

Voices Of Manhood: A Linguistic Reconstruction Of Hegemonic Masculinity In Lubukusu Intiation Ritual Oratory

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Abstract

Many insights into the social and ideological foundations of a particular culture can be gained by analyzing the language used in ritual texts. This study examines how ritual language in Lubukusu initiation ritual speeches reflects and influences cultural identities, especially gender relations and hegemonic masculinity. It focuses on identifying linguistic elements that support dominant masculine ideals, such as imagery, euphemisms, proverbs, and exaggeration. The goal is to demonstrate how ritual discourse constructs and sustains ideas of male authority and social hierarchy by analysing these patterns. The study uses a qualitative approach to analyse five purposively sampled Lubukusu initiation speeches recorded during male circumcision ceremonies in Bungoma, Kenya, in 2024. Data was collected through audio recordings, interviews, and focus group discussions, then translated into English and transcribed for content analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis theory underpinned the study. Preliminary findings suggest that the language used reinforces gender stereotypes by promoting male dominance and female subordination. By situating Lubukusu initiation discourse within broader debates on language, ideology, and gender, this paper contributes to ongoing discussions in discourse studies and African sociolinguistics on the role of ritual language in shaping social identities.

Keywords: Discourse, discourse analysis, hegemonic masculinities, gender inequality, initiation ritual speeches, Critical Discourse Analysis, content analysis, ritual discourse

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I. Introduction

The Lubukusu initiation ritual speeches are performed during the circumcision rites amongst the Bukusu people of Western Kenya. Rituals are a cultural or religious system of symbolic communication that consists of a series of actions, words, gestures and involving revered objects. They are performed according to a prescribed tradition of a community (Khaemba, Yieke and Ogola, 2015). The study sought to linguistically analyze the reconstruction of hegemonic masculinities in selected Lubukusu initiation ritual speeches (ritual discourse), that are passed on to the initiates during the different stages of the initiation ceremony.

The focus of the current paper is on how linguistic structures and/or communication strategies are used to further the beliefs behind the idea of hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, the study does not only endeavor to describe and interpret linguistic devices such as metaphors, similes, euphemism, personification, exaggeration, idiomatic expressions, proverbs and juxtaposition, but also unravel hegemonic masculinities embedded in the selected Lubukusu initiation texts. To address the hegemonies, the study employed the Critical Discourse Analysis theory (CDA) by Fairclough (1989).

Background to the Study

The male initiation process (*embalu*) which is the Bukusu circumcision ceremony in the Bukusu speech community, is the centre of the discourse reconstruction, upon which the study is built. The Bukusu or *Babukusu* are Abantu speaking people of western Kenya who speak Lubukusu. According to Wanyama and Egesah (2015:7) the initiation process has three phases: Phase one is the period leading up to the actual initiation cut, during which initiates psychologically prepare for the actual cut. The initiates spend their lives in the seclusion hut, known as *mwirumbi* in Lubukusu, during the second phase. The initiates remain at this stage while the wounds are allowed to heal, and this is also the time when the initiates are taught both practical and theoretical life lessons. The 'feast of emerging out of seclusion', or *khukhwalukha*, describes the third phase. A number of rituals and celebrations that signify the passage into maturity are observed during the ceremony. The key to this transformation is the content of the messages delivered to initiates through ritual speeches. The utterances contain symbolic meanings that the Bukusu refer to as *lubito* or *khuvita* ritual.

The discursive reconstruction of hegemonic masculinities in the Lubukusu context of Bukusu initiation is considered along the lines of Stubbs (1983), who posits that discourse analysis, in broader social contexts, is an attempt to investigate how language is organized above the level of a sentence or clause. Larger language units examined in the study included conversational interactions, which enabled the description and reconstruction of the hegemonic masculinities in circumcision texts as communal communicative units. The meanings accrue from the performance exchanges involving the key participants during the three phases of the initiation ceremony. The participants include the uncles, the father or guardian to the initiate, the circumciser, the elders, lead singers, the initiate, and other revelers.

Since the present study focuses on hegemonic masculinities as the main variable in the context of the Bukusu initiation ritual speeches, it borrows largely from Connell's (1995) discussion of hegemonic masculinity. The configuration of gender practice that "embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and subordination of women," as defined by Connell (1995:77), is what is known as hegemonic masculinity. Connell (1995:78) clarifies that hegemonic masculinity entices men of various social positions, not always the most powerful, to perpetuate it and reap its rewards. The argument supports the system of patriarchy and male domination.

Furthermore, Connell (1995) asserts that hegemony at any period arises from the cultural elevation of one kind of masculinity above others. This hegemony is only likely to exist if there is some correlation between the cultural ideal and institutional authority, communal if not individual. Thus, Connell (1986:1) recognizes "Multiple masculinities that differ throughout time, varying across cultures, social classes, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and historical periods, and the individual".

The ritual speeches that accompany each of the three phases of the Bukusu male circumcision offer symbolic meanings that usher the initiate into adulthood and alert the community about current events that impact the speech community and the rest of the world. Additionally, Muliro (2011) asserts that circumcision messages transmit significant lessons about the Bukusu values, morality, beliefs, and way of life. The ceremonial discourse captures the significance and value of this historic ceremony. The overt and covert symbolic meanings in circumcision messages are investigated to understand the significance of the process.

While researchers have focused on gender inequality, power dynamics, and ideology in diverse contexts of linguistic studies on masculinity, a majority of ventures have focused on the Western nations and cultures, notably those of Europe and America. The subtle nuances ingrained in the African cultural event-centred creativity, in equal measure, reconstruct hegemonic realities that depict societal hierarchies of relationships in interactions. Compositions, performances of music, and the complementary ritual verbalisations that are related to circumcision attract scholarship from researchers in social sciences from diverse perspectives. The literary analyst would examine the aesthetic aspects of the performances in mirroring social realities as the anthropologist interrogates the group behavior in communities. The present study examined how the linguistic dynamics in cultural texts (circumcision ritual speeches) manifest these multifaceted social realities.

Generally, initiation discourse in the African setting reflects a patriarchal set-up that maintains and reinforces male dominance (Onyango, 2008). Lubukusu initiation discourse tends to create power imbalances that elevate and glorify masculinity in form and function while subjugating the female segment and disdainfully portraying them as insignificant. The perpetuation of hegemonic masculinities through Lubukusu ritual discourse seems to accentuate the notions of male identity and gender power relations which cannot be openly criticized. Consequently, the use of Bukusu ritual discourse has embraced broader dimensions in the speech community.

Thus, this study considers the fundamental function of language at the centre of the (re)construction of hierarchical categories in interactional social realities. Notably, hegemonic masculinity, as a social practice, is foregrounded in social contexts such as Lubukusu initiation ritual speeches.

Theoretical Framework

The primary theory underlying the present study is the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Fairclough (1995). It focuses on the social issue of abuse of power or authority as it is signalled, constituted, or legitimised by language use. From Fairclough's perspective, CDA integrates much from the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory and Sociological Theory (ST). As a result, Fairclough (1989) contends that language, in both spoken and written forms, should be studied as discourse. Additionally, Fairclough (1989) talks about "text", which is considered a component of how people communicate, and that the ultimate goal of linguistic analysis is to increase people's awareness of exploitative social interactions.

The objectives and tenets of CDA are used in analyzing recent CDA studies, and they were set out by Van Dijk (2009), and Wodak and Meyer (2009). Since CDA is problem-oriented rather than focusing on theory or a specific field, its implications are directly communicated to society in layman's terms (Fairclough, 2001). This is the beginning point and fundamental principle of CDA that is pertinent to the present study. CDA's critical research is considered a social science because it focuses on social issues, including the study of human rights,

social injustice, and power abuse in areas like racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. Therefore, it is believed within the parameters of the present study that the male initiation process encompasses societal issues that include gender inequality, domination, and social abuse. The issues are presented and repeated in speech in ways that are not always clear-cut (Fairclough, 1992; Van Dijk, 2001).

Another principle of CDA is that it demonstrates discursive social relationships of power. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) note that the relationships are negotiated and put into practice in discourse. The majority of African communities are patriarchal by nature and practice; hence, this study investigates whether there are power dynamics present in the Lubukusu language that is used during the circumcision ritual among the Bukusu of western Kenya.

II. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the hegemonic masculinities in the Lubukusu initiation ritual speeches. The present study adopts the critical paradigm. Martens (2015) observes that the critical paradigm places its study in the context of social justice issues and aims to address the social-cultural problems that give rise to gender-power struggle and structures such as masculinities. It is frequently referred to as the transformational paradigm since it aims to alter power imbalances to address social oppression and enhance social justice in the circumstances. The Critical paradigm offers strategies for promoting constructive social change and aids in our understanding of how communication is used to oppress the masses (Foss and Foss, 2016).

The fact that this study sought to establish meanings that are embedded in Lubukusu ritual speeches makes a qualitative research methodology more suitable. The study adopted the research methodology because the data is in linguistic forms or patterns, constituting texts somewhat more than figures. These data formats unquestionably exhibit one of the features of the qualitative research methodology outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (1998).

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The present study places hegemonic masculinities in the context of synchronic language studies and gives an objective explanation of the connections between language, and the social constructions that influence the use of Lubukusu initiation speeches. The narration, and descriptive techniques of the study, which align with CDA theory, aim to depict the reality of linguistic constructs in the Lubukusu language without the prejudice of preconceived notions about how it should be (Kordic, 2010). In this context, the present study examines the meanings, and patterns that underlie the use of texts as they are used by native speakers.

The primary source of information for the research was a collection of speech texts from the Bukusu initiation ritual held in Bungoma, Western Kenya, in December in the year 2024. Every even year (for instance, 2010, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2024), the rite is performed in August or December which is harvest time in the Bukusu community. The study adopted purposive sampling which is the most common methodology used in qualitative research. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) it is a sampling approach that enables researchers to use cases that include the necessary data in relation to the objectives of their study. The subjects for the study were chosen specifically because they are thought to be informative or because they have unique characteristics fit for the study.

For the study objectives to be answered appropriately, the views of informants on the main variable, hegemonic masculinities, were critical. The informants for the present study included three circumcisers, three lead singers, two local government officials, and six key Bukusu cultural elders. They were purposefully sampled through face-to-face interactions, and recommendations from the local administration that comprises sub-chiefs, village elders (headmen), and the *Nyumba Kumi* (Ten house structure) initiative. These comprised a total sample size of 14 subjects in total that provided in-depth information before, during, and after the circumcision phase. Six FGDs were conducted in two sub-counties namely Bungoma North and Tongaren. The FGDs were heterogeneous with both females and males who were above 40-65 years of age. The local administration helped in the identification of FGD participants.

In addition, data collection instruments employed in the study included audio-taping, open-ended interviews, and FGDs. Finally, content and textual analysis were used in the analysis of data

III. Findings And Discussion

From the interviews, the ritual speeches were presented according to the stages at which they are performed. The four Pre-initiation and one Post-initiation ritual texts are coded as Pre.R.T and Post.R.T respectively.

This section examines the construction of hegemonic masculinities in Bukusu circumcision ritual speeches in the *khuvita* ritual. Thus, particular attention is paid to the verbal texts collected using audio recordings of the FGDs and interviews from the two periods of circumcision, namely pre-circumcision and post-circumcision. The speeches that are delivered during these phases determine the messages that are communicated to the initiates. The episodes when speeches are conveyed form the content of the messages passed on to the initiates.

Therefore, this section analyzes hegemonic masculinities embedded in the Lubukusu initiation speech texts. In addition, the discursive features or strategies of language use, in terms of structure and how these features reinforce and maintain masculinities and gendered relations in the speech texts are discussed. The analysis is undertaken within the CDA theoretical framework proposed by Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak in the 1990s. The linguistic theory sheds light on how speech reproduces power imbalances, social injustices, and dominance. The section integrates the tenets of CDA into the discussion and analysis of the collected data. The presentation and analysis of the ritual speeches that follows is covered under the theme of gender overtones, gender roles and disparities, sexism, the narrator's voice and hybrid masculinity.

Gender Overtones in the Lubukusu Ritual Speeches

The simile *omukhasi alinga sa luluchi* (a woman is like a running river) in excerpt (i) above is used in the discourses (as discussed in the FGD 2) to imply that even if you have intercourse with a woman, there would be no sign of evidence. Accordingly, a man has the right to dump the girl and still carry on with others. The utterance *omukhasi omukhasi busa* (a woman is just a woman) in excerpt (ii) implies the denigration of women and so illustrates power disparities based on gender. The noun *omukhasi* (woman), which is often used, underscores the scorn with which the oral artist views women in Bukusu society.

Other images used in excerpt (i) include a phrase *wakhapamo lifumo* (stab with a spear), which has been used as an idiom, to insinuate having sex. In addition, the Bukusu woman is compared to the sentence *luluchi lubira* (a river that is flowing) perhaps to imply that it is not worth keeping her. The oral artist also observes that it is not worth killing an uncircumcised man if found red-handed in an adulterous act with somebody's wife. What is important are the children. From the accounts of informant C, a man without children in the Bukusu community has no face, and he is indeed disrespected in most African communities. In favor of this claim, Etuk (2002) observes that parents take pride in having several kids; offspring were, and still are considered as a form of social protection and a fiscal asset.

Similarly, the same utterance *omukhasi* (a woman) has been repeated several times Pre.R.S.1, 2, 3 and 4 by the oral artists in the following examples: In Post.R.S.1 below, the oral artist who is the circumciser, uses a simile as a figure of speech. A man who is not circumcised is also compared to a woman, or an infant's urine (*Alisanga omukhasi, namwe omwana*). In this case, a woman in Bukusu community as noted from FGD 2 and FGD 3 is trivialized and treated with disrespect, notably because she is powerless, and worthless. The oral artist uses a rhetorical question *omwana-nakhwinyalakho ubi?* (Is it bad for an infant to urinate on you?), perhaps to emphasize how the rite of circumcision is important in the Bukusu community. On the other hand, metaphors such as *likongwe* (sisal plant) and *lirango liye njofu* (the thigh of the elephant) are used to refer to the circumcised men in excerpt (i) of Pre.R.S.1 above. The sisal plant represents strength, durability, and toughness. The resilient plant thrives year-round in hot and dry weather, and yields stiff fiber used to produce medicine, and in making rope, paper, and cloth (Seigler, 2005). In addition, the metaphor, *lirango lie enjofu* (the thigh of an elephant) in excerpt (iv) is used to refer to men who are strong, resilient, and big in mass, and who have thick skin (just like that of the elephant).

The theme of gender power relations is evident in the following presented ritual speeches.

Post.R.S.1

(i) A woman is just like a flowing river, whether you stab the water with a spear there won't be a scar. You don't kill when you find your wife or girl red-handed in the adulterous act. What is important are children.

Pre.R.S.3

(ii) A woman is just a woman

Post.R.S.1

(iii) In Bukusu society, a man who is not circumcised is not a man. If you get such kind in your house, with your wife (engaging in a sexual act); don't bother, as there is nothing to worry about. Such an uncircumcised man is like a woman or an infant's urine. Is it bad for an infant to urinate on you? There is no impact. The circumcised man will be charged a fine of a cow and a goat.

(iv) You are now like the sisal plant of the home. In all seriousness, a Bukusu man is the elephant's thigh.

Reflecting on the ethnographic accounts of informants it is important to note that *lirango lie enjofu* is used in fond reference to Bukusu's traditional pride and cohesion forged over circumcision. The imagery is used deliberately to invoke the masculine pride in the initiation rite. The metaphor appreciates men and has a positive

connotation. In support of this argument, Wasike (2015:155) observes “The Bukusu, like most communities, believe that their male ideals, which reflect their ethnic background, are superior to those of others”, notably those held by neighboring ethnic groups in Kenya. Thus, the metaphor creates cultural barriers and encourages ethnocentrism, however it is tinged with ethnic chauvinism.

In one-way *lirango liye enjofu* (Thigh of an Elephant) is used to extol the community's perception of strength in togetherness and patriotism. This explicitly supports the CDA tenet that discourse is ideological and serves to maintain power relations (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1998). In this instance, “*lirango lie enjofu*” functions as an ideological construct, implicitly asserting the supremacy of Bukusu male ideals and, by extension, the ethnic group's collective identity, particularly in contrast to neighboring ethnic groups in Kenya.

To normalise and elevate the Bukusu male initiation cultural practice as a fundamental component of their identity, the positive framing of “masculine pride in the initiation rite” serves to legitimise the power structures and social norms that are linked to it. This is consistent with Van Dijk's (2001) notion that group identities are created in opposition to others through “us vs. them” classification in discourse.

Furthermore, power dynamics are in more episodes as demonstrated in both **Pre.R.S.1** and **Pre.R.S.3** below
Who sent you? Is it your mother?

The above utterance takes place when the boy seeks approval from his father or guardian to be initiated. After a long interrogation, his father or any guardian asks him whether it is his mother who had sent him to ask for permission to be circumcised. As informant B narrated, “The mother is associated with the kitchen, domestic chores, weakness, and cowardice, therefore he is warned that if it is the mother who had sent him, then he had better quit.” This kind of cultural ideology in Bukusu community seems to subordinate the female gender as no one questions the community as to why there are such utterances. In support of such an ideology, Wall and Wall (2009) point out that the idea of ideology helps us comprehend the dynamic process at play within power systems that cause them to become unquestionably self-justifying and natural. The wealthy and powerful would be easily persuaded by arguments supporting their increasing wealth and power. Regarding hegemonic masculinity, this idea of acceptance is crucial, since the Bukusu community appears to approve and tacitly support the cultural ideals.

The discourses in Pre.R.S.3 vividly illustrates a core tenet of CDA that discourse is a social practice (Fairclough, 1992; 1995).

This means language is not just a way to describe the world; it actively constructs, maintains, and transforms social identities, relationships, and knowledge within specific cultural contexts like that of the Bukusu people in Kenya. In the crucial setting of the initiation ritual, this seemingly simple question of *nanu okhurerekho* (who sent you) becomes a powerful social action. It directly participates in constructing an idealized Bukusu male identity. By framing the mother as a potentially disqualifying influence, the discourse implicitly defines what an initiated male should not be associated with. Moreover, the consistent use of this question across generations within the Bukusu initiation ritual as explained by informant B ensures the reproduction of specific Bukusu cultural norms and values concerning gender and male maturation (Wasike, 2015). The discourse serves as a potential educational tool, teaching not only the initiate but also all participants about the acceptable and unacceptable influences on male development.

It is evident from the highlighted Bukusu ritual discourses that the most vulnerable people who are affected are women. The ability of people in charge of the community's rituals, such as the men, the elders, and the oral artists who are the guardians of the community's culture, are typically regarded as the source of power.

Gender Roles and Disparities in the Lubukusu Ritual Speeches

The theme of gender roles as evidenced in Lubukusu ritual speeches is analyzed under the following sub-themes.

Sexual Prowess

Sexual prowess is the capacity to engage in sexual acts with considerable skill or exceptional ability. The analysis of the following section relates sexual prowess to gender disparities in ritual speeches.

Kumuliango kumwikule kukwoo ne kumwikale kwa bene (an open door is yours, and a locked door belongs to someone else) is the proverb that is spoken above. An important reproductive message is conveyed to newly circumcised Bukusu males, as stated by informants in FGD 4 in relation to Post.R.S.1. According to this adage, a boy is allowed to have sex with as many girls as he wants because they (the boys) are adults, as marked by circumcision. Boys who are customarily circumcised are frequently given this message to encourage the boys to undertake their reproductive roles. An open door symbolizes any woman who is not married, whereas a closed door represents a woman who is married. The proverb presents and seals sexual prowess and aggressiveness as distinctive features of the character structure typical of men in a patriarchal society. Participants in FGD 3 noted that women internalize their subjugation within the Bukusu culture. As a result, masculinities are a product of culture.

Consequently, in the Post.R.S.1, the boys are instructed by the oral artist who is the circumciser to seduce and have sexual relations with numerous women as a way to demonstrate their masculinity, which is accepted by the Bukusu community as expressed in the sentence *Yaani rura oche musibala, okhole kamakhua*, translated as "step out into the world and do worldly things".

As illustrated in Post.R.S.1 above, the notion portrayed by the oral artist is that it is appropriate for the Bukusu man to have as many relations as possible, so long as the girls are not married. From the explanation of informant A, the speech community does not have a problem with men having multiple women, and being sexually active, adding more reason to them being exalted even in the sayings. Consequently, the Bukusu get along with such cultural beliefs and never question them.

Post.R.S.1

If a door is open, it belongs to you; if it is closed, it does not. It belongs to somebody else. Go out, step out, and do the things of the world. Understood?

From a CDA position, the function of the proverb is overtly ideological (Fairclough, 1992). It constructs and naturalizes an ideology of male sexual entitlement. The "open door" metaphor is not a neutral statement about opportunity; it is a direct, metaphorical instruction to newly initiated males that sexual access to females is their rightful domain, a privilege conferred by their newly acquired adult status through circumcision. Conversely, the "locked door" belonging "to someone else" implies a restriction only on others, reinforcing the circumcised male's perceived unbounded access. This linguistic framing presents male sexual agency as a natural and unquestionable right, directly linked to their initiation

Similarly, it is important to note that in Post.R.S.1 below, the maternal uncle and the circumciser, who are the oral artists, give the boy guidance by using symbolism to convey hidden messages. The data given below serves as an example of how the boy receives prohibition messages in addition to prescriptive (instructional) ones:

There are three things you must take seriously:

Be swift in seducing women. Beautiful women. You must be active, in matters of sex. Soon you should marry, to be a bachelor is a show of weakness. Is it that you are unable to seduce? Have the aggression in seduction. A man and woman when they meet, they play sex. You don't just leave like that!

The young man is advised to be swift in seducing beautiful, and different women, and later marry as bachelorhood is a sign of weakness. In a rhetorical question, *aba sawinyala ta?* (Is it that you are unable to seduce?). The newly initiated boy is asked whether he would have a problem with seducing women. As Burton (2007) notes, the rhetorical question in this sense is used by the speaker to maintain control over the audience. These types of questions seem to persuade the listener. Thus, it is a robust way for a speaker to try to get the initiate, and the other audience to go along with what the circumciser is emphasizing: hegemony in terms of sexual prowess, and general bravery.

Accordingly, the series of directives (*Obe omurani wa khuenja omukhana*; Be swift in seducing pretty girls, *lasima obe chonjo khu makhua ka khuselela*; You must be active in matters sex, *oyile*; you should marry) are central in forming an idealized, hegemonic masculine identity (Fairclough, 1995). The consistent emphasis on "swiftness," "activity," and "aggression" in seduction normalizes and valorizes a dominant, almost predatory, approach to sexual interaction. Being a "bachelor" is discursively framed as a "show of weakness," creating immense social pressure for early marriage and procreation as recounted by informant C. This language establishes the male as inherently sexually driven and masterful in conquest, explicitly defining what it means to be a "real man" within a cultural context (Van Dijk, 2001). Furthermore, these statements profoundly influence power relations and gender inequality. The imperative tone leaves little room for individual choice or alternative forms of masculinity.

The Protection role as constructed in the Lubukusu Ritual Speeches

The circumciser recounts to the new initiate that in traditional African society, the boy had to be given *lifomo nende engabo* (a spear and a shield) to defend his home and was supposed to go and hunt in the bush after becoming circumcised. In the event that his father passed away, he was obligated to keep his mother, and other family members safe, regardless of the threat he would face. From the discussions in FGD 4, a man enhances his reputation by being adept at playing the protector role. At the same time, he enhances the strength-related reputation of his neighborhood, because a strong community acts as a type of defense. A Bukusu man is depicted as a protector through the symbolism of the shield and spear; he defends his people (his family and the greater society in general) against all adversaries. According to the informants in FGD 4, most men in the Bukusu village are always expected to be prepared to defend their homes from any human or animal intruders. Each adult male member was supposed to have a sword and a shield to defend his family.

The requirement to create, and defend borders is demonstrated in the following presented texts:

Post.R.S.1

Today I am saying to you this

You are a man, a male adult

When you were circumcised in the past, you were given a spear and a shield to defend your house and go hunting.

As a result, when referring to a family with numerous boys, the symbolism "there are many shields in that family" is often used. On the other hand, a person without a son is viewed as being weak, and frequently in danger. In fact, according to the informant B accounts, the absence of a male kid in the family was terrible, and in most cases, the women were held responsible. The men were therefore justified in marrying additional women till they had male offspring. Furthermore, this pervasive expectation demonstrates how discourse is ideological, embedding a particular set of beliefs about gender and responsibility (Van Dijk, 2001). The ideology at play here naturalizes the male as the designated defender, implicitly assigning women and children to a position of needing protection. Thus, reinforcing a traditional patriarchal structure where men hold power and responsibility over the security domain, ultimately perpetuating specific gendered divisions of labor and social roles (Wodak and Meyer, 2009).

Confinement vs Outdoor Activity Roles

Some of the physical activities that are taken up by members of the families are constrained by the surroundings of the venue where they are held, and the number of participants in the activities. The following presentation of ritual texts demonstrates either gender's activities in the community.

The circumciser keeps outlining the initiates' moral code as he delivers the ritual speech. For instance, he bars the boy from women's company. As explained in FGD 4, if the boy continues to hang around the mother and sisters, they may have a bad influence on his socialization. The boy is counseled on how to engage in manly pursuits away from the home and hang out with the men in his neighborhood. He is told that that is the only way he would get anything from them. He uses personification, *khulia chingano chikhamanyikhe cha basakhulu* (eating secret words/narratives of wisdom from elders) to emphasize what it means to be a man, that if he is well-behaved, he would even be told (eat) the hidden secrets of elders. From Post.R.S.1, the young man receives advice on interpersonal skills, the foundations of effective governance, and how to care for a family as he soon would be given the go-ahead to get a wife for himself. As previously established, the initiates are tasked with finding single women to marry. One source who was the circumciser extended the imagery to mean that initiates are forbidden from stealing or claiming any other people's property.

Post.R.S.1

We have now put off your mother's dress, we are now dressing you with your father's clothes.....clothes of adulthood. No jokes my son!

Now you have become a man. Stop doing little and childish things (laughs). Do not join the women when they congregate, argue, or discuss women's issues! Join the older men where they are seated by going there and benefit from their words of wisdom. Tell folks to stop arguing if you see them fighting.

Do not go to your mother's bedroom; you could easily see her nakedness. Today, I forbid you from that room or house. Separate yourself from feminine roles like the warmth of the kitchen. Do not light a fire; **forget the kitchen like the way you left your mother's breast.**

What I mean is that you go out my son. A disciplined man may always count on blessings, leadership, and elders' stories and secret words of wisdom. Friendship ties are more valuable than many worldly things.

The gendering of certain skills is noticed from the ritual texts, and this fortifies the construction of women's position in society; their care-giving and nurturing abilities are emphasized by the choice of the simile, *Lekha muchokoni nga waleha lituru liya maayi woo* (Forget the kitchen like the way you left your mother's breast) and the symbolism of the bed, kitchen, and her breasts. Similarly, the oral artist seems to trivialize women and uphold patriarchal values. He warns the initiate to stop doing little and childish things that are related to women. He uses demeaning idioms such as *biakoko* (childish play) and *bukhasikhasi* (womanly actions) to describe what women do. The comparison to leaving "your mother's breast" underscores the finality and necessity of this break, marking it as a second, symbolic weaning. This segment of the discourse actively reproduces and reinforces a gendered division of labor and social space, firmly positioning men outside the domestic realm and associating it with weakness or immaturity (Wasike, 2015). The "kitchen" here is not just a physical location; it's a symbolic anchor for female-coded roles and perceived lack of masculine agency. Messerschmidt (2000) corroborates this opinion by noting that the kitchen, and being with women are examples of contextually accessible feminine resources that can be used to achieve masculinity. As a result, the Bukusu community has resisted changing the idea up to recent times. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2001) further endorse Messerschmidt's (2000) observation that most civilizations still hold to the belief that men and women normally exhibit cognitive and behavioral inclinations that are distinctly different from one another

The powerful directives issued to a young Bukusu male during initiation represent a critical moment where discourse is a social practice that constitutes identities and relationships while heavily drawing upon ideology (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 2001). The discourse in Post.R.S.1 above act as a profound symbolic disconnection from childhood and feminine sphere, actively shaping the initiate's transition into a culturally defined Bukusu manhood.

Hard Work and Economic Stability Values as Depicted in the Lubukusu Ritual Speeches

In example (i) below, a Bukusu man is presented as one who endures suffering. Accordingly, the suffering always bears addition and multiplication for him to be successful; not minus and division. Using mathematical paradoxes, the words; *khutesa ne khumara* (addition and multiplication) are positive attributes that suggest hard work, and subsequent economic stability. On the other hand, the narrator says negative attributes such as *khurusiamo nende khukabula* (subtraction and division) are not attributed to the Bukusu man as they are not associated with success. Subtraction in this case signifies the removal of things or the diminishing of property. Division suggests breaking up, separating, or even disunity among people.

The two roles are illustrated in the following excerpts:

Post.R.S.1

- (i) A Bukusu man has two kinds of suffering: **adding and multiplication. Not minus and division.**
 (i) Harvesting means wealth. And this wealth you look for it with **both hands**. A Bukusu man must rear animals, these include cows, sheep, goats, and chickens. You must toil for success. A cow will give you a home, and prevent you from admiring other people's stuff. Say no to poverty my son.

Pre.R.S.3

- (ii) You are now a man; you have reached home after your maternal uncle has blessed you! The wealth that we took there (your mother) is back with us (animals).

The portrayal of a Bukusu man as one who endures suffering, where this suffering invariably leads to "addition and multiplication" but never "minus and division," offers a rich site for CDA. This example strikingly demonstrates how discourse is ideological, embedding specific beliefs about masculine success, labor, and economic prosperity within the community (Van Dijk, 1998). It also powerfully showcases how discourse is a social practice that actively constitutes identity and values (Fairclough, 1995).

In the second example (ii) above, *Khusoloma kimiandu. Kimiandu okienja na kamakhono kombi* (harvesting implies wealth, wealth is looked for by both hands) the newly initiated young man is advised to shun poverty because a typical Bukusu man is a renowned farmer who keeps all types of animals such as cows, goats, and chicken. He also engages in planting and harvesting of crops. He is also advised to look for wealth (*ne kimikhono kiombi*) with both hands, an idiomatic expression that means willingness to work extremely hard. Moreover, the male gender is constructed positively with such qualities as hard work and ambition.

The advice given to the young man is a powerful illustration of how discourse actively constitutes society and culture which is central tenet of CDA. As recounted by informant D, Bukusu society and culture are directly constituted around specific ideals of male industriousness and economic responsibility. The very act of advising young men that "harvesting implies wealth" immediately embeds a deep-seated cultural value: that agricultural productivity is synonymous with success and social standing. This is not merely an observation; it is a discursive equation that frames farming as a characteristic male endeavor, thereby culturally legitimizing it as a cornerstone of Bukusu livelihood and identity.

Last but not least, in example (iii) of Pre.R.S.3 the initiate is congratulated for coming back with an animal from the maternal uncle's place: *Ewe niyo omusecha. Lola wakhola mungo mno khochoa bakhusebula. Emali niyo khwayilayo bona bakhukalusile* (You are now a man; you have reached home after your maternal uncle has blessed you! The wealth that we took there (your mother) is back with us). He is reminded that the animal he has brought to the home is what was taken to the maternal home as dowry hence he has brought back what is rightfully theirs. Generally, men are portrayed as owning property, and in this case, animals.

In FGD 2, a good number of participants agreed with Tam and Yip's (2010) assertion that the traits women are encouraged to promote include sexiness, indifference, attractiveness, and vulnerability. They are required to possess these traits to uphold societal standards of femininity, which adds to their victimization. Additionally, the traits that men are encouraged to exhibit—aggression, dominance, sexuality, and strength—are the same ones that have been connected to the mistreatment of women. While acceptance standards vary among cultures, they are typically based on gender, with the extent of any differences being dictated by the patriarchal or hegemonic masculinity that is dominant. Gender is given more weight than other identity markers by hegemonic (and patriarchal) masculinity, which also maintains that social acceptance is contingent upon meeting specific gender norms (Tam and Yip, 2010).

Sexism in Lubukusu Ritual Speeches

This is clear in the case of sexism, which Cameron (2006) defines as language that portrays women unfavorably to discriminate against them based on gender or that seems to subtly presume that activities that are largely linked with women are inherently unimportant. The following texts are analyzed according to the theme of sexism.

Post.R.S.1

You have graduated from childishness to maturity. You are a man and ready to mingle. If you get the daughter of a chief seduce her. This is a way of making you strong. So **drum** her. Even that one from the poor, from a rich family, or even if she is physically challenged. It doesn't matter; a woman is a woman!

The metaphor, *khong'onda* (hard continuous beating of the drum) implores the boy to have sex with any girl from different backgrounds. Similarly, the repetition of the word, *bira naye* (have sex with her), in the above excerpt emphasizes the use of legitimacy, and power by a person in a particular position, in this case, the circumciser who decides to articulate the core values of the Bukusu community. Nonetheless, in doing so, there is the cultural devaluation of women as demonstrated in the utterance *omukhasi omukhasi* (a woman is just a woman) who remains passive in the circumcision ritual. This argument borders on hegemonic masculinities where men defy the need for selection. Arguably, Bukusu men are permitted or encouraged by the community to have all sorts of women, as long as they serve their masculine pleasure as a show of power and dominance

In **Post.R.S.1** below, the circumciser tells the initiate the following words:

If a woman, asks you to go and help her split firewood, **split her** first before you split the firewood.

As recounted by discussants in FGD 5, the oral artist uses the phrase *khukhwasaka chikhu* (splitting firewood) in the first incidence to mean the real action of splitting firewood, however in the second incident, the same word is used as a metaphor to refer to engaging in sex with the lady. If a lady, say a neighbor, calls a man to help her to split firewood, he is advised to first have sex with her before giving her a hand. Women, in this case, are constructed as objects of sex and whenever a man sees a woman, he surely views her as an object that can easily help him satisfy his sexual desires. The metaphor *khukhwasaka* (split) can be interpreted as a demonstration of how Bukusu men are energetic and confident. However, women seem to be constructed as weak; any form of assistance given to them is reciprocated with favors of sex. Similarly, the following texts are evaluated in respect to the theme of sexism.

Pre.R.S.1

(a) Focus on the women who are attractive, curvy with firm and perky breasts, not saggy and sluggish. That is why we take 13 cows as bride price; one is for the breasts!

In example (a) of Pre.R.S.1 above, the woman is constructed as an object of obtaining wealth. The circumciser discourages men from looking out for women who are not attractive; those with fallen breasts and small legs. He advises them to seduce the beautiful ones with firm breasts. This phrase, *bakhasi bitata* (tightly built with a good figure) implies beautiful women whose primary role is to create images or objects to gaze at. As unequivocally stated in the ritual discourse, men should compare women according to their looks, and as a measure, place as appropriate bride price value on them. From the explanations in FGD 4, seemingly, through dowry the husband owns the woman, thus she has been diminished to the status of an item with a value and a price tag. Diabah and Amfo (2015:202) agree with the proposition by stating that, "...the idea that women should take care of their physical attributes to satisfy their roles as sex objects and serve as the centre of concentration for men's sexual needs is the foundation of the narrative on women as objects."

Far from being mere advice, the above ritual speeches function as powerful discursive acts that shape identities, normalize exploitative behaviors, and define women's roles. From a CDA perspective, the discourse is ideological (van Dijk, 1998). It naturalizes the notion that women's bodies, or specific parts thereof, are economic assets to be exchanged, negotiated, and paid for.

Pre.R.S.4

(b) See, you have reached home after your maternal uncle has blessed you! The wealth that we took there (your mother) is back with us (animals). They are done with you!

Pre.R.S.2

(c) **A man is like an ocean**, but a woman's role is to fetch wealth (brideprice), serve men, and give birth.

In example (c) above, the oral artist who is still the circumciser, through another simile, omusecha *alinga enyanja* (a man is like an ocean), reminds the boy that he is strong and stable just like an ocean while a woman is meant to serve a man and bear children.

The ocean is a symbol of life and stability because it can exist largely unchanged for centuries. The ocean is also vast implying greatness in size, strength, and knowledge, as explained in FGD 5. On the other hand, the woman is assigned to traditional gender roles of cooking for men and giving birth (*Kacha bukhwale na khukhwibula babana*). Men are depicted positively as compared to those attributes that largely reconstruct women in the ritual speeches.

Pre.R.S.3

(d) The time has come, young man! (The paternal uncle gives him two smacks) Right now, you cannot change your mind. It is now! Observe me closely! I'm not the vagina of your mother. The buttocks of your mother! Or do you want me to curse you (by flashing my bum)? I curse you for daring to be afraid of the knife. You little boy!

The boy is challenged by his uncle in the aforementioned speech to endure the discomfort of circumcision. Through warnings *chisaa chiakhola chisuku echosi chiawe* (the time is nigh; the days are over) to emphasize that it was almost time, and the repetition of the common noun *mao* (mother) also stresses the idea that women are associated with fear. He specifically emphasizes the taboo words, *kumunie* and *kamatakho* (initiate's mother's vagina and buttocks). According to the ethnographic accounts of informant F, the abuses seem to articulate the trivialization of women based on sex.

The humiliating nature of the Bukusu initiation procedure is demonstrated by the abuses meted out to the initiate, and to others who have disobeyed community rules. In the ceremony, offensive remarks, obscenity, and taboo words are frequently used. However, the initiates acquire the values of modesty, and fortitude by such remarks as described during FGD 4, 5 and 6. The slurs not only make the initiates humble but also inspire them to remain brave in anticipation of the cut. From accounts of FGD 5 therefore, the idea of being humbled before being exalted is crucial for instilling authority in the circumcised.

According to informant G, the gravity that permeates the admonishment above is intended to serve as a reminder to the initiate that the rite must continue at all costs because there is no going back. The only option left to the initiate was to muster up the bravery necessary for the cut. The process elevates manliness by demonizing fear as humiliating to the initiate's entire family as well as to himself

To sum up, the ritualized verbal aggression as demonstrated in Pre.R.S.3 is deeply ingrained in Bukusu cultural communication. The repetition that occurs both in ritual discursive domains points to the ideological naturalization of such practices (van Dijk, 2001). It becomes an accepted, even expected, part of the cultural landscape, further solidifying its role in shaping identities and policing behavior without overt questioning (van Dijk, 2002). The "humiliating nature" is thus not an accidental byproduct, but a culturally meaningful and discursively constructed element essential to the ritual's purpose of forging disciplined men and reinforcing community norms.

Narrator's Voice and Hegemonic Masculinity in Lubukusu Ritual Speeches

In the Lubukusu ritual speeches, the narrators basically include the circumciser, the father/guardian, the uncles, grandfathers, lead singers, and other elders as exemplified in the following text:

Pre.R.S.3

And I warn you today as I repeat, the closed door is not yours (speech spoken by the circumciser after the boy has been circumcised)

Today, I am done with you, completely. Tomorrow, I want you to stand still and motionless until the birds will die for people to pick (speech spoken by the uncle)

Pre.R.S.1

For me it is just once (was cut) and I am a man

It is important to note that the oral artists or narrators are all men who have been given the duty of completing the circumcision process by ushering the boys into manhood, and consequently into the customs of the community. One of the informants in the FGD 3 related that culturally, the circumciser, for example, is an important person to the initiate, almost to the level of a father figure, and therefore, his word is respected. The speakers derive their influence from the society's ideology and whatever they tell the boy is obligatory. In the discourses illustrated above, the narrator who is the circumciser is clear, as he identifies himself using the personal pronoun I (*ese, na-, ni-*) in the narrative when he is passing pieces of advice to the newly initiated man.

The pronoun I (*na-, ne- and ese*) in the ritual speech is used deictically to authoritatively identify the narrator, and bring out his boastful nature: *Ese lulala busa nengwa omundu* (For me it is just once (was cut) and I am a man). The circumciser braved the knife; hence, he is a living example of what he preaches. Gender issues arise from the activities that take place during the process of guiding the initiates: for instance, the one who offers instructions is the male sanctioned by the speech community. A closed door in the proverb, *khekhukania luno na*

nilakho, kumwuliango kukwikale kwabene (I warn you today as I repeat, the closed door is not yours) implies a married woman. Khaemba (2013) notes that the men acting as principals and authors of customary discourses lead the ritual discourses; they advance their sentiments and approve philosophies. The same men raise the regulatory norms of the public that act in line with the laws of Bukusu community. The oral performer highlights the gender-meaning oppositions that are deeply ingrained in ritual discourse as a result.

The narrator talks authoritatively because he has the backing of the community. In this case, the ideological views and attitudes seem to be held unconsciously by the speech community in many situations. The beliefs thus, may become engrained in their language, and cognitive processes.

The Lubukusu ritual speeches are substantial in that the initiation period is the duration the initiate has or has not received the transformation in his duties in the society. Using symbolism in Post.R.S.1 below, the artist says, *walekhile enyuma engubo ya mao* (you have left your mother's cloth behind) and *khwakhufwarire engubo ya raro* (we have come to dress you in your father's cloth).

Post.R.S.1

You refused mother's cloth (prepuce), my son, but now we have dressed you with your father's cloth! The clothes of adulthood. Do not open the door to a closed residence and enter! When you approach it, just hasten your steps. Yours is the one that is open. Help the grandfather or grandmother; because they are elderly, they deserve respect. As you help the elderly, combat the individual bothering them if you find out who it is. You'll receive their blessings and enjoy a peaceful life.

The artist in his speech uses the personal pronoun, *khwa (we) khufwarire* (clothed you) to imply that bringing up young people traditionally was everyone's responsibility. Thus "we" makes it a belief system of the community and all-inclusive. This ritual text implies that the boy is being initiated into adulthood, hence his roles in society should change; from feminine roles to masculine roles (from the accounts in FGD).

In support of the claim, Cameron (2006:16) argues that "sexist language is more accurately described as a multifaceted phenomenon that occurs in several complex systems of representation rather than just the naming of the world from one masculinist perspective."

Consequently, it is important to also note that the expression *khwakhufwarire engubo ya papa wowo, ya busani* (we have dressed you in your father's clothes, clothes of adulthood) seemingly presents Lubukusu as a language that has generic elements that perpetuate discriminatory opinions that foreground gender. Mills (1995) supports the assertion by noting that a language that maintains the idea that men are the standard or universal, and women are deviant people is known as a generic form. Some of the female participants in FGD 5 envisaged the symbolism in Post.R.S.1 above as overt sexism, hence questioning why the "mother's clothes" should be taken off from the young man. They argued that women's roles are as important as the men's roles in their society.

From a CDA standpoint, the excerpt highlights the intricate relationship between power, ideology, and language within the context of the circumcision ritual. The speakers' influence emanates from the Bukusu society's ideology that immediately signals how dominant societal beliefs are reinforced and perpetuated through discourse. According to Cameron (1996) CDA would meticulously scrutinize how this linguistic and social sanctioning of male instructors perpetuates patriarchal structures.

IV. Conclusion

The current study embarked on a linguistic discourse reconstruction of hegemonic masculinities within Lubukusu initiation ritual speeches, revealing profound insights into their structural, thematic, and functional dimensions.

Firstly, the research successfully described the intricate discourse structure of Lubukusu initiation ritual speeches. It identified recurring patterns of organization, rhetorical strategies, and distinctive linguistic features, including specific lexical choices, metaphors, similes, euphemism, personification, exaggeration, idiomatic expressions, proverbs and juxtaposition, and the pervasive use of proverbs and sayings. This detailed structural analysis illuminated how these traditional texts are meticulously crafted to convey specific cultural messages and facilitate the socialization process.

A discourse analysis of the speeches from the Lubukusu initiation ritual offers new perspectives on ritual analysis and shows how the Bukusu circumcision ceremony can be the topic of linguistic studies. The new perspectives have been made abundantly clear through the findings in the current study. This pertains to the linguistic structure, the degree of impact of traditional speeches in the community as well as the gender-power imbalances that shape how such speech texts are displayed in modern contexts.

This study discovered that Bukusu circumcision ritual speeches have a context-specific nature because they are strongly anchored in myths, taboos, and beliefs that comprise the fundamental philosophical foundations of the Bukusu cultural fabric. Additionally, all human behavior is socially created, and influenced by language and belief systems. To explain why social practices, exist and why they take the forms they do, legitimacy is discursively produced. There exists considerable evidence from the study that hegemonic masculinity has been legitimized in the Lubukusu initiation ritual speeches.

Textual repeats are used to highlight the meanings included in the speech texts. The discourse that accompanies the Bukusu circumcision rite, as well as its shape, substance, and performance, all embody numerous ideals that go beyond simply cutting the foreskin of the initiate's penis. The majority of values place a strong emphasis on the value of perseverance, hard effort, resolve, respect, shared accountability, ties to the community, politeness, and discipline.

Initiating the circumcised into adult roles and expectations or "making the man" is the ultimate purpose of the Bukusu initiation rites and procedures, which are embellished with symbolic messaging. Similar to this, Babukusu circumcision speech texts use symbols to obscure their true, but hidden meanings. The paper explains how the researcher deciphers these complex circumcision texts that denote male circumcision and discloses to the audience their hidden meanings.

CDA is a flexible and interdisciplinary theory that enabled a vigorous assessment of the Lubukusu ritual discourses. The theory allowed for the examination of the discourse structure and substance as well as the stylistic patterns used in their composition to the reception, and perception by the audience. More importantly, the theory revealed the underlying ideologies and power dynamics that shape language use in the Lubukusu ritual discourses in a sociocultural context.

The ongoing usage and repeating of the Lubukusu initiation ritual speeches from one season to the next is impeding progress in Bukusu society, despite the current shift in trends on women's responsibilities and gender positions in contemporary Kenya and the rest of the globe. These have the effect of continuing to normalize unequal relationships and depicting imbalances as normal, expected, and even acceptable.

V. Recommendations

A linguistic discourse reconstruction of hegemonic masculinities in Lubukusu initiation ritual speeches highlights several areas where the Bukusu community can foster more equitable and adaptive understandings of manhood. These recommendations aim to bridge the gap between valuable cultural heritage and contemporary needs, ensuring that initiation practices continue to prepare young men for responsible roles in society without perpetuating harmful gender norms. The following recommendations emanate from the current study.

It is vital to promote critical dialogue within the community, involving elders, youth, and women. This open conversation can help identify aspects of traditional masculine ideals that need adaptation. We should then re-evaluate and adapt rituals to align with modern gender-equality principles while preserving their cultural significance. This might involve softening threatening language in ritual texts and emphasizing positive masculine traits like responsibility, hard work and empathy.

We need to integrate gender-sensitive language into both formal and informal community programs for boys and girls. These programs should actively challenge rigid gender stereotypes. Supporting counter-narratives through new narrations and stories can offer more inclusive models of masculinity, moving beyond sole reliance on physical toughness.

In as far as local educational frameworks are concerned, the study advocates for the incorporation of critical gender studies into local curricula. This would involve integrating discussions on gender, masculinity, and cultural identity, utilizing culturally relevant examples drawn directly from Lubukusu traditions. It would also highlight the importance of language and communication awareness, encouraging educators to help students develop critical skills to analyze how language itself shapes and constructs social realities, particularly concerning gender.

On broader social implications, the study can inform policy decisions. This would include advising on the design of gender-sensitive programs that acknowledge and work constructively with existing cultural norms of masculinity, rather than against them, to achieve more equitable societal outcomes. It could also advocate for policies that support cultural preservation while embracing a modern outlook, ensuring that traditions are maintained in ways that promote positive social change.

Given the current study's emphasis on modern masculinities such as self-care and family planning, enhancing health and well-being education for young men is also paramount. This education should link healthy behaviours, including sexual and reproductive health, to responsible manhood.

Providing resources for community-based organizations working on gender equality can empower them to drive change. Since societal attitudes and mentalities cannot be changed alone by legislation, regular public sensitization through the media, cultural events, and governmental gatherings called "barazas" organized by municipal or county governments should be emphasized.

While acknowledging the importance of traditional heritage, there would also be a call for preservation and documentation with a critical lens, suggesting that while these valuable traditional texts should be preserved, they should also be accompanied by contextual notes or discussions that allow for a deeper, critical understanding of how gender has been historically and socially constructed within them.

Finally, directly challenging the devaluation of the feminine is essential. This means recognizing women's contributions and acknowledging that emotional expression is universal, not a gendered weakness.

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