Gender Variations in the Use of Swear Words in Six Social Network Groups in the Meru Speech Community

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to investigate genderlect in the use of swear words in the six social network groups in the Meru speech community. Sample was drawn from the following social network groups: boys 'groups, girls 'groups, men's groups and women's groups using judgmental sampling method. The difference theory by Deborah Tannen studied the analysis of the data. The study found out that boys and men use more swear words than girls and women in Kimeru. These differences are informed by different socialization of both males and females in the Meru culture. Women have been instructed in the proper ways of talking just as they have been instructed in the proper ways of dressing, in the use of cosmetics, and in other "feminine" kinds of behaviour. On the other hand men have been instructed in "masculine" kinds of behaviour.

Keywords: genderlect, social networks, swear words, socialization, masculine behaviour,,feminine,behaviuor

1. Introduction

The theoretical basis of language variation is the premise that language varies and these variations patterns across social variables gender being one of them. Gender is a cultural construct that distinguishes males and females roles in society and this distinction has linguistic implications. The focus in gender studies is genderlect which refers to differences in language of both men and women for example, In Living Language (p.222),George Keith and John Shuttleworth record suggestions that: women - talk more than men, talk too much, are more polite, are indecisive/hesitant, complain and nag, ask more questions, support each other, are more co-operative, whereas men - swear more, don't talk about emotions, talk about sport more, talk about women and machines in the same way, insult each other frequently, are competitive in conversation, dominate conversation, speak with more authority, give more commands, interrupt more. It is from this background that the study by Mikwa (2017) focused on genderlect in the use of swear words in Kimeru language. Swear words refer to Kimeru terms that are used to swear, such as to express strong anger or frustration.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Numerous studies have been conducted in Kimeru but none had been done on genderlect in the use of swear words, therefore; the study filled that gap.

1.2 Objectives of the study

The study had four objectives but this paper is based on the first and second objectives of the study namely: to identify the swear words used by different social networks groups in Kimeru and to find out gender differences in the use of swear words in Kimeru

2 Literature review and Theoretical Framework

The study reviewed firstly literature on language variation. Here it was found out that language varies across the social variables of age, sex, class, education, ethnicity etc. Secondly, Literature on language and gender was reviewed this helped to shed light on the differences between men and women speeches.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Difference theory by Deborah Tannen studied the data of the study. *Difference* is an approach of equality, differentiating men and women as belonging to different 'sub-cultures' as they have been socialized to do so since childhood. This then results in the varying communicative styles of men and women. Deborah Tannen is a major advocate of this position Tannen compares gender differences in language to cultural differences. Comparing conversational goals, she argues that men tend to use a "report style", aiming to communicate factual information, whereas women more often use a "rapport style", which is more concerned with building and maintaining relationships.

3 Materials and methods

Judgemental sampling method was used to select respondents for the study. It underlying principle involves identifying in advance the 'type' of speakers to be studied and then seeking a quota of speakers who fit the specified categories as Milroy (1987:26) observes. A total number of three contact people were used each from the three pre- specified social network groups. The identified subjects introduced the researcher to the members

of their social network groups. Therefore, the researcher was able to get three informants per each social network group who were interviewed by way of word list discussion topics which were tape recorded to elicit data for the study. Milroy (1987:26) notes that sociolinguistics samples that are very large amount to unnecessarily large data and necessitate much time in analysis, but may not yield different results (cf Kebeya 1997, Muthwii 1994 and Trudgill 1974), Mikwa (2008) also observes that it is no longer necessary to work with large samples for studies in speech communication because sampling procedures have improved greatly. Thus, in the study, data was got from three pre-specified social network groups in Meru. Each group had three male members and three female members therefore the total population was eighteen informants.

The data consisted of tape recorded spontaneous speech using the difference theory technique.

The data collected was sorted out into social network groups using the process of data reduction and interpretation as per the swear word list discussion topics provided. Then the data for each discussion word list topic was presented in a table alongside the social network groups. The information on genderlect on the use of swear words per social network groups were expressed in percentages. The tables and figures were used to express the scores of genderlect on use of swear words knowledge per social network group using tables.

3.1 Data Presentation
Data was presented in extracts from transcribed texts. The genderlect on the use of swear words knowledge that varied according to Pre-specified social network groups were identified and a statistical evaluation method was used to analyse them showing the variability of this knowledge across the social network groups.

Therefore, the study adopted quantitative and qualitative approaches to data analysis. The analysis of scores obtained from the variation of the knowledge of genderlect on the use of swear words across social network groups generated numerical data which called for quantitative analysis. Every word on genderlect on the use of swear words that varied alongside gender depending on the word lists topics of discussion was assigned one point and the total points for every group of informants was converted into percentages and the informants were stratified using these percentages. The percentages were found by dividing 100% by the total number of words on genderlect on the use of swear words per word list discussion topic and multiplying the answer by the words scored by the respective social network groups. This translates in mathematical representation thus:

$$\frac{100}{\text{ŇŤ} \times \text{Ñåî}}$$

Where ŇŤ is the total number of swear words per word list discussion topic. Ñåî is the swear words scored by the respective social network group.

3.2 Analysis of Data as per the words lists Discussion Topics
The informants were given swear words lists discussion topics namely: Kimeru swear words that they use when annoyed or frustrated. The spontaneous speech of the informants was tape recorded during the interview sessions. The knowledge of genderlect on the use of swear words varied across the social network groups as illustrated in the data below:

3.2.1 A1 Boys and girls aged between 9 years- 13 years.
These respondents were in their upper primary school level of their education. They were given a list of swear words and asked to identify the ones they used when annoyed by their peers during their past time activities. They identified swear words and their scores were as captured on the table below.
The provided swear words were:

Ita naria /ita naria/	go there!
Kia /kia/	fool!
Washumbura /waʃumbura/	don't disturb me
Wamburia/wamburia/	don't ask me
Aibu eku /aibu eku/	shame on you

Their scores were presented as shown on the table below.
Table 1.1 Boys and girls aged (9-13) years swear words scores

Speakers	Gender	Points	Variance	Percentage
A1	Males	5/5	0	0
	Females	2/5	3	60

KEY
A1   Boys and girls (9-13) years
Table 1.1 shows that the scores for boys and girls (9-13) years where the scores for boys are higher than the scores for girls meaning that boys used more swear words in their conversation than girls where boys preferred conflict to compromise and girls preferred compromise to conflict. This is represented graphically as follows:

Graph 1.1 boys and girls (9-13) years swear words graphical representation.

KEY
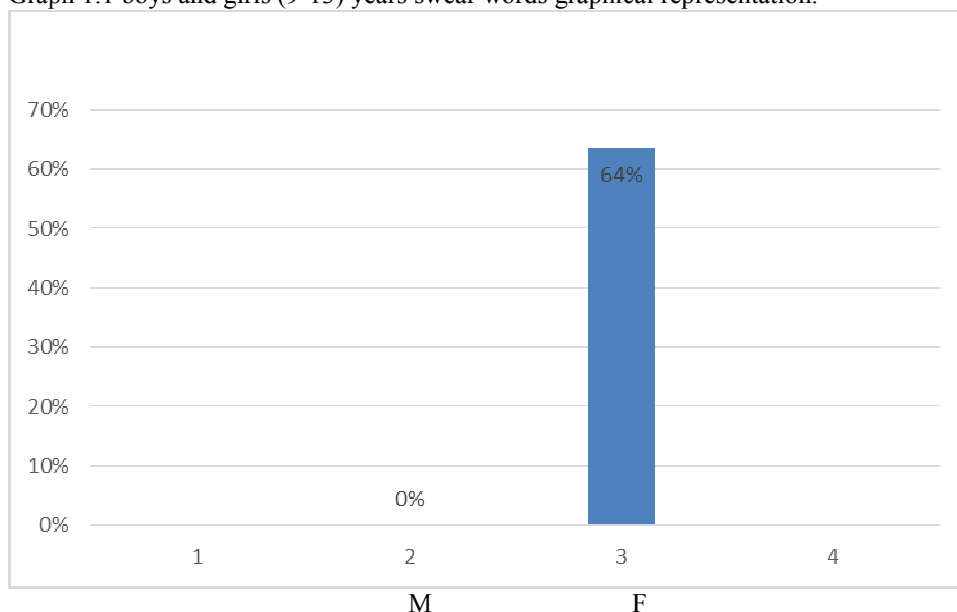
M   Males

F   Females

Graph 1.1 shows that males have a 0% variance while females have 60 % variance meaning males use swear words more than females.

3.2.2 A2 Youths aged between 14 years - 18 years

These were boys and girls in their secondary school level of education. They were asked the same question that the boys and girls of (9-13) years were asked. The provided swear words and their scores were as shown below.

Nkai/nkai/   testicles
Kuru /kuru/   dog
Ntigiri /ntigiri/   donkey
Kia/kia/   fool
Ntaka /ntaka/   rubbish

Their scores were as shown on the table below.

Table 2.1   Youths (14-18) years swear words scores

Speakers	Gender	Points	Variance	Percentage
A2	Males	5/5	0	0
	Females	1/5	4	80

KEY

A2   Youths (14-18) years

Table 2.1 shows that the scores for boys and girls aged (14-18) years where the scores for boys are higher than the scores for girls meaning that boys used more swear words in their conversation than girls. Where boys preferred conflict to compromise and girls preferred compromise to conflict. This was captured graphically as follows.

Graph 2.1 Youths (14-18) years swear words scores

KEY
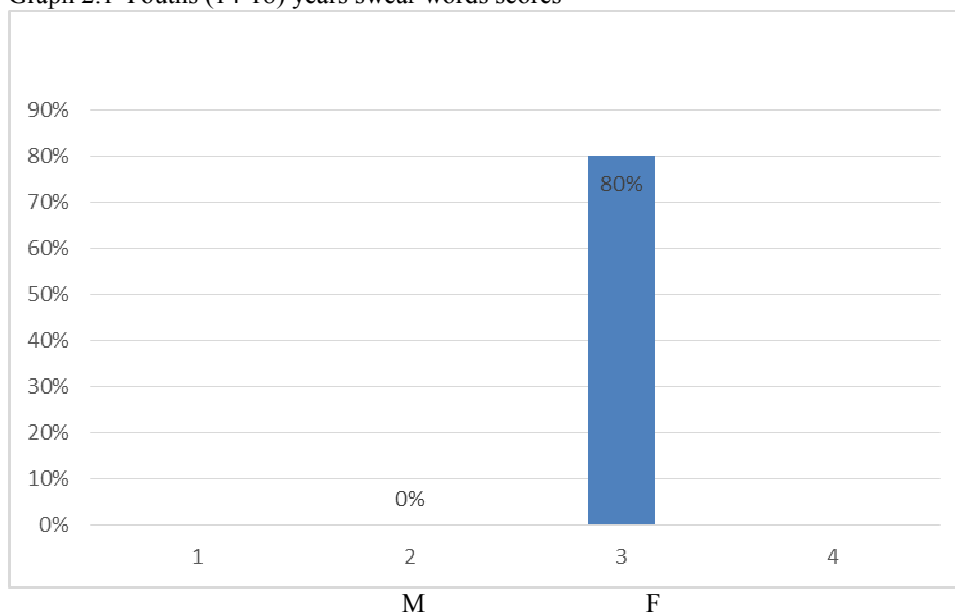
M   Males

F   Females

Graph 2.1 shows that males have 0% variance while females have 80% variance meaning males use more swear words than females.

3.2.3 A3 Speakers above 18 years

These were speakers who were through with their secondary school education. They were asked the same question that the other speakers above were asked. The provided swear words list and their scores were as shown below.

Ukailila /ukailila/	you will regret!
Ukamenya uria mbitawa /ukameŋa uria mbitawa/	you will know my name!
Ti kia yukwe /ti kia yukwe/	it is not of your mother
Ntani nkathira /ntani nkathira/	I am fully circumcised
Ukambona /ukambona/	you will see me

Table 3.1   Speakers above 18 years swear words scores

Speakers	Gender	Points	Variance	Percentage
A3	Males	5/5	0	0
	Females	1/5	4	80

KEY

A3   Speakers above 18 years old

Table 3.1 shows that the scores for speakers above 18 years old where the scores for males are higher than the scores for females meaning that males used more swear words in their conversation than females .Where males preferred conflict to compromise and females preferred compromise to conflict. This was represented graphically as follows

Graph 3.1 Graphical representation of speakers above 18 years old swear words scores
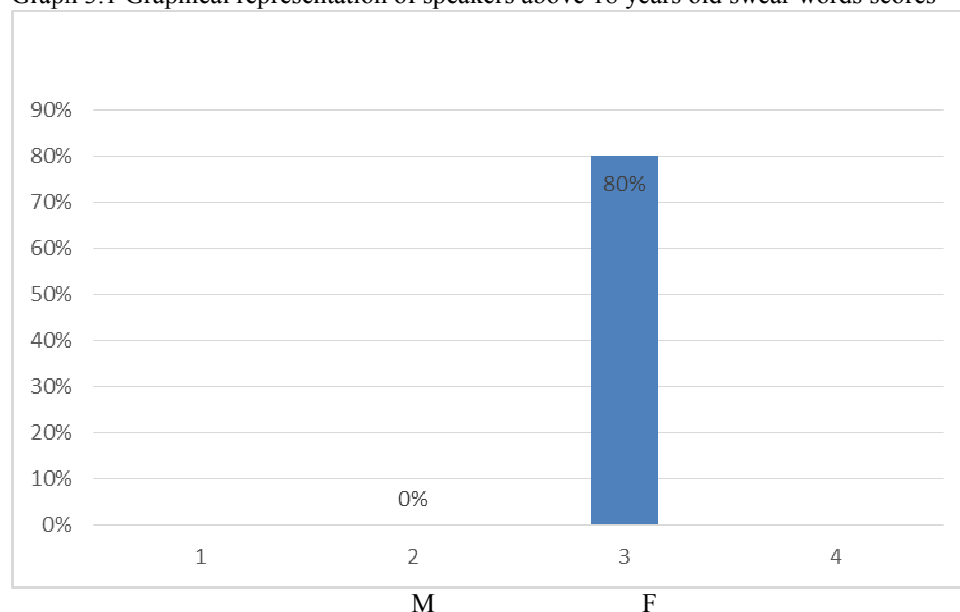
KEY
M   Males
F   Females

Graph 3.1 shows that the males have 0% variance while females have 80% variance meaning males use more swear words than females.

Conclusion

Genderlect in the use of swear words is as a result of difference in socialization of males and females in the Meru culture where females more than males refer compromises to conflicts when annoyed hence using less swear words than their males counterparts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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