

ABSTRACT

Dholuo panegyrics (*pakruok*) reflect social issues that can only be contextually understood with reference to societal norms and Luo cultural practices. Dholuo panegyrics entail deliberate use of indirect references comprising implicit meanings. Dholuo panegyrics are full of indeterminacies such as ambiguities, metaphors, ironies and implicatures that are difficult to interpret as understanding them is contextually determined because of the use of figurative language. This study provides meaning of an utterance as an interpretation beyond literal meaning, which requires a hearer to resolve the indeterminacies to establish the speaker's implicit meaning of Dholuo panegyrics. The aim of the study was to explain how hearers bridge the gap between the encoded linguistic meaning of an utterance and the speaker's intended meaning of Dholuo panegyrics. Specific objectives were: to identify interpretive mechanisms required in order to interpret Dholuo panegyrics, explain how hearers interpret speakers' meaning of Dholuo panegyrics and determine role of contextual information in the interpretation of the panegyrics. It was important to investigate interpretation of Dholuo panegyrics in social contexts since previous studies provide literal meaning, which do not require interpretation strategies. The study adopted Relevance Theory propounded by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (1995) founded on two principles: communicative principle and cognitive principle. This study was carried out in Nyang'oma Division, Bondo Sub-County. The study population comprised 200 utterances of Dholuo panegyrics. The study employed analytical research design. Purposive sampling technique was used to identify 10 informants of age thirty-five and above. Two hundred panegyrics were collected in different contexts by use of interview and observation schedules. The panegyrics were randomly sampled then a systematic sampling procedure done. To determine reliability, a pilot study was carried out to test reliability of the research methods and instruments. The study sample was not the same respondents used in the pilot study. This was to determine validity. Findings: understanding of Dholuo panegyrics is achieved by inferring the meaning of the speaker's utterance; communicators must provide interpretive mechanisms on the basis of contextual information to resolve the indeterminacies in different contexts, identify and classify types of panegyrics. Recommendations: users of Dholuo panegyrics should be conversant with socio-cultural strategies and discourse directions to appropriately interpret panegyrics. The study suggests further research to investigate panegyrics in other languages for future comparative studies and intercultural understanding of panegyrics. This study has contributed to the field of Linguistics, particularly, to scholars interested in Dholuo panegyrics.