

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272663299>

# Humour in Pakruok Among the Luo of Kenya: Do Current Theories of Humour Effectively Explain Pakruok?

Article in *International Journal of Linguistics* · June 2013

DOI: 10.5296/ijl.v5i3.3369

---

CITATION

1

READS

2,316

1 author:



**Beatrice Owiti**

Meru University College of Science and Technology

1 PUBLICATION 1 CITATION

SEE PROFILE

# Humour in Pakruok Among the Luo of Kenya: Do Current Theories of Humour Effectively Explain Pakruok?

Beatrice Owiti

Department of English University of Huddersfield

Queensgate, Huddersfield, HD1 3DH

E-mail: [owitibeatrice@yahoo.com](mailto:owitibeatrice@yahoo.com)

Received: March 11, 2013    Accepted: March 27, 2013    Published: June 24, 2013

doi:10.5296/ijl.v5i3.3369    URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v5i3.3369>

## Abstract

Many studies have been carried out on the Dholuo oral literature genre known as *pakruok* (Parkin 1978, Amuka 2000, Masolo 2000 and Mwangi 2009). Other studies have been carried out on how humour is created in language (Walsh 1995, Alison 1998, Simpson 2003 and Salvatore 2009). However, these studies have not targeted *pakruok* as a source of humour. The use of *pakruok* as a joke telling session is an important sociolinguistic phenomenon that needs to be examined. This essay analyses the linguistic aspects used to create humour in *pakruok* in the Dholuo cultural, social and environmental contexts.

**Keywords:** CDA, Dholuo, humour, incongruity and *pakruok*.

## 1. Introduction

*Pakruok* is a literary genre in Dholuo oral literature. It is considered a complex genre of speech. This genre has been studied by among others Parkin (1978), Amuka (2000), Masolo (2000) and Mwangi (2009) who each give a definition of *pakruok*. For instance, Parkin describes *pakruok* as "... brief and it is an encapsulation of multiple longer narratives, anecdotes and myths that predate and succeed its utterance (Parkin 1978:90) Parkin goes on to note that *Pakruok* is politically significant as self-fashioning in public spaces as performers compete each other openly to claim the highest social status for themselves. This paper agrees with Parkin in so far as he states that *pakruok* encompasses more than just the words uttered in the genre itself. However, this paper points out that, *pakruok* may also be used merely for entertainment and not so much for claiming high social status for the performer.

Amuka (2000:90) on the other hand also states that "*Pakruok* is a Dholuo noun. It is often translated as "praising oneself", "praise poetry", "praise-word-poetry" or "praise-word-game". One is praised or praises oneself in order to provoke response or to initiate verbal drama". Amuka points out that in order to understand *Pakruok*, one has to interpret what the surface conceals. He argues that the meanings created in *Pakruok* are "meanings that one is led to by the nature of the surfaces and by the contexts in which they operate" (2000:90). This is true as indeed the *Pakruok* that Amuka identifies and defines here is full of symbolism and its meanings have to be unravelled in relation to the context of the utterance. In this definition, Amuka restricts himself to one type of *Pakruok* that involves only self-praise which is only a small part of the *Pakruok* that this study dwells on.

Masolo (2000:369) defines *Pakruok* as "an incantation of one's own or another person's praises by members of the audience in turns in between songs. *Pakruok* is a part of "chamo nyadhi" (display of self-virtue) a poetic form of self-identification usually framed in idioms punctuated with proverbial irony". This definition is particularly useful to this study because it situates the use of *Pakruok* in songs which is what forms the data for this study. However this essay shows that *Pakruok* involves more linguistic complex styles apart from irony and use of idioms. I also illustrate that *Pakruok* is a form of a joke telling session.

Masolo(2000) adds a definition of *Pakruok* that this study embraces. He defines it as "expression of social and personal relations through talk which happens in *Pakruok* in the "gano" (narrations) by Nyatiti performers". This study embraces this definition because the data used in this study as *Pakruok* goes beyond the self-praise identified by the earlier mentioned scholars and encompasses what Masolo calls expression of social and personal relations. The user of *Pakruok* in my data uses it within the pop song giving his personal renditions through humorous comments. During the *Pakruok* session, the musician continues to play the musical instruments but instead of singing, talks to the audience in a narration. What Masolo fails to point out is that these narrations are usually a form of a joking session within the song aimed at provoking laughter for entertainment as well as to ridicule unbecoming behaviour in the society thus creating satire.

Therefore, a working definition of *Pakruok* for this study would be that, *pakruok* is literary genre of oral literature usually performed within another genre such as song where the

performer narrates jokes and uses praise of oneself or of others through speech for entertainment as well as to ridicule unbecoming behaviour.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This paper employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in the analysis of humour in *pakruok*. The proponents of CDA include Fairclough (1992, 1995), Van Dijk (1997), Wodak (1995) and Bloomaert (2005). CDA analyzes the relationship between language and society and focuses on the relationship between language, discourse, speech, and social interactions. Van Dijk (1997) points out that CDA offers sociolinguistics a critical approach to examine fully the interaction between language and social structures and to explain how these social structures are constituted by linguistic interaction.

*Pakruok* is an aspect of discourse which is culturally bound. It is a genre that makes light of social issues in a manner that can only be explained by understanding the societal norms cultural practices and expectations and then explaining *pakruok* in the light of those norms. In order to interpret the humour to be found in *pakruok*, one has to examine the discourse at the three levels envisioned by CDA. First, one has to analyse the text level by examining the grammar, vocabulary, cohesion, word, and text structure. Secondly, in order to explain messages in *pakruok*, the unit is looked at in its entirety taking into consideration the wholesome message. The third dimension is discourse as a social practice. As mentioned earlier, *pakruok* is culture specific and appears within a particular social set up. *Pakruok* forms part of entertainment in form of a play on words meant to elicit laughter. In this essay, I am going to restrict myself to *pakruok* found in the Dholuo traditional songs.

The major tenets of CDA as summarized by Fairclough and Wodak (1997:271-280) in Kobia (2008) include: CDA is used for addressing social problems, it is used in power relations, and it is discursive. CDA also postulates that; discourse constitutes society and culture, discourse does ideological work, discourse is historical, the link between text and society is mediated, discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory and finally that discourse is a form of social action. The tenets mentioned go hand in hand with the analysis of the messages in *pakruok*. *Pakruok* addresses social problems by identifying them and making light even of the most serious issues. This genre identifies power relations in the depiction of men, women, children, plants, and animals in a hierarchical manner. *Pakruok* is discursive in that one has to take an explanatory approach in its examination. In *pakruok*, the culture of the Luo community is relayed and indeed, it is difficult to interpret the messages in *pakruok* without understanding the context in which they are used. The *pakruok* used as data in this paper are analyzed using the main tenets of CDA and are explained in the context of the cultural references in the Dholuo traditional songs in which they occur.

*Pakruok* also makes some members of the society a subject of mockery. CDA come into play here as it takes a particular interest in language and power. Fairclough (1989) seeks to increase consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others. Wodak (2001:2) defines CDA as fundamentally concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structure relationships of dominance, discrimination and control as manifested in language. Therefore CDA sets out to investigate social inequality as it is

expressed, constituted and legitimised in discourse. In the analysis of pakruok, I am able to identify how the less powerful are made the subject of jokes thus perpetuating discrimination and social inequality in the society in which the discourse occurs through the use of language. It is therefore clearly in language that discriminatory practices are enacted and propagated; and in language that unequal relations of power are constituted and produced (Blackledge, 2005)

### 3. Creation of Humour in Language

Humour in language is a widely researched area with authors such as Wash (1995), Alison (1998), Simpson (2003), and Salvatore (2009) all describing how humour is created for purposes of entertainment as well as for satire.

According to Alison (1998), the context of humour is crucial in determining whether an individual finds something amusing or not. She further notes that “humour is created out of a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke” (1998:7). This is what she calls incongruity, which can occur at the different levels of language. Through incongruity, there is created ambiguity and double meaning which misleads the audience thus causing humour. Incongruity can be created by the structure, semantics, pragmatics and the discourse of a language. In the data used in this essay, each level of incongruity mentioned by Alison (1998) was identified. The data was explained in the context of the Dholuo socio-cultural context in which the texts used occurred. In order for one to be able to understand the jokes used in Pakruok, one has to analyse them in the context in which they occurred. This actually refers us back to the major tenets of CDA, which postulate that discourse cannot be understood in isolation and is intertwined with the context in which it occurs.

Alison (ibid) also explains that humour is created as a result of mockery. Humour used in this way actually attacks others and most often the butt of these jokes are the less powerful in the society. Simpson (2003) also identifies this type of humour as useful in the creation of satire. Indeed most Pakruok collected in this study targeted the less powerful in the society mainly the physically handicapped such as the blind, lame, hunchback and deaf as well as those with any kind of deformity however slight such as limping, the ugly and those with cataract. Apart from physical deformities, some character traits viewed as negative are also a butt of jokes such as cowardice, meanness, and irresponsibility. Wodak explains the power relations in language by stating thus

Power does not derive from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power, in the short and long term. Language provides a finely articulated means for differences in power in social hierarchical structures...CDA takes an interest in the ways in which linguistic forms are used in various expressions and manipulations of power (Wodak 2001:11).

The humour in pakruok is also generally culture bound and the understanding of status will of course vary from one culture to another. In creation of humour thus, CDA comes in handy in the analysis of this data as it enables the researcher to point out the power relations to be in

this type of discourse. I however need to point out that in some instances, powerful groups can also be the butt of humour and according to Wash (2009), this helps to create satirical humour. Alison (1998) summarizes all these by stating that humour has the following elements:

- 1) There is conflict between what is expected and what occurs
- 2) The conflict is caused by ambiguity at some level of language
- 3) The punch line is surprising as it is not the expected interpretation

In the data used in this study, I identify the *pakruok*; which is treated as the joke, and analyse it to identify the conflict between what is expected and what occurs, I identify the ambiguity and the level of language at which it occurs and explain why the interpretation is surprising. All these are the steps that are recommended by CDA of first analysing the words, then placing them in the context in which they occur in order to unravel the complete meaning of the utterance.

Salvatore (2009) explains the elements of pun that create humour. These include paronyms; where two words have similar but not identical phonemic representations, homonyms; when the phonemic representation of two words is identical, homographs; when two words are spelt exactly the same and homophones; when two words that have different meanings are pronounced the same. Using these different types of puns, a speaker may be able to create humour in that the interpretation of the word used is incongruent bringing an element of surprise resulting in humour. In this essay, some of the data identified used puns for the creation of humour as we will see in the data analysis section.

Many scholars like Wash (1995), Alison (1998) and Salvatore (2009) agree that humour in language is created by handling of taboo topics in jokes. The taboo topics vary from society to society but some of the most common are; sex, excreta, religion and death. Indeed, some of the data collected indicated these as some of the taboo topics also found in *Pakruok*. However, the data used in this study was limited to data found in Dholuo traditional pop songs that are recorded and are played on air in electronic media. Thus, the artist is constrained by the fact that the music is for a wider public consumption and may censure some of the utterances made. I suggest further research needs to be carried out on the same genre but in the naturally occurring environment for comparison purposes.

#### **4. Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion**

In this section, I look at the *Pakruok* identified and analyse it in terms of how it portrays humour in the social, cultural and environmental context of the Dholuo language in which it occurs. The section discusses *pakruok* in relation to how the humour in it is created. The discussions and conclusions are based on the tenets of the CDA approach.

##### *4.1 Source of Data*

The data used in this paper was collected from Dholuo pop traditional songs composed by the late Oguta Lie Bobo a renowned “onanda” (accordion) player, who used the genre in all the

songs that he composed. The songs are in the public domain and were bought in form of a compact disk by the researcher.

#### 4.2 Humour through Mockery of the Less Powerful

According to Allison (1998), humour can be created through the mockery of others and usually, the less powerful are the target of these kinds of jokes. In the data collected, *pakruok* was seen as targeting people in the society perceived to be in a less powerful position most of the times but in other instances, even the people in more powerful positions were targeted. I will examine the different categories of the targets of *pakruok*. The data is presented first as source text (henceforth ST), which is the text as it was collected in Dholuo, then as translated text (henceforth TT), which is the text as it is translated into English.

##### 4.2.1 The Disabled

There were those *pakruok* that targeted the people with disabilities such as the blind, the dumb and those with low vision due to cataract. The composer uses their disability to create incongruity either semantically or pragmatically. One such *pakruok* goes;

ST: “*Rao oriyo e gwe’ng, dhano go uwi nyaka muofu. Muofu to go uwi ni rao oriyo to okia ni ochu’ng but rao.*”

TT: A hippopotamus has strayed into the village and everybody is shouting including the blind who screams “stray hippo” not knowing he is standing right next to the hippo.

The *pakruok* here first of all shows power relations by depicting the blind person in a powerless situation as one to be the subject of mockery due to the disability. Secondly, pragmatic incongruity is created in that, the expectation is, a hippo being dangerous, should be feared and all should strive to keep their distance in as much as they will be excited about the prospects of killing it for free meat. The blind man in the joke shows excitement at the arrival of the animal but is at the same time in grave danger as he is shouting right next to the hippo. Therefore instead of the language being used to warn others of impending danger, the language puts the blind man in danger of being attacked by the hippo thus bringing about the aspect of pragmatic incongruity.

In relation to lack of sight is a second *pakruok* whose target is a person with low vision as a result of cataract.

ST: “*N’gama rachiero okwanyo not owuoro ni joma nigi wa’ngi koro okwanyo mathoth*”

TT: The man with a cataract stumbled upon some money and now thinks the sighted must have picked much more.

The incongruity which is the source of the laughter in this instance is the expectation by the low vision person that if he who has a low vision can pick some money, then the sighted must have picked much more. Now money is not something that anyone blind or sighted can pick every day. Therefore the joke is about this interpretation of picking of money to mean it is an everyday occurrence that he does not benefit from only due to being of low vision.

The other person with disability that is the butt of a joke from the data collected is the dumb. In one pakruok that appears in about five different songs, the musician poses

ST: “*momo rach ka meru*”

TT: It is bad to have the a dumb mother

This pakruok is one statement with no further elaborations. It is left to the listener to decide why it is bad to have a dumb woman as your mother. One can analyze this statement in the Luo cultural context, whereby, the mother played the key role in the upbringing of a child. In fact in a polygamous set up among the Luo, the child is referred to as the daughter or son to their mother and not to their father so that you will hear of “*wuod nya uyoma*” or “*nyathi nya uyoma*” i.e the son or the child of the woman from Uyoma. Therefore to have a dumb mother would mean that one’s upbringing is impeded. The incongruity is drawn between the expectations of what a mother does for the child in the cultural context of the Luo and the difficulties of meeting those if one is a dumb mother.

#### 4.2.2 Other Deformities

Some other pakruok in the data collected made the butt of their jokes deformities found in other members of the society. Imperfection in body structure however slight was found to be a subject of derision. These include limping, hunchback, jiggers infested feet, and a cut nose. In this section, I look at some of these.

SL: “*Jamneme ohero picha a’ngada ma ka tie ji to mm*”

TT: The man with jiggers likes half photos so when asked to take a full photo including his feet he takes offence.

The idea here is that jiggers usually attack just the feet and not the rest of the body. The person with jiggers is therefore comfortable with his torso captured in a photo because the deformity will not be shown. In order to understand the gist of this joke, one has to first of all understand the disdain with which a half photo is held in this culture. The term used to refer to a half photo is “*picha an’gada*” which loosely translates to the photo that “cuts”. This term thus shows that a half photo is not worth being called a photo at all but to the man with jiggers this is the best kind of photo. In reference to his feet, the man with jiggers resorts to the passive by saying:

ST: “*ka tie ji to mm*”

TT: if it is people’s feet mm

The passive brings in the element that the speaker does not want to be identified with the deformed feet even though they belong to him so generalises the term to refer to all people’s feet generally. The passive form used also brings in an element of semantic incongruity where one is left to wonder whose feet these are.

The second deformity derided is the hunchback. Amongst the Luo, divorce is granted in extremely rare circumstances and is a subject that is seen to bring embarrassment to the



divorced man. The bride price is given back to the man as a symbol of divorce. One of the pakruok collected uses the divorce background thus

ST: *“Rakuom odhi wero. Osiko mana ni “ooyo jadio’ng e kindwa kodi nyo kabere. Wach nyathini ema othun’go kora e gwe’ngwa koro gima nitie to imiya”*

TT: A hunchback has gone to retrieve his bride price and tells his ex-father-in-law “between me and you all is well, but your child’s issues press on my chest so whatever is available, just give it to me”

‘Press on my chest’ is used to refer to the issues of divorce which weigh down on the estranged husband. Looked at literally, then the issues may be interpreted as the cause of the hunchback. Therefore the incongruity is brought out between the literal meaning and the connotative meaning which pits semantics against pragmatics.

#### 4.2.3 Women

Women are also the target of humour through mockery. Many issues revolve around the socio-cultural practices and beliefs of a community. Some of the data collected concerning women are:

ST: *Nyako ma raracha mogo mbura gi log pala ni “ooyo mbura dak nyuomi mikao ringwa dak nyuomi?”*

TT: an ugly girl who beats the cat with the lock of the knife saying” hey cat why don’t you get married. That you keep taking our meat why don’t you get married?”

In this pakruok, the butt of the joke is a young girl who is considered ugly. The position of being less powerful is twofold. At one level, a woman in this society is considered less powerful as the community is largely patriarchal. On another level, the girl is also identified as ugly thus less powerful at that level than the more beautiful girls.

The levels of incongruity in this joke are also two. One is the discursual level. The girl in question directly addresses a cat in a conversation. In such a discourse, there can be no instances of turn-taking and there can also be no feedback. The element of surprise is created by the unexpected nature of the conversation and to whom the words are directed. The second instance of incongruity is semantic. The girl asks the cat why it does not get married. It is not expected of a cat to get married anyway. It is the girl who is expected to get married. The musician creates this pakruok to show that the girl projects her frustration of not getting a suitor on the cat. One can understand the incongruity of this more by looking at the cultural practices of the Luo. It was compulsory to get married and a spinster was an unknown person in this culture and failure to get married was treated as a catastrophe with the unmarried girl being blamed for the misfortune.

#### 4.3 Humour through Mockery of the More Powerful

More powerful people can also be the subject of mockery in the creation of humour. This happens in most situations in the creation of satirical humour (Simpson, 2003). In the Luo society and indeed in many other societies, men are viewed to be in more powerful positions

than the women in all the spheres of life such as economically, socially, religiously and politically. In some of the data collected for this study, men have been made the subject of mockery as shown in the examples that follow:

ST: *“Jaduon’g ma randere otho e ding nyapara, nyithindo laro handa ne ni “an ema yande oora nyasore miyauru”*

TT: A thin old man has died on the roadside children are heard fighting over his underwear saying” I am the one he used to send for bhang give it to me”

In this pakruok, the dead old man is derided for living an irresponsible life. His irresponsibility is shown in the fact that while alive, instead of being a good example to the children, he was the one to send them to buy him bhang; an addictive drug. Secondly, he himself must have been a drug addict to send children for it and to even die at the roadside. Thirdly, the musician singles out the fact that he was thin implying poor nutrition which may also be attributed to his irresponsible lifestyle. This pakruok thus satirises irresponsibility and drug addiction. The result of these vices the joke seems to imply is that even in death, when one is supposed to be treated with utmost respect, this particular man is shown none. The old man in the pakruok is not even mourned; instead, the children fight over his underwear.

Another example of the powerful in the society becoming the subject of mockery is

ST: *“N’gama dhako oloyo mamedo wach gi Kiswahili ni ‘Lakini bibi hii, kama leo hakuna wageni taona mimi’”.*

TT: A man who is weaker than his wife adds Kiswahili in his speech that “but this wife if today there were no visitors, she would have suffered”

In this pakruok, the direct speech attributed to the man in the joke is said in Kiswahili thus the speaker engages in code switching. The man is mocked for being weaker than his wife. He is depicted as so weak that if his wife understands what he is saying, he will be in deep trouble and that’s his reason for code switching to Kiswahili. The irony is that in his Kiswahili speech, he implies that it is only because there are visitors that his wife is spared a beating but the musician clearly believes otherwise.

Another pakruok in the data for this study also mocks a male who holds a high office in the society thus showing the power position in two dimensions; first as male and then as holder of a high rank. It says:

ST: *Dhako weyi kata iriembo ndege”*

TT: A wife can leave you even if you are a pilot.

This *pakruok* can be understood within the Luo culture where if a woman left a man, the man was the one derided for it. The implication here is that it does not matter your position in the society, a woman can still leave you for another man.

#### 4.4 Creation of Humour through Puns

Pun is the play on words and there are many types of puns. According to Salvatore (2009), puns involve the use of paronyms (words whose phonemic representations are similar but not identical), homonyms (words that are identical in spelling and pronunciation but different in meaning), homographs (words with different meanings but are spelt the same) and homophones (two words with different meanings but are pronounced the same). Alison (1998) also adds malapropism as another source of puns where a word of a similar sound is used inappropriately. When puns are used, they create incongruity at different levels of language thus causing humour. In the data collected for this study, there were several different uses of pun some of which we recount here.

ST: *Chi japuonj otho iywago mana gi handbag gi kalam ni “my dear”. Mon madongo kwere ni wek ywak. Dimb nwa ywak. Ma idiya manade miwacho wach marach ywag nya kuma nyien.*

TT: The teacher’s wife has died and he mourns her with a handbag and pen saying “my dear”. Elderly women admonish him saying “you are squeezing me! What sort of bad words are those? Mourn your wife well”.

In the Luo cultural context, when a man lost a wife, he mourned her by wailing loudly and singing dirges. The mourning had to be appropriate. It was the duty of elders to ensure the customs were followed. In this pakruok, the bereaved husband is admonished by the elders for inappropriate mourning. The cause of this is the Dholuo word ‘dia’ which means squeeze me. The teacher in the pakruok however used English and said: “my dear”. These words are misinterpreted to imply the Dholuo meaning rather than the English meaning creating the impression that the widower says his late wife is squeezing him. This pun can be classified as a homophone where the two words, though come from different languages, are pronounced the same but have different meanings. Apart from the pun, this pakruok has sexual connotations. By claiming that the mourner is using inappropriate words, they seem to say it is inappropriate for the man to be talking about being squeezed by his wife during this period of mourning. This can be understood in the socio-cultural context of this community where sex during mourning was prohibited for all close members of the family. It therefore goes against cultural expectations for the bereaved man to be even thinking about sex at this particular time. Sex was only officially allowed some days after the burial in a ceremony called “*chodo kode*.”

A second pakruok containing a pun is

ST: *Dhia’ng otho dala gi rabam. Rabam kwere ni “dhia’ng wabambo ri’ngo motwo emaber. Rachiero ni dhia’ng to chier kata uthagoru”*

TT: A cow has died in the home of the limping man who says “we have to dry the meat as dried meat is the best”. The man with the cataract says “the cow will resurrect even as you bother yourselves”

Looking at the translation of this pakruok, it is difficult even to make sense of it. However,

the joke lies in the pun. The words in *bold* in the ST are the source of the puns. In Dholuo, “rabam” is a person who limps whereas “bambo” means to dry meat. The musician plays with the two words which in normal speech are not connected and connects them in a sentence creating semantic incongruity. The same applies to the words “rachiero” which means a man with cataract and “chier” which means resurrect. It is not possible for a dead cow to resurrect and that is another cause of humour in this pakruok. The musician uses homonyms to create the puns.

The third pakruok that used pun is short and goes:

ST: “*N’gama kwa tok dalau mokwako jodalau te*”

TT: The person who grazes his animals near your home holds all of you in an embrace.

“Kwa kaa” are two words in Dholuo which mean graze your animals here. “Kwaka” is one word which means embrace me. In the pakruok, the speaker chooses to take the second meaning instead of the first meaning which would have made more semantic sense thus creating humour through malapropism.

#### *4.5 Creating Humour through Taboo Topics*

According to Simpson (2003), the most common taboo topics in the creation of humour are sex, death and religion. Simpson also points out that when the joke is in the public domain, disguise is used and the implication of the taboo word may be made through some sort of disguise. From the data analysed in this paper, the taboo topics in Dholuo are related to sex, urine and death. Some of them are:

TT: Maro ma ume ochot moketho mos ka chuur nyare ni “i’ngothna nyawanana eh gi nyara bende a’ng i’ngothna maber”

TT: A mother-in-law with a cut nose spoilt greetings at her son-in law’s saying “have sex for me with your mother and have sex for me well with my daughter too”

The composer of this pakruok creates a taboo word about sex by use of pun. The woman who is the subject of this pakruok is identified as a woman with a cut nose which contributes to her difficulty in pronouncing some nasal sounds. In Dholuo, the word “mosna” pronounced [mɔsna] means greet for me. Due to the difficulty in pronouncing some nasals, the woman says [ɲɔθnɔ]. The initial sound in the first word which is the voiceless bilabial nasal /m/ is replaced with the voiceless velar nasal /ɲ/ whereas the third phoneme in the first word which is the voiceless alveolar fricative/s/ is replaced with the voiceless dental fricative/θ/ creating a totally different word which means have sex for me. The humour is thus created by using a taboo word through pun.

There is also the socio-cultural context that comes into play in this pakruok. In the Luo culture, a mother-in-law has great social distance between herself and her son-in-law so that they are not even expected to shake hands. A mother-in-law must carry herself with great dignity and decorum more so in the presence of her son-in-law so it is unthinkable for her to discuss sex with her son-in-law. This brings out discursual incongruity in that such a topic

would never occur between these two people in a Luo cultural context. The other issue that brings about the humour here is that the deformity of a cut nose is the butt of the joke.

Urine is another taboo topic found in the data collected in the following pakruok;

ST: *“N’gama nindo kende malayo e ot kipeenje to okoni ni kanyo koth e ma goyo”*

TT: A man who sleeps alone who urinates in the house. If you ask him he tells you that place is leaking.

In this joke, the musician chooses to use the word urinate even though there exists a euphemism for it in Dholuo which is the term “olo pi” that loosely translates to “pouring water”. This pakruok is also satirical. The musician ridicules cowardice especially in a man. In the environmental context, there were no toilets in huts and so one had to go outside to answer the call of nature therefore the man in question is just cowardly and fears to go out at night. He knows it is wrong to urinate in the house and so claims it is the rain which is also another source of humour.

Death is another taboo topic that I found in my data. For instance:

ST: *“N’gama otero meru mo’nge gima onego wuoru”*

TT: The man who has inherited your mother knows what killed your father.

In the Luo culture, if a woman was widowed young, the clan choose a man from her husband’s clan to inherit her. The man would then take up all the responsibilities of her late husband including siring children with her. In this pakruok, the musician implies that a person could maybe kill a man so as to inherit his wife. Killing a fellow human being even in war was abhorred by the Luo and the result would be banishment for the whole clan involved or a complex set of cleansing rituals and that is why it is not expected for a man to kill another.

Another pakruok related to death in the data is:

ST: *Ochodo ororo ma’ngongo ma ojogo jodalagi gi wacho ni “to loche magwenyore gi moro ka nege an’go? Ojogo wa gi gope”!*

TT: Members of a family are so fed up of big time prostitute in their midst that they say “why can’t these lorries that crisscross here kill her we are tired of her debts”!

What causes incongruity in this pakruok is the fact that members of a family wish death upon one of their own. The normal expectation is that members of a family love one another and despite their shortcomings, will look out for each other. However, the one hated here is a prostitute. She is powerless two fold, firstly as a woman and then as a prostitute who is greatly looked down upon. In fact one of the worst insults for a woman in the Luo community is to be called a prostitute.

#### *4.6 Humour Created through Figures of Speech*

According to Amuka (2000), in order to understand Pakruok, one has to interpret what the

surface conceals and those meaning are understood by the nature of their surfaces and by the contexts in which they appear. In the data for this study, I also collected some pakruok that used different figures of speech which had to be unravelled in the socio-cultural context of the Luo community. Some of these are:

ST: *“Mano Nundu wuod gi Bando n’gama bor maneno ka Lan’go nyiedho”*

TT: That’s Nundu the brother to Bando the tall man who sees when the Lan’go are milking.

The Lan’go are the neighbours of the Luo to the East. The pakruok uses a simile to show that the man Nundu is so tall that he can see the neighbouring tribe go about their daily chores. Even if this man was from the village nearest to the Lan’go, it would be difficult for him to see them do their chores just by looking across the fence. Therefore, the pakruok also involves the use of hyperbole and it is that that causes the humour. In fact, it breaks the Gricean principle of quality that says one should state only that which they know to be true thus creating pragmatic incongruity. Another related example is:

ST: *“Ouko maka Seda auka chuor mon”*

TT: Ouko the son of Seda whirlwind the husband of women.

In this pakruok, the whirlwind is referred to as the husband of women and by extension so is Ouko the man in the pakruok. In the Luo socio-cultural set up, a woman only supposed to expose her body to her husband and no other man. It is her husband who can undress her. The fact that a whirlwind can also lift up a woman’s dress as if to undress her is what causes the musician to refer to it as the husband of women. That could be extended to the man in question to show his machismo in relation to women. The pakruok employs personification which also creates pragmatic incongruity as there is no way wind can marry a woman.

ST: *“Nyakore osiepna niang nyiri”*

TT: Nyakore my friend the sugarcane of women.

This one employs the use of a metaphor by referring to Nyakore as sugarcane. The pakruok has sexual connotations and conforms to Simpson (2003) in his assertions that in the creation of humour using taboo words in the public domain, some disguise is usually used. The man is said to be sugarcane to women specifically thus creating ground to treat it as sexual in nature. The implication is that the man in question is good in bed.

ST; *Ogolla chuor chi n’gato”*

TT: Ogolla the husband to another man’s wife

In this pakruok, the man Ogolla is said to be the husband of another man’s wife something that is pragmatically impossible. If the man in the pakruok is having an affair with another man’s wife, it is not expected that he would be referred to as the woman’s husband and it is also not expected that it would be announced in public. The humour here is thus created in two ways; first through pragmatic incongruity where instead of saying the man is the lover to

the said woman, he is said to be her husband, and secondly through discursual incongruity where the topic that is brought out in the public domain is one that is not usually brought out in the manner that has been done here. It has in fact been used as praise instead of as a source of shame.

## 5. Conclusion

*Pakruok* is a genre of Dholuo oral literature used in traditional songs as a joking session. This essay explored how humour is created in *pakruok* which include; through use of mockery of targeting the less powerful as well as those targeting the more powerful in the society, through the use of puns, through the use of taboo topics and through the use of figures of speech.

Mockery of the less powerful targeted the disabled, deformities and women whereas the more powerful targets were men, the employed and the rich. Puns were created through the use of paronyms, homonyms, homographs and homophones. The taboo topics in *pakruok* that were uncovered in this essay were those to do with sex, urine, and death. However, since the data used for this study was collected from pop songs by the late Oguta Lie Bobo which are all in the public domain and are played on radio it means that the humour created through use of taboo words in these songs are highly censored by the musician himself. I would suggest more research using the live performances where the creators of *pakruok* are freer and the creation is done by all including the audience. The figures of speech used in the creation of humour include hyperbole, metaphor, personification and use of simile.

Humour was also found to be created through incongruity at the various levels of language such as phonological incongruity, morphological incongruity, semantic incongruity, discursual incongruity as well as pragmatic incongruity. This paper also showed that in order to understand the humour created in *pakruok*, one had to unravel the socio-cultural context in which it occurs as most of the incongruities created were socio-culturally bound.

## References

- Alison, R. (1998). *Language of Humour*. Florence: Routledge.
- Amuka, P. S. O. (2000). The Place of Deconstruction in the Speech of Africa: The Role of *Pakruok* and *Ngero* in Telling Culture in Dholuo. In Karp, I., & Masolo, D.A (Eds.), *African Philosophy as Cultural Inquiry* (pp. 90-103). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Blackledge, A. (2005). *Discourse and Power in a Multilingual World*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Bloomaert, J. (2005). *Discourse; A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511610295>
- Fairclough, N. L. (1992). Discourse and the Text: Linguistic and Inter-textual Analysis Within Discourse Analysis in *Discourse and Society*, 3, 193-217.
- Fairclough, N. L. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. London: Longman.

Kobia, J. M. (2008). Metaphor in HIV/AIDS Discourse among Ololuyia Speakers of Western Kenya. *CADAAD*, 2(2), 48-66. Available online at: <http://cadaad.net/2008-volume2-issue-2/28-31>

Masolo D. A. (2000) Social Features of Popular Music in Kenya. In Radano, R.M., & Bohlman, P. V. (Eds.), *Music and the Racial Imagination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mboya, P. (1997). *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi* 6<sup>th</sup> ed (S.L)

Ogola-Ayayo A.B.C. (1980) *The Luo Culture: A Reconstruction of the Material Culture Patterns of a Traditional African Society*. Wiesbaden: Franz, Steiner, Verlag GMBH

Omondi, L. N. (1982). The Major Syntactic Structures of Dholuo. In Heine, B., Mohlig, W.J.G., & Rottland I. (Eds.), *Language and Dialect Atlas of Kenya*.

Parkin, D. (1978). *The Cultural Definition of Political Response: Lineal Destiny Among the Luo* London: Academic Press.

Salvatore, A. (2009). *Linguistic Theories of Humour*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Simpson, P. (2003). *On the Discourse of Satire: Towards a Stylistic Model of Satirical Humour*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Van Dijk, T. (Ed) (1997). *Discourse and Social Interaction*. London: Sage Publications  
Wodak, R. (1995). Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis in: Verschuren, J. et al (eds) *Handbook of pragmatics*, (pp. 204-210). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Wodak, R. (2001). The Discourse Historical Approach in Wodak, R. and Meyer M (Eds). *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 63-94) London: Sage Publications. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9780857028020.d6>

### Copyright Disclaimer

Copyright reserved by the author(s).

This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).