

**CONSPIRACY: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF LANGUAGE OF POWER AND AGGRESSION IN JOHN KARGBO'S "LET ME DIE ALONE"**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The inordinate quest for power over the throne of Mande kingdom generated conspiracy against chief Gbanya. This study explored the language of power and aggression that caused the death of chief Gbanya, Queen Yoko and Jeneba in Kargbo's "Let Me Die Alone". The social structure as well as the social attributes of the characters were highlighted. De Hands and Maxwell's (1996) social exclusion theory formed the theoretical framework. A qualitative approach was adopted to analyze thirty-five (35) excerpts from the study text that constituted the data. It was discovered that the social attribute of sex was major reason Lamboi and Musa through language of aggression conspired and poisoned chief Gbanya to death in order to take over the throne of Mande chieftdom. It was also revealed that Lamboi and Musa murdered Jeneba and accused Queen Yoko of the crime so as to be in charge of the chieftdom. The study therefore, recommended that power should not be lopsided in order to avert envy, conspiracy and death of particular persons in the society.*

**Key Words:** Language, Sociolinguistic, Conspiracy, Power and Aggression.

**INTRODUCTION**

The royal throne in a kingdom stands as a contact point of power and authority over the people. Individuals and groups aspire to ascend the throne through various means. The means of language can be through subtle or aggressive mood of interlocutors by which plans are executed. Language is a social phenomenon which can be used to encourage, discourage, enhance/facilitate good or bad relationship, bring about hatred, generate conflict and cause death. We use language to persuade others to our convictions and urge them towards action by crafting text that demonstrate the logic and appeal to those convictions (Fasold & Linton, 2012, P.9). Language is deployed for all communicative intents. It is evidently the most versatile means of communication among human beings. Through language, feelings/emotions, ideologies, questions, advise, insult, conspiracy, intimidation, exclusion, apology and so on are communicated.

Society has always had a way of making distinctions between individual and groups as a way of classifying or determining inclusion and exclusion. Prominent among these parameters include race, colour, gender, social class, ethnicity, nationality, occupation, language and religion (Bamgbose, 2000 P.25). The place of words in conspiracy and power can never be over emphasized. Words can make and mar, words can instigate conspiracy and words can negate conspiracy. O'Grady, W., Archibald, J. and Katamba, F. (2011,P.1) opines that "words can be used to achieve various ends; language is at the heart all things human". The role of language in human relationship is basically expedient because it has the capacity to serve as a vital instrument of cohesion and peaceful coexistence among people. Equally, language serves as a powerful instrument of disunity and estrangement capable of terminating an existing relationship. No matter the role of language in any sociolinguistic environment, it is purely dependent on how individuals deploy it in addressing issues of personal and communal interest.

**Objectives of the Study:** This study aims to;

- investigate the pattern of conspiracy in Kargbo's "*Let Me Die Alone*".
- examine the language of power and aggression in the drama.
- highlight the social structures and social attributes of the major characters.

### **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and the society with the aim of understanding how language functions in communication (Wardhaugh, 2010,p.12). Coulmas (1997, P.2) identified two aspects of sociolinguistics as; micro-sociolinguistics and macro-sociolinguistics. Micro-sociolinguistics investigates how social structures influences the way people talk and how language varieties and patterns of use correlate with social attributes such as class, sex and age. Macro-sociolinguistics studies what societies do with their languages, that is attitudes and attachments that account for the functional distribution of speech forms in society, language shift, maintenance and replacement, the delimitation and interaction of speech communities.

Conspiracy is a secret plan by two or more people to do something unlawful or bad. This study avers that it can also mean the secret agreement between two or more people to commit an illegal or harmful act in order to achieve a desirable goal. Conspiracy is done by means of language.

Language is a powerful instrument of identification and classification. It is one of the major means by which social disparity prevails in the society. Language is used as a weapon for individual and societal marginalization, intimidation, discrimination, conspiracy, exclusion and aggression. It can also be a means through which power is given, pronounced, denounced and denied.

Language of power and aggression are usually targeted at gaining advantage over others in order to achieve a desired objective. Man in his inordinate quest for power conspires against another without consideration to the consequences. Often times, the consequences can lead to destruction of relationships, murder and loss of properties. The relationship among chief Gbanya, Queen Yoko and Lamboi was destroyed by Lamboi's inordinate quest for power to dethrone his in-law chief Gbanya the kng of Mende chiefdom and the wife Queen Yoko.

### **MAJOR CHARACTERIZATION/ROLES**

1. Chief Gbanya ----- King of Mende chiefdom and husband of Queen Yoko
2. Queen Yoko ----- Female ruler of Mende chiefdom and the heroine
3. Musa ----- Seer and medicine man also a servant
4. Lamboi ----- Yoko's brother and also a servant
5. Jeneba ----- Ndapi's daughter and a victim of conspiracy

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is anchored on De Haan and Maxwell's (1996) social exclusion theory. Social exclusion embraces diverse ways in which people may be denied full participation in society and effective rights of citizenship in the civil, political and social spheres (Rawal 2005, P.162). According to De Haan and Maxwell, there are ten social structures that impact exclusion and can fluctuate over time. The structures are: class structure, race, geographical location, globalization, social issues, personal habits/appearance, education, religion, economics and politics (2002,P.2). Social exclusion refers to the process by which individuals are denied some rights, opportunities and resources that are usually available to others. It is the process that is used to exclude persons or groups wholly from full participation in the society where they live. The resultant effect of social exclusion is that, it affects both, the quality of life of individuals, the equity and cohesion of people in the society at large.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **Language of Power Excerpts**

Text 1, Gbanya: (Laughs) But I will. I know it. But I will let my enemy the Governor know my power. I will present him with the greatest of gifts. He will see the most dazzling and gracious of sande dancers Mende

land can boast of, the richest wine and the biggest cattle. Let my murderer know my power before he snuffs out my life (p.6).

Text 2, Gbanya: Look woman, if Senehun is to survive, a man must lead her. Come now, there are other riches you will outlive me to enjoy (p.7).

Text 3, Musa: Lamboi, they often say power makes men drunk. Some say power makes men crazy but you are already crazy, Ndake and power has not yet come your way (p.14).

Text 4, Lamboi: All I want you to do is to kill the chief and help me to prevent the chieftom from falling into the hands of a woman (p.15).

Text 5, Yoko: (comes with machete in hand) And indeed, any attempts at subversion will meet with instant death from me...I don't know the manner of my husband's death but you heard him when he said I should take charge and I'm going to do exactly that (p.27).

Text 6, Yoko: Ndapi, Jilo take your spear and let this my hand be the source of your power and my wants the cause of your action (p.28).

Text 7, Yoko: A ruler should think of anything. Anything could happen at anytime, I know that not everybody is pleased over the fact that I am a chief of the Kpa Mende tribe especially my brother, Lamboi. I fear that man. He is cunning. Ngo Musa is another man I do not trust. He is like a chameleon. He changes easily. I think he killed my husband (p.44).

Text 8, Yoko: It will have to wait, Lavalie, if the Governor says we pay, we pay. I will be in charge of collecting payments for this area and I'll turn over to the Governor any chief who prevents his people from paying. Fanneh, are the body guards who should accompany me ready?(p.62).

Text 9, Yoko: Shut up! Guards put him in stocks and starve him till I return from Taiama. You want to bring trouble to my household. I will deal with... (another noise and Jilo comes in waling. She falls to the ground) (p.63).

Text 10, Lamboi: If the secrets of the heart are known, blood will be spilled, for blood has already been spilled. There is no way through which we can pass to reach the pinnacle of dominion over our fellow men save through a part spread with blood. (He goes over the throne and examines it) I have dreamt of power of governing here in this chieftom of Moyamba. It has now come my way but for just a few days (smiles grimly). How beautiful it is to sit on this throne regarding your subjects minions cringing in your presence: passing judgment over them: wielding the power of life or death over all. No wonder! Yoko does not want to give it up. I have started walking towards this throne now, towards this seat of supreme power on the road of blood and there is no turning back. First, it was Gbanya and now Jeneba. Next it may have to be Yoko herself, for she guards this throne so jealously (p. 67).

Text 11, Yoko: Lavalie, I command you. I am your Queen. Now go (p. 86).

The utterances from the above excerpts depict the language of power such as; influence, commands, challenges, warning, entreaty and dares. The speaker in text 1 & 2 exercised his power by daring the governor to know his ability while his still alive. Text 3&4 revealed the inordinate quest for power over the throne of Mende by Lamboi who influenced Musa to kill the chief. The utterances in text 4 specifically is in tandem with the assertion of Antobus (2002, p.16) that "oppression is a common phenomenon to mankind but women suffer most from oppression by reason of their gender and from several cultural inhibitions emanating from gender discrimination in patriarchal societies". Most men accord no respect to women no matter the positions women occupy. The utterances in texts 5, 6,7,8 &9 are confrontational. The anger of queen Yoko losing her husband and the eagerness to be in charge of the chieftom as said by the husband before his death is manifested in her actions towards doing exactly what she was told to do. Again, text 10 portrayed the inordinate quest and conspiratory manner of Lamboi who without consideration to his relationship with Yoko murdered chief Gbanya in order to become a king. Also, revealed is Lamboi nursing the evil intention of killing Yoko and Jeneba if they stand as obstacles to the actualization of his dream as a ruler over the people of Mende chieftom. The excerpts are reflected in social exclusion theory of De Haan and Maxwell where personal habits and social issues constitute bases for denial of opportunities or rights. Social issues in this study text captured gender (sex) which predominantly is the contention over the throne of Mende chieftom. Hence, Ekpo (2006, p. 64) opines that gender equity is a stage of human social development where rights and opportunities of individuals will not be determined by the fact of being born male or female but a stage when both of them realize their full potential.

### **Language of Aggression Excerpts**

Text 12, Gbanya: This might have something to do with the boys I hired out to John Caulker to fight against his brother, George. A runner came two days ago and spoke of the governor and his soldiers (p.3).

Text 13, Gbanya: (To himself) And now everything seems to be happening with such rapidity. I lost my best fighters in the Ashanti and Caulker campaigns. Just as in the dream of last night the governor himself comes to humiliate me in the eyes of my people (p.4).

Text 14, Gbanya: Peace? Peace? What is peace woman to the man who commands the finest, most courageous band of fighters in Mende land? What is peace? Where can we find it? I will tell you, Yoko peace is only found in the eyes on the head of the sacrificial lamb long after that head has been served from its agony wracked body; peace is found in the limp body of the dead cock, when its feather are being plucked out...Yoko, there is no peace in this world. But now, why should I who sent many enemies on their quest for such peace be afraid to die? No, I'm not. My fears rest in the manner of dying. I would gladly have the sharp edge of an enemy's spear wedge in this rich heart that has loved you, this proud heart that has savoured and enjoyed the sweet fruits of power, than die a dishonorable death (p.6).

Interrogatives here portrayed aggression over atrocities melted on the people and serves as expressive and judgmental roles of chief Gbanya. The interrogatives are designed to capture the aggressive and emotional state of the king who had a premonition of his dishonorable death. This aligns with the personal habits of social exclusion theory.

Text 15, Lamboi: Now think, think, Ngo Musa of your children and grandchildren. Would your spirit in the land of our ancestors ever know peace if Senehun is attacked and all of them are either killed or dragged into slavery?

Text 16, Musa: Lamboi, are you deaf? I say I will not. And if you continue to play monkey games with me, I will tell chief Gbanya of your intention to kill him. I don't want power and I'm not prepared to kill anybody to get it or keep it. I have never killed a man neither in war nor in peace and I don't want to start doing so now. I have never killed a man and I will not start doing so for... (p.12).

Text 17, Lamboi: Ngo Musa, if you have never killed a man, here swear let the Poro Devil spit on your nose and rot it; let it eat your fingers and make you a leper; let the Gbeni shout deafen your ears and blind you; let the Gbeni's whip beat elephantiasis into your legs...Go on swear, you wicked crafty old goat. Swear! You don't? Of course you won't. A mad man may eat his own shit but will never play with fire (p.13).

Text 18, Lamboi: Ngo Musa, our elders say, only the guilty are afraid. If you know your hands are clean, I dare you to swear (p.13).

Text 19, Musa: My hands are clean, I wash them everyday in the river (p.13).

Text 20, Lamboi: Yes indeed, in the river of blood, rich and hot human blood (p. 13).

Text 21, Lamboi: The blood of Yattah's son and Mama Kadi's daughter. Those you slaughtered and whose fat you used for your bofima. You want me to name what charms you made with their private parts? Or do you want me to lead Gbanya whom you want to protect to their shallow graves out there in the bush? (p. 14).

Text 22, Lamboi: Then there is going to be trouble. The warriors who fought in the Caulker campaign crossed the frontier. Now look, whatever happens Gbanya may need your help. I don't know how you will do it but you must. And if you reveal this plot (brings out a dagger) I will plant this firmly into your chest and lead people to those graves (p.16).

Text 23, Musa: Heh! Lamboi, I will tell nobody. I know exactly what we need. After the Governor's visit, Gbanya will surely want to go to the poro bush and drink from that bottle, the medicine that could kill him instantly. It is the gall of the alligator. Just a drop will do the trick. Let's go now. May be when you become chief we shall go to war against our enemies and I shall have enough human fat for bofima. Heh, heh, heh. (p.16).

The utterances depicts challenges, commands and dares from Lamboi to know the rationale for Musa's refusal to perform the unlawful act and getting no justifiable answers, they resort to conspiracy. The servants' act of conspiracy is condemnatory. They cling to murder chief Gbanya with alligator gall so as to cover up their atrocities and take over the throne of Mende chiefdom.

Text 24, Lamboi: Ndake, nothing is impossible. We must try to assume a position of strength. We cannot afford to take any risks. First of all J will have to announce to the people that the chief is dead...No, you will

have to do that and tell them that I'm the new chief. Warn them sternly that any attempts at subversion will meet with instant death (p.27).

Text 24 revealed Lamboi's desperate move to seal every track of their conspiracy towards the chief's death and assume the position instantly.

Text 25, Ndapi: (Slaps her) You lazy woman, you're always finding excuses. Why are you shouting? Have I touched you? (p.37).

Text 26, Ndapi: Kpoo, so what? Poro or no poro, she's still a woman requiring a man like any of them. All that aside, she's greedy, insolent and power-drunk, very, very ambitious. Tell me, my brother, why do we need to expand the chiefdom? (p. 39).

Text 27, Ndapi: Don't talk such nonsense. Ngo! Now can the queen do that? If she wants human sacrifice, I know parents here in Moyamba who would gladly give up their children to her (p.69).

Text 28, Lamboi: what? Are you now doubting the poro? Do you know the dreadful implications of that Lavalie? Look Ndapi, don't allow grief to cause you to anger the Gbeni. I know you grieve for your daughter. But would you like your nose to rot, would you like leprosy to devour your fingers, cataracts to marry your eyeballs and elephantiasis to cling to your legs like...(p.70).

Text 29, Yoko: Have you all in this chiefdom gone mad? Can't I pass through my own land without my people shouting murderer, devil and witch? Is that the way to greet your queen? Now everybody out, out of the barre. Where is the child? Have you found her? (pause) Have you found Jeneba? Guard! (p.72).

In text 29, Queen Yoko's aggressive utterances depicts her disappointment by her own people who tagged her 'murderer', 'devil' and 'witch' without justification. The conspiracy and accusation stirs up rhetorical questions and self-conflict from Queen Yoko.

Text 30, Ndapi: And that is why the Governor has been showering you with gifts, extending your power. Why must I pay to satisfy your crazy, your devilish ambition? Look madam, I want my daughter back if I don't get her I'll kill you with my bare hands (p.74).

Text 31, Ndapi: Look woman, stay right down. You have killed my pain of child birth but I cannot blame you. You don't know the pain of childbirth, so you don't know the worth of a child. You have never had children of your own, so you don't know what mother love is. You gave Jilo and the entire chiefdom the impression that you loved the child. All the while, you had been plotting in your mind to offer her to the gods (p. 74).

Text 32, Yoko: Don't beg for forgiveness from me Ndapi. Is it not because of my ignorance of the pain of childbirth that I sacrificed your daughter? Is it not because of my wicked heart is insensitive and incapable of experiencing motherly love that I reared Jeneba like I would a sacrifice lamb for that one fateful moment? Go away now! Lavalie, prepare the poro bush. I intend to get to the bottom of this. And if in the process I die then and only then will my spirit find peace in the land of our ancestors. The maiden paytaytaying her water-pot on her way from the river of life has her toe against a concealed pebble. There is now no remedy, for the water pot has crashed to the ground and the water-shipped by the earth. That cannot change the fact that I have been unjustly humiliated. We meet in the poro bush tonight. Now everybody out (p.78).

The antagonistic imperative "Don't beg for forgiveness from me" depicts preference disagreement. Schegloff (2007, p. 41) asserts that preference agreements take precedence over preference disagreement eg. answers over non-answers or silence. But in language of aggression, 'preference disagreement takes precedence.

Text 33, Yoko: Tell the Governor that I understand the contents of his letter...Tell him that I thank him...Tell him that in all my years as ruler of this chiefdom, I have never been disgraced in this manner...Tell him the way he has decided on the boundary marks is a slap in the face for a lady who has been loyal to him all these years...And tell him that...(p. 86-87).

Text 34, Yoko: There you go again, Musu. There you go again. Come, you have seen the lighting in the way I was humiliated by the entire chiefdom. You have seen the lighting in the treachery of Ngo Musa and Lamboi my own brother. You have seen the lighting in the way the boundary marks have been laid by the District Commissioner on the Governor's orders. Now go prepare the medicine woman (Musu exits). Let's continue young man, tell the Governor that I have risked my life and throne to carry out his commands. And it is only now that I have come to realize-now that I am getting old that I have been a fool. I have been used. Tell him it is a great insult to my integrity and honor as Queen. Tell him I will be very thankful of his

Excellency the Governor if he will be kind enough to send someone to examine the way the boundary marks have been laid by him. I sent my representative but the DC and the other chiefs refused to wait for them to arrive. But young man...why am I telling you all this? Why should I? (P.88-89).

Text 35, Yoko: Enough I say! If you could see my heart-this heart that has known happiness, this heart that has known love and power. It has also known humiliation and treachery this day. my late husband, Gbanya warned me. Behind every set of white teeth, there lurks an evil plotting mind. But I am ready. Go now, go mourn for the death of your fine daughter, Jeneba and leave me to suffer in my distress alone (p. 91).

Text 30 & 31 revealed Ndapi's aggressive, accusation, threatening and humiliating attacks against Queen Yoko to register his anger over the death of his daughter Jeneba. Ndapi forgetting how the queen cared for his daughter and without adequate investigation accused Yoko of the act she never committed. The adoption of interrogatives and repetition for emphasis in text 32, 33, 34 & 35 is to register her aggression and undeserved ill treatment from her people and the Governor who subvert her integrity and honor. The aggression displayed by Yoko is seen as a reflection of what her husband chief Gbanya suffered before his death. This aggression Queen Yoko tagged "the sickness of the mind" is detrimental.

### **Conclusion/Recommendation**

It is discovered that the sociolinguistic relevance of language in communication is paramount to human roles. The study concludes that the social attribute of sex is the cause of conspiracy and murder in the study text. The study therefore recommends that power in societies should not be lopsided to avert envy, conspiracy and murder. Also, Teachers of English language and Literature need to incorporate comprehensive passages on conspiracy to teach and expose the consequences of envy, conspiracy, greed, murder and other vices in the society.

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