

# Conceptualization of the Seropositive using the Journey Metaphor in EkeGusii HIV and AIDS Discourse in Kisii County, Kenya

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## Abstract

Language plays a fundamental role in the fight against HIV and AIDS in Kenya. Moreover, language is important in the dissemination of information that would ensure the success of both prevention and treatment of any disease. English language is used as the main language of communication on HIV and AIDS related issues in Kenya. The documented information available in indigenous languages, for example, EkeGusii on HIV and AIDS is many at times a direct translation from English. Whereas Kenya has made significant progress in the fight against HIV and AIDS, the prevalence of HIV in Gusii is very high, at between 10% and 28%, this call for investigation. In a recent draft report, HIV Prevention Revolution Road MAP 2013, prepared by NACC and NASCOP revealed that Kisii is among the nine Counties that contribute more than half of the new HIV infections in the country. A number of linguistic expressions such as metaphors are used in reference to HIV and AIDS in EkeGusii. This article investigates the journey metaphor as used in EkeGusii HIV and AIDS discourse. The ubiquity nature of metaphor makes it possible for the journey metaphor to be abundant in EkeGusii HIV and AIDS discourse. This paper reveals how metaphor reflects and structures EkeGusii speakers understanding of reality and particularly HIV and AIDS. As a result, the basic metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY is elaborated in novel ways and expressed in diverse measures in EkeGusii. Consequently, EkeGusii speakers perceive a seropositive individual as a traveller on an endless journey of taking ARVs or death.

**Keywords:** Seropositive, conceptualization, metaphor, journey, HIV and AIDS

## 1. Introduction

This article deals with language use and HIV and AIDS. Specifically, it examines the conceptualization of the seropositive in EkeGusii language using the journey metaphor. The seropositives are the individuals who are infected with HIV.

Waitiki (2010) asserts that one way of fighting HIV and AIDS is through communication of relevant, honest and complete information. This underscores the importance of using a language that is well understood by the people if communication is indeed to be effective.

Unfortunately, in Kenya, English and Kiswahili are official languages of communication. However, English continues to be used as the main language of communication in matters relating to HIV and AIDS, despite the fact that only about 17% of the population speak or use English effectively (Angoya, 2002). It would therefore be correct to argue that majority of the Kenyan population do not receive adequate information on HIV and AIDS. In addition, Kiswahili has its shortcomings. One argument might be that Kiswahili is understood by more people than those who understand English but this is normally with varying degrees of competence and intelligibility. In fact, Webb and Kembo (2000) argue that Kiswahili is spoken by 65% of the Kenyan population; therefore, some people do not understand Kiswahili too. This means that the two languages that are largely used for communication on HIV and AIDS are not languages which the majority of Kenyans are competent in.

Although the literacy rate in Kenya is high, at 87.4% (CIA world fact book, 2012), the lack of adequate proficiency in the two official languages of the country remains a barrier to effective communication. Moreover, Webb and Kembo (2000) assert that English is the language of scientific, technological and intellectual discourse. Therefore, most of the issues in HIV and AIDS are relayed in English and then translated to other languages. Waitiki (2010) also observes that translating information received in English to local languages including Kiswahili is a tall order. There is no one to one equivalence between English and Kiswahili while other terms once translated acquire connotations that are absent in the English equivalents. This leads to miscomprehension. Sperber and Wilson (1986) argue that miscomprehension is an inevitable occurrence in communication. Miscomprehension of HIV and AIDS messages means that the knowledge acquired may not be accurate and thus fail to send the appropriate information to the people concerned. It is against this background that this article seeks to understand how EkeGusii speakers construe the seropositives.

EkeGusii is a Lacustrine Eastern Bantu language that is spoken in the western part of Kenya (Nurse & Phillipson, 1980). The 2009 population census indicates that EkeGusii is used by approximately 2.2 million speakers in the two Counties of Kisii and Nyamira. The speakers of EkeGusii are known as AbaGusii and the language has two dialects: EkeRogoro and EkeMaate, also referred to as Rogoro and Maate (Bosire, 1993). EkeGusii is predominantly spoken in Nyanza province but AbaGusii form part of local immigrants in major towns and cities in Kenya and it is normal to hear EkeGusii being spoken far from the original EkeGusii speaking areas. The first case of HIV in Kenya was identified in 1984 and approximately 1.7 million Kenyans have succumbed to HIV and AIDS related complications since then. As of December 2011, the people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) in the country were 1.6 million (NACC and NASCOP, 2012). In 2013, it was estimated that approximately 5.6% of the adult population in Kenya was infected with HIV (NASCOP, 2013). Nevertheless, with seropositives living longer as a result of increased treatment access, Kenya projects that the number of people living with HIV will continue to grow (NACC and NASCOP, 2012).

Recent studies indicate that whereas Kenya has made significant progress in the fight against HIV and AIDS, the national HIV prevalence is still high and this raises concern. Prevalence is the measure of the total burden of disease, including new and old infections (NASCOP, 2008). Prevalence can reduce or increase based on several factors including the rate of infections, the mortality from a disease and the length of time people are able to survive a disease based on available treatment.

While the national HIV prevalence stands at 5.6%, Nyanza province has the highest HIV prevalence standing at 15.1% (KAIS in NASCOP, 2013). The rate of HIV infection has hence continued to rise despite the fact that there have been a number of spirited campaigns on

HIV and AIDS in Kenya. A recent draft report, HIV Prevention Revolution Road MAP 2013, prepared by NACC and NASCOP revealed that nine Counties namely Nairobi, Homa Bay, Kisumu, Siaya, Migori, Mombasa, Turkana, Busia and Kisii are 'high incidence cluster' as far as HIV and AIDS is concerned. According to Siringi (2013) the nine Counties contribute more than half the new HIV and AIDS infections in the country. Siringi (2013) also indicates that one million people are infected with HIV in the 'high incidence cluster' Counties, which is a big chunk of the total 1.6 million people living with the virus countrywide. Siringi (2013) further asserts that the 'high incidence cluster' regions have high prevalence rates of between 10% and 28% which is much higher than the national average of 6.2%. The high prevalence therefore calls for urgent measures to cut down the number of new infections. Kisii is among the nine 'high incidence cluster' counties in which this is the focus of this study.

Waweru (2014) indicates that according to the UNAids 2012 report, Kisii County has HIV prevalence of 8.9% against the national rate of 5.6%. Similarly, Njaaga (2014) points out that stigma is literally killing more people living with HIV and AIDS in Kisii county than the condition itself. Njaaga (2014) further states that the health experts in the county attribute the high prevalence in the county to stigma that causes the majority to fail to disclose their status hence spread the virus. Njaaga's (2014) report further shows that Kisii County has 73,000 seropositives with only 15,000 accessing care and treatment services. These statistics are worrying and hence the motivation behind the current paper. The foregoing discussion about Kisii county indicates that there is need to carry out more HIV and AIDS awareness campaigns. These campaigns would also entail communicating HIV and AIDS messages using appropriate and relevant linguistic expressions. This article focuses on language use in EkeGusii with regard to HIV and AIDS communication.

### 1.1 Theoretical Assumptions

According to the Cognitive Theory of Metaphor, metaphor is viewed as a cross-domain mapping of our conceptual system. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) define metaphor as understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another or as a tightly structured mapping or a set of correspondences between two conceptual domains which are referred as the source and target domains. In this case, a concrete and clearly organized source domain, being more clearly related to physical and bodily experience is used to understand and talk about a more abstract and less clearly structured target domain.

Barcelona (2000) defines metaphor as the cognitive mechanism whereby one experiential domain is partially 'mapped', that is projected, onto a different experiential domain, so that the second domain is partially understood in terms of the first one. The domain that is mapped is called the *source* or *donor domain*, and the domain onto which the source is mapped is called the *target* or *recipient*. Both domains have to belong to different super ordinate domain. To illustrate this argument, Barcelona makes use of a well-known metaphoric example of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) LOVE IS A JOURNEY. This conceptual metaphor involves understanding abstract domain of experience (love) in terms of a very different and more concrete domain of experience (journeys). The linguistic expressions that are used to talk about love have a connection to journeys. For instance, *It has been a long, bumpy road, We are at crossroads, We may have to go separate ways, Our marriage is on the rocks, We are spinning our wheels,* and, *look how far we have come,* among the others are used in reference to love relationships.

This paper focuses on metaphor since one of the most important characteristics of metaphor is its ubiquity not only in language but also in thought (Nyakoe, Ongarora and Oloo, 2014). As

such, people form an idea in their minds which is in turn reflected in their speech. Therefore, metaphor is pervasive in language and using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) approach, it is difficult if not impossible to conceive of HIV and AIDS as free from metaphorical terms since metaphor is ubiquitous not only in language but also in thought and action. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) further argue that metaphor is always pervasive both in ordinary and specialized discourses. It is therefore obvious that EkeGusii HIV and AIDS discourse would utilize metaphor. In addition, metaphor systematicity allows one to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another. This systematicity necessitates the current article to analyze the conceptualization of the seropositives in EkeGusii in terms of the journey metaphor.

Cognitive linguistics considers language to be intrinsically and inherently symbolic, that is, linguistic expressions stand for conceptualizations (Langacker, 1987). It is also believed that language provides speakers with a set of resources for representing thought. In other words, human communication is based on the conceptual system people use in thinking and acting and language communicates this system. As such, EkeGusii speakers use the journey metaphor to understand the seropositive. In this case, the linguistic expressions drawn from the source domain of a journey were used to understand the target domain of seropositive in EkeGusii.

## **2. Methodology**

This study was conducted in Kisii County where EkeRogoro and EkeMaate dialects of EkeGusii are spoken. The study employed the analytical research design. In order to explain the use the conceptualization of the seropositives in EkeGusii in terms of a journey metaphor, a thorough examination of the various linguistic expressions that are drawn from the journey domain was deemed necessary.

The sample for the study consisted of the EkeGusii speakers and linguistic expressions that are used in HIV and AIDS discourse. The respondents were required to give the linguistic expressions drawn from the journey domain that are used to refer to the seropositives. The study employed purposive and chain sampling techniques in the selection of EkeGusii speakers who provided data for analysis. Two of the researchers are native speakers of EkeGusii, so, they used their native speaker intuition to come up with linguistic expressions and purposively select and interview other EkeGusii speakers from Kisii County who provided data for this study.

Further, the chain sampling assisted the investigators in identifying the other informants in the study. Therefore, the EkeGusii speaker identified purposively and with the information on the subject of research led the researchers to others of equal or more value. The chain sampling was used until a point of saturation was reached. A saturated sample of the linguistic expressions collected was used for analysis. The data collected was tape recorded and later transcribed for ease of analysis.

## **3. Results and discussion**

According to Lakoff and Turner (1989) the schema of 'journey' contains a number of slots and not all of which are compulsory. Some common slots are: travellers, path, impediments, destinations, and vehicles. The concept of a source domain, a journey is used to understand and structure the target domain of HIV and AIDS in EkeGusii. In this mapping, the metaphorical expressions that are used as source domains are drawn from the image schemas of journeys. This metaphor is explained using the following linguistic expressions.

- i) Aare as orogendo  
One is on a journey
- ii) Oonachire etigiti  
She/he has acquired a ticket
- iii) Aabangete eraini  
She/he is on a queue
- iv) Oonachire etigiti ya amakweri  
She/he has acquired a ticket for death
- v) Egetondo kegotara

#### A walking corpse

EkeGusii speakers understand the target domain, the seropositives using the aforementioned linguistic expressions that are drawn from the journey domain. Using the Cognitive Metaphor theory initiated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), it can be argued that the metaphorical expression, *oonachire etigiti* (he has acquired a ticket) is used as a source domain that is used to describe a target domain, the seropositive. In this understanding the acquisition of a ticket is compared to one being infected with HIV. It can be assumed that in this conceptualization, the seropositive is seen to be someone who has acquired a bus or air ticket, for example, and ready to travel. This source domain can be compared to Horne's (2010) study that sees a seropositive as *a traveler on the waiting lounge*. In this scenario, a ticket symbolizes the acquisition of a virus or being infected. Therefore it can be concluded that HIV IS A TICKET to travel according to EkeGusii AIDS discourse. The metaphorical expression, one has acquired a ticket does not indicate the destination or the path of the seropositive. However, given the understanding that HIV and AIDS is a taboo topic in most African societies (Achoka, 2007), it can be argued that the acquisition of HIV will imply the start of a journey. Therefore, once one has acquired this ticket, it has in most cases connotation of one who is about to travel to either the journey of ARVs or death.

The metaphorical expression, *aare ase orogendo* (one is on a journey), indicates explicitly that the seropositive is on a journey. The source domain indicates that a the target domain, the seropositive is a traveller who has embarked on a path or journey whose destination can only be guessed, either to the long journey of taking ARVS or death. Whereas, the metaphorical expression *aabangete eraini* (he is on a queue) is a source domain that may mean one is queuing to acquire a ticket or to board some means of transport. In understanding the target domain of the seropositives in EkeGusii HIV and AIDS discourse, being on a queue may also mean one is queuing to receive ARV treatment because of being seropositive or waiting for death. The queue aspect may also imply that the seropositives are several and hence on a long journey together. The queuing may further mean that the journey of taking ARV is an endless one and may be to death. The journey metaphor in this sense indicates that once one is infected, then his vehicle starts moving towards ARV treatment or death.

The metaphorical expressions *oonachire etigiti ya amakweri* (he has acquired a ticket for death) and *eketondo kegotara* (a walking corpse) are also used as source domains to understand the target domain, the seropositive. The two metaphoric expressions further show how EkeGusii speakers perceive HIV infection as a death sentence. The metaphorical expression, one has acquired a ticket for death understands HIV as acquiring a ticket that definitely will take one to the grave. This metaphorical expression is similar to what is used to understand the seropositive in Botswana. Muthangwane (2011) describes the connection between the a journey and HIV infection by arguing that the same way acquisition of a travel ticket is capable of taking one to several places, HIV infection is also capable too of taking one

to another place, in fact, from life to death. Therefore, the metaphorical expression, one has acquired a ticket for death in EkeGusii may compare HIV infection to the acquisition of a death certificate or sentence whereas the metaphorical expression a walking corpse shows that being seropositive transforms one to a person who is a half dead. In this regard, it may be argued that HIV INFECTION IS DEATH in EkeGusii HIV and ADS discourse. In some other understanding, the target domain, the seropositive is seen to have changed to a corpse who is walking to death. No one has even seen a corpse walking, therefore when EkeGusii speakers compares HIV infection to a walking corpse implies that HIV infection transforms one to somebody who can be compared to a zombie, it might seem that according to EkeGusii speaker's understanding, HIV infection removes the livelihood of a person. Hence, the use of the metaphorical expression,  *egetondo kegotara*  (a walking corpse) as a source domain in reference to a target domain, the seropositive in EkeGusii HIV and AIDS discourse.

The foregoing discussion indicates that the metaphorical expressions used as source domains utilize the journey schemas to understand the target domain, the seropositive. Thus, the conceptual metaphor, A SEROPOSITIVE IS ON A JOURNEY is formulated. In this metaphor, EkeGusii speakers believe that once one is seropositive, he/she embarks on a journey by acquiring a ticket to travel to either death or to the life long process of taking ARVs. At times the destination of the journey is indicated as death. This is illustrated by use of source domains of acquiring a ticket for death and a walking corpse to structure the target domain, the seropositive. These metaphorical expressions understand the process of infection as a death sentence or as a transformation of a living being to half dead status. This in turn creates a negative impression of an infected person. Hence, HIV is compared to a corpse and the infected person is compared to a lifeless entity hence a walking corpse. It is unlikely to see a corpse walking in a real life situation and this conceptualization that compares the lifelessness of a corpse to a human being that is infected with HIV and walking shows the fear that EkeGusii speakers have over HIV. In this situation, the seropositives' life is short-lived as they can die any time.

Some of these journey schemas that were discussed by Lakoff and Turner (1989) LIFE IS A JOURNEY were utilized in the metaphor, A SEROPOSITIVE IS ON A JOURNEY. The journey metaphor further introduces the metaphor PROBLEMS ARE OBSTACLES. In the journey to life, AIDS is seen as an obstacle towards living a healthy life. This is depicted by one of the lady respondents of this research. She revealed that she was living healthy and peacefully at her rural home until she was infected by her husband who stayed and worked in town and that finally changed her lifestyle forever. She indicated that:

*...nabo namanyete buya inka na abana bane, omogaka kagokora egasi Nairobi. Engaki egaika ingachaka korwara rwara. Ekeru nachiete nyagetari korigereriwa, abaringori bagantebia buna nigonindwarete oborwaire obo obonene. Inkoboria omogaka inaki rende yaba iga, agantebia buna nere nabo arwarete korende namarioga akonakomera. Nabo namanyete buna omogaka oretete oborwaire obo. Korwa engaki eywo, obogoma bwane bogaonchoreria mono.*

(I was staying well with my children at home while my husband was working and staying in Nairobi till a time that I started being sick on and off. When I went for medical checkup, I was informed that I was infected. On enquiring from my husband, he said that he too was infected and on medication. I knew my husband had infected me. From that day, my life changed forever).

This illustration indicates that HIV was a burden for the lady who was a house wife and staying at Kisii County while her husband was working and staying in Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. She lived a miserable life after she was infected with HIV by her husband.

While the JOURNEY METAPHOR does not require a vehicle domain to be used, it is often included by extension in the metaphorical expressions. Many at times, when one is travelling, he/she has to acquire a ticket beforehand then board a vehicle. EkeGusii speakers therefore represent a scenario that one boards another vehicle probably for the seropositives only the moment he/she is infected with HIV and embarks on a journey towards death. However, the seropositives' journey towards the destination of death can be halted temporarily by taking ARVs which is referred to as *konywa amariogo* (taking medication) or *koomera chintetere* (swallowing seeds). The aforementioned metaphorical expressions are used as source domains to understand and structure the target domain, the uptake of ARVs. The term; being on medication shows that there is narrowing of meaning in EkeGusii HIV and AIDS discourse such that being on medication implies being on ARVs. While the swallowing of seeds indicates semantic expansion in that seeds are also refer to ARVs. In this case, ARVs are compared to seeds in that the same way seeds are planted for plants to germinate and grow; ARVs are taken to rejuvenate the weakened immunity of the seropositives. Therefore, the metaphor ARVs IS LIFE SUSTAINING can apply in EkeGusii HIV and AIDS discourse.

The conceptualization of EkeGusii HIV and AIDS discourse, also distinguished two kinds of travellers, the positive or optimistic and the negative or pessimistic. In EkeGusii HIV and AIDS discourse, the journey metaphor analysis indicates that a traveler is an infected person. The two categories of travellers were revealed from the respondents who indicated that:

*Abanto aba bare abarwaire nigo bare ara kabere. Mbare okonyora barwarete, bakonywa amariogo naende besigete mono. Tokonyora bare banyaka nonya. Korende abande nigo bakwanga konywa amariogo barwara mono na abande nigo batagete gotambokeria enyamoreo. Nigo banga nga ebakoyebusura goeta ekiagera ebare abatari tari.*

(The infected individuals can be divided into two groups; there are those ones who are on medication and living healthy. Whereas, the others are either on denial or on ARVs but out to infect more people as they are into immense prostitution).

The aforementioned illustration indicates two sets of travellers as far as EkeGusii HIV and AIDS is concerned. The optimistic traveller lives positively and has accepted his status. These people are on ARV treatment and look healthy. The optimistic travellers are living healthy, are faithful to their partners and do not default on taking medication. Whereas, the pessimistic traveller is careless and immoral and has not accepted his or her status and therefore lives in denial. Some of the pessimistic travelers have defaulted with their medication and are unfaithful as some of them are promiscuous. As a result, they are re-infected as time goes by and for some; they are out to infect more people. These two kinds of travellers also lead two different journeys. The optimistic traveller is almost sure of living healthy for some time and may not develop AIDS soon. The pessimistic traveller might be travelling towards death. The two kinds of travellers in EkeGusii HIV and AIDS discourse are illustrated by the expressions, *amariogo bakonakonywa* (they are on medication) which implies that one is seropositive and on ARVs. This focuses on an optimistic traveller. Whereas, the pessimistic traveler has a do not care attitude and can be illustrated by the expression *omonto oyo nomorwaire naende nomotayayi* (this person is infected and a prostitute). This is

an indication of a pessimistic traveler who is infected but out to spread HIV in that he is practicing prostitution. The pessimistic traveller may not know that he is pessimistic but the people surrounding him are able to see that through his attitude and behavior patterns. Shokr (2006) posits that the conventional metaphor, LIFE AS A JOURNEY where both domains are explicit is traditionally used to cover the concept human life from birth to death. However, human life is viewed in EkeGusii HIV and AIDS discourse with the departure with being infected and the final destination as either death or unknown place of recovery in case a cure of HIV and AIDS is discovered. Thus, the HIV journey is an endless journey with the uptake of ARVs because one cannot really know when he will die and whether he will die of HIV complications or to death once in denial and not on ARVs. The basic metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY is a point of departure in EkeGusii HIV and AIDS discourse as novel metaphors are created from it. This is a fairly common resource in literary language as Lakoff and Turner (1989:26) admits:

The number of basic metaphorical concepts of life and death turns out to be very small. Though these can be combined and elaborated in novel ways and expressed in infinity of ways, the infinity is fashioned from the small set of basic metaphors.

Lakoff and Turner (1989) assert that such basic metaphors may be composed or elaborated in new ways, but the basic conceptual resources available to human beings are used. If this is not done, one would understand them. Thus, it has been realized from the foregoing discussion that the linguistic creativity of EkeGusii is evident and it has been used in novel and unprecedented ways.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Linguistic metaphors that construe the understanding of a seropositive using the journey metaphor were found to be abundant in EkeGusii HIV and AIDS discourse. The fact that metaphorical expressions discussed constituted the spoken utterances about the seropositive in EkeGusii strongly suggested that the ubiquity of linguistic metaphors was prevalent due to the necessity of metaphorical conceptualization. EkeGusii speakers use the already available information in understanding the seropositive and HIV infection. As such, the metaphorical expressions in the source domains were drawn from concrete and readily available concepts that the speakers are aware of. The foregoing discussion is in agreement with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) assertion that humans experience their environment through their bodies and also construe their world in terms of their body experiences. This study reveals how metaphor reflects and structures EkeGusii speakers understanding of reality and particularly HIV and AIDS. As a result, the basic metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY is elaborated in novel ways and expressed in diverse measures in EkeGusii. Consequently, EkeGusii speakers perceive a seropositive individual as a traveler to an endless journey of taking ARVs or death.

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