

Leonard Kipkirui (ELTE): Sounding Taboos: Exploring Euphemistic Strategies in Kipsigis and English Song Lyrics

The purpose of this study is to describe and provide an overview of the ways in which Kipsigis popular music and English hip-hop lyric songs employ sexual euphemisms to avoid taboo terms, which are typically inappropriate to discuss in public. Grounded on Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1978), it delves into the creative ways in which artists of English and Kipsigis music genres focus on euphemisms in the navigation of societal taboos. Through a qualitative analysis of 20 carefully sampled songs comprising 10 pop songs and 10 Kipsigis popular songs from Kipsigis artists, the study expounds on the mechanisms used by artists in maintaining social harmony and preserving societal norms. For the purpose of this analysis, Billboard.com was used to acquire the ten pop songs from the United States of America composed based on club play, radio airplay, audience impressions, sales data, and streaming activity. These songs were selected because they were thematically relevant in addressing the euphemistic strategies, guaranteed rich and relevant data, and addressed the objectives of the study. To establish what counts as "taboo" Kipsigis popular music, studies such as Rop (2015) which explored identification of taboos based on restrictions, values and societal norms in Kipsigis culture. In the English pop music, studies such as Kuzio (2018) provided the frameworks for comparisons of the norms in both cultures and how they influence the use of euphemisms in music in the reflection of cultural variations in addressing and defining taboos. Based on the study data, the researcher discovered that there are similarities and differences in the way that sexual euphemism is used Kipsigis popular music and English pop songs. Additionally, the findings reveal that both genres use sexual euphemisms as a linguistic technique that helps musicians present potentially harmful or socially unacceptable subjects in a more agreeable way. The study does, however, also reveal minor variations in the approaches taken by each genre, emphasizing the impact of linguistic norms and cultural environment on the use of euphemistic language. Through investigating the confluence of music, language, and culture, this study advances our comprehension of how artists handle delicate subjects within their local communities.

Keywords: popular songs, English pop lyric song, taboos.

References

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