of communication. Symbols are indispensable to any communicative act. Further, the thinking perspective focuses on how individual speakers interpret symbols and the messages they communicate.

These three principles of symbolic interaction by Blumer (1969) are interconnected because one cannot talk of the symbols used without using language to express them (Language Principle) and the meaning posed by the mystical acts (Meaning Principle) without putting into consideration how these acts are interpreted by the social actors and the message that such symbols communicate (Thinking Principle). The data from the semi-structured interviews were applied to these tenets to establish the mystical lexis, then to identify the denotative and connotative meanings of these mystical acts.

In the current study, the mystical texts were transcribed and translated, then presented in a table showing the transcription, the translation, and the denotative and connotative meanings of the mystical discourse. The language principle was applied to identify the words, symbols, and discourse used to express mysticism. Further, the meaning principle was applied to understand the denotative meanings of these acts; lastly, the thinking principle was applied during interpretation to bring out the connotative meaning of such mysticism and how it embeds the culture of the Akamba *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals.

In addition to the principles discussed earlier, SIT rests on three propositions (Blumer, 1969). These propositions informed the current study. First, humans develop attitudes toward things based on the meanings those things offer them. Second, people infer these meanings through

interpretation. Third, meaningful interaction creates meaning through symbols. Social actors create this meaning through symbols because objects do not have meaning on their own; they derive meaning from social actors (Aksan et al., 2009). These tenets and propositions of SIT (Blumer, 1969) made it appropriate to use this theory to identify and analyse the mystical data.

SIT was triangulated with the Semantic Approach Theory (SAT) by Frege (1995), which focuses on the sense or meanings of words. Frege (1995) argues that SAT, most notably outlined in his concept of 'sense and reference', distinguishes between the meaning of a term (its sense) and the object it refers to (its reference), essentially arguing that the meaning of a word or a symbol goes just beyond the thing it points to and includes the way it is understood or conceived. The semantic approach focuses on how words, phrases, and sentences convey meaning and how that meaning is structured and interpreted in different contexts. In analysing mystical discourse in the current study, the semantic approach was appropriate for establishing the meanings created by mystical words that take on different meanings in different contexts. For instance, the word *Miti* (trees) is understood as ordinary trees used for timber, shade, firewood, and other day-to-day uses. However, in Akamba mysticism, *Miti/Kamuti* (trees) refers to an evil charm.

On the other hand, SIT and the Semantic approach have a weakness in that they do not take into account the basic social context in which the interaction is positioned; thus, they do not perceive any social relations beyond the one that humans create with their interpretations and thus fail to explain society on a more general level. This weakness, disregarding social context, a key aspect of understanding language use and how power relations and ideologies are embedded in language, necessitates triangulating the two theories of meaning with Fairclough's CDA. Fairclough (1995) considers the role of social context in understanding language use, which, in the current study, helped establish the aspects of ideologies and power relations embedded in the mystical discourse used during *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals for inter-ethnic marriages in Kenya.

According to Fairclough (1995), the object of analysis is the 'text' which he treats as a product rather than a process, a product of the process of text production. He uses 'text' to refer to both written texts and 'spoken text.' A spoken text is simply what is said in a piece of spoken discourse. According to Fairclough's CDA Approach, discourse analysis involves three levels. These are the descriptive, interpretive, and explanatory stages.

In the description stage, the study analysed the lexis and vocabulary established as mystical and used distinctively in social interaction during these rituals. The interpretation stage then covers aspects of text production and text consumption. It is the dimension that provides a link between the text (linguistic features) and the sociocultural conditions that shape it. Lastly, the explanation stage focuses on the more immediate situational, institutional, and societal contexts that also shape discourse practices (Fairclough, 2001). According to Fairclough, these contexts shape the discourse practices, which in turn influence the text (Fairclough, 1995).

Research Methodology

The study is qualitative and adopted a descriptive research design (Kabir, 2016), in which the findings were described to investigate the use of mystical texts during *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals. The study was carried out in three counties in the Ukambani region: Machakos, Makueni, and Kitui, as the researcher identified them as places where inter-ethnic marriages between the Akamba and non-Kamba mostly take place.

The target population was inter-ethnically married couples, each comprising a Kamba and a non-Kamba. The study purposively sampled three *Ntheo-Ngasya* negotiations. Participants included the brides (3), grooms (3), presiding elders (30), and spokespersons (36), who were best

positioned to inform the study. The participants totalled 72. They were aged between 20 and 90 years. Notes included exact quotes where possible, observations, and the researcher's daily journal notes (Barbara, 2005).

Audio-visual recording captured participants' social interaction and the semi-structured interviews, where questions on mystical texts were loosely structured to give interviewees more opportunities to fully express themselves (Saldana, 2013). The interviews were also recorded. The researcher recorded observations in a field notebook. Mvumbi (2015) states that observed data should be kept in the researcher's field notes and a researcher must have a checklist of what to observe. The findings were discussed, and data were presented in tables and narratives.

Results and Discussions

In the discussion of the findings, the researcher first categorised the participants in relation to their age and gender, as they have been analysed as factors that determine language use (Holmes, 2001 Hudson, 1980; Coulmas,2005).

Coding of the Data

Letters and numbers were used to code the speakers and their various counties as follows; **M**-Machakos County; **MN**-Makueni County; **K**-Kitui County; **BG**-Bride groom; **B**- Bride; **SP**-Spokesperson and **PE**- Presiding Elder

The codes were used in the following order;
Gender+ **Role+ Location**
For instance, the following coding of the participants would be interpreted as follows;
MPEM- Male presiding elder from Machakos

However, when there were more participants, numbers were used as follows;
Number+Gender+Role+Location
For instance, **1FSPM** means the first female spokesperson from Machakos County, and so on. This order applied only to the presiding elders and spokespersons, who were ten and twelve, respectively, in each county studied.

Description of Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The research first categorised the participants in relation to their age and gender. Table 1 presents the demographics of the negotiators in the three counties.

Table 1: Distributions and Profiles of Respondents by Gender and Age Intervals

Participants (Gender)	Machakos County	Kitui County	Makueni County	Age (years) 0-20	Age (years) 20-45	Age (years) 45-90	Total (Number and %)
Male	17	17	17	None	7	44	51(70.8%)
Female	7	7	7	None	6	15	21(29.1%)
Total	24	24	24	00	13(18.0%)	59(81.9%)	72(100%)

Source: Semi-structured Interviews and Researcher's Field Notes, 2025

Table 1 summarizes the demographic features of the participants. Most negotiators were elderly men and women (44 and 15, respectively) aged 45 to 90 years (81.9%). Those below 45 years

were 13 (18.1%), seven men and six women, mainly brides and grooms. Further, gender analysis shows that more men than women (51 and 21, respectively) are involved in *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals.

Elderly people are conversant with Akamba rituals, interpret and use mystical discourse, and were therefore purposively sampled for this study. Men lead marriage negotiations, as *Atumia* (elderly men) negotiate the bride price. Iveti/Aka (women) are invited into the negotiations but play subsidiary roles (Kinuthia, 2015). The negotiators are generally referred to as *Kikalo kya Atumia* (a sitting for elderly men, including women).

The discussion of the findings begins with an analysis of the lexis interpreted as enigmatic or mystical in nature, that is, puzzling and with hidden meanings. Table 2 presents this mystical lexis, followed by extracts and a discussion of these mystical discourses. The lexis is presented in Kikamba, and its denotative and connotative meanings are translated into English.

Table 2: Kikamba Lexis that are Mystical, as Analyzed in *Ntheo-Ngasya* Rituals

Lexis (kikamba language)	Denotative meaning	Connotative meaning
Uoi	Charm	Witchcraft (practised), Charm
Mithea	A typer of tree/herb	A Charm(kept)
Kwausya	Consulting witch doctors	Mystical gods
Ngai sya ngungani	Gods in a cavern	Mystical gods
Kaluma nzia	A traditional healer	Witchdoctors, mystical god
Nthoo	Cuttings on the body	A protective charm
Nzevu	Herb	A charm (practised)
Nimo Maisaa andu	They are the ones who eat you	They bewitch to kill people
Kuinga kithitu	To call upon a spell (breaking a pot)	To cast a spell that is meant to kill a whole family lineage
Kuya Kithitu	A pot	An oath to bid/ once broken one dies/a charm
Kuthua Nthunu	Scratching the hips	Act of bewitching (practised)
Kamuti/miti	tree	Herb/Charm/Loveportion(practised)
Mundu mue/Awe	Witch doctors	Priest/tess, a witchdoctor
Ndoi/muoi	A person (evil)	A Witch or a sorcerer
Ndumba, Dawa	Medicine	A form of a talisman, charm
Ngata	medicine	A protective charm(eaten)
Masya	Herb	A protective charm (eaten)
Dawa	medicine	A protective charm
Kiko	Dirt	Evil charms(practised)
Mayini	jinnis	black magics
Iluminati	illuminants	Those who visit mystics to get wealth/mystical gods
Avoyi	Those who 'pray'	Seers, priest/ess, mystics

Source: Semi-structured Interviews, Researcher's Field Notes, 2025

As shown in Table 2, mysticism is expressed through lexis, utterances, or objects that carry a hidden, deeper meaning. Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism theory helps establish mystical discourse and its extended meanings. Frege (1995) SAT differentiates the sense (word) and referent (object) or what it refers to. For instance, the lexis '*Kamuti'* literally means a tiny tree,

but its connotative meaning is an evil harmful 'charm'. Also, the lexis '*kiko*' in everyday discourse means 'dirt'; however, 'kiko' denotes evil charms that are sent to harm innocent victims. Such '*kiko*' must be cleansed by performing rituals to set the victims free. For instance, someone or even an ancestor could have sent *kithitu* (*kuinga kithitu*), a curse, thus bringing evils. '*Kiko*' is cleansed by visiting *Awe,* who perform rituals on the affected family member (s) to stop the curse (*Kithitu*) so as to cleanse off such 'dirt'. Further, if the family or a member would like to be protected against the evil schemes of the *Aoi,* the members are to 'partake' of '*Ngata*', a charm that one eats amidst incantations by the *Awe* because taking '*Ngata'*, was believed to be a protective 'good' charm. The examples below capture some texts that expound on Akamba mysticism;

Excerpt 1
MPEM: *Ngata yaisawa nikenda Ndukaowe na ndukaowane*
1FSPM: *Uoi wo wikwo*
2FSPM: *Andu matemawa nthoo na maivakkwa miti ni mundu mue maikaowe*

Translations

MPEN: *Ngata* was eaten to prevent one from being bewitched and from bewitching others.
1FSPM: Witchcraft is there
2FSPM: People would be 'treated' using *Nthoo* and herbs applied to their bodies to prevent them from being bewitched.

In this excerpt, the first speaker, **MPEM** expounded on the contexts in which *Ngata* is taken. It is like a charm eaten by someone who believes that consuming such *Ngata* prevents anyone from bewitching them. *Ngata* was also given to a certain group to prevent them from harming others by bewitching them. Further, a **FSPM** states that *uoi* (witchcraft) is real. So, the community believes *ngata* is a 'good' charm that protects the community from any evil schemes of the witches. Similarly, *Nthoo* (protective body marks/scratches by witch doctors) is believed to be a protective charm against witchcraft. Further, the extracts that follow expound on this mysticism;

Excerpt 2
1MSPMN: *Mundu nusyaasya, kwi misyi yi kiko*
BGMN: *Nyie ndikinyiawa sandoo, ninaekie kwikia sandoo*
FSPMN*: ithwe twi avoyi, ona mundu ooka vaa na maundu nake ndesa kutovoa*
FSPK*: mundu no kuuya akaumina o muitheka imwe*

Translations

MSPMN: One has to check/be alert; some homes have *Kiko***-** evil things'
BGMN: **I** do not allow anyone to step on my sandals, **I** even don't wear sandals anymore
FSPMN: **We** are prayerful, even if someone came here with their evil intentions, they can never succeed (with their evil plans)
FSPK: A person can 'eat you up' completely even as you laugh with him/her

The first speaker, **1MSPMN**, states that a person should always be careful with people, for some people have *Kiko* (evil charms) that harm innocent victims. The groom, BGMN, asserts that he cannot allow someone to step on his sandals and that he no longer wears sandals. This statement is metaphorical; it implies that wearing sandals others could step on is unwise, so one should always 'watch their steps' to avoid falling victim to people who may be evil and intend a bring down innocent victims.

Further, the next speaker, **FSPK**, adds that one 'can eat you up', which is metaphorical and interpreted to mean killing someone by use of the evil charms of witchcraft. Ndumbi (1998) states that witchcraft is the power that counters the good in society; that is, good life and prosperity. It cannot be narrowed to a clear definition. Witchcraft is an external phenomenon, always taking new forms as society evolves. For instance, for many decades, the Akamba used the word *Uoi, Awe,nthoo, ngata* (as listed in Table 2 above), but in the recent past, this vocabulary has been expanded further, and today, in the current society, there are mystical lexis like '*dawa*', '*iluminati',* '*mayini',* and '*Avoyi'* that were not there some decades ago.

Further, the Akamba speech community has a clear distinction between a *Ndoi/Aoi (witches)* and *Awe/Mundu Mue (witchdoctors)*. In theory and practice, these two are opposed. Witches are believed to be evil and to harm people (Ndumbi, 1998), while the witchdoctor/seer is believed to be the solution, as he/she offers 'good' charms to counter the evils witches cause. The next extract illustrates this.

Excerpt 3
1MPEK :*Ndoi ni nzuku muno vyo*
1MSPK: Awe ni aseangango nundu nimo dakitari nimo mwiso wa aoi
MNMSP: E*ethiwa ukie vaa na uoi waku, wivaluka o vaa*
GK*: Nyie ninaendie na nasyoka, vai mundu wisa kumbika undu ona wiva*
MPEK*: Aka oonthe in makile ngua isu. Ni sya aka.*
MSPMN: E*ethiwa ukie vaa kuthoa nthunu na uoi waku, wivaluka o vaa.*

Translations

1MPEK: Witches are very bad
1MSPK: Witch doctors are better off, they are the doctors, and they are the solutions to overcome witches
MSPK: If you came here with your *charm*s to bewitch, you will collapse here.
BGK: I have already gone far and wide, no one can dare harm me
MPEK: All women **should** jump over/skip that specific inner wear. It is a woman's inner wear
MSPMN: If you came here to 'scratch your hips' with *charm*s to bewitch, you will collapse here.

From excerpt 3, the first speaker, **IMPEK** contends that the witches are very evil, and the other speaker, **1MSPK** states that the witchdoctors are good, for they are the doctors that heal and protect one from the evil charms of the witches. Further, the groom from Kitui **(BGK)** asserts that he has gone 'far and wide' and therefore no evils can harm him. This implies that mystical gods can counter witchcraft. Thus, many of the mystical texts used by the Akamba centre on witchcraft and mystical gods who offer protection against harm from witches.

Lastly, it is also implied in the texts that witchcraft and mystical acts are mostly associated with the female gender; thus, mystical discourse embeds gendered ideologies. A male speaker **MPEK** accuses women of '*kuthoa nthunu'* and '*kukila ngua sya aka'* which is interpreted as bewitching others**.** The two male speakers thus accuse women of witchcraft, and associating women with the evils of witchcraft was interpreted as a gendered ideology.

van Dijk (2008) argues that ideology is a fundamental notion that establishes a line between discourse and society. Ideologies are developed by dominant groups in order to produce and legitimise their domination. Wisegeek (2016) states that ideology is a set of shared beliefs within a group such as a nation, or a social class. Therefore, the language used during *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals was established to reflect gendered ideologies.

Conclusion

Based on the findings on mysticism and language use, the research established that mysticism is a reality among the Akamba community as expressed during *Ntheo-Ngasya* rituals. Mysticism is communicated through revered, powerful language, and it gives the community its identity. However, some of the mystical discourses on witchcraft are embedded with sexist ideologies that position women as evil and powerless. Such discourses are to be deconstructed and renegotiated for a gender-neutral society.

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