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Traditional Marriage in Africa: A Pragmatic Analysis of the Wedding Songs in Saalum Communities

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Abstract

This study raises women's issues that are part of women's lives. It draws particularly the wedding songs pragmatics in societies in which communication is an oral cultural basis. From these views, the topic elaborates cultural perception of a certain community, regarding wedding songs to illustrate a handful of characteristics of civilized rules held by the tradition. This topic treats from the view of pragmatic meaning the problem of wedding songs in which, an extracted version is taken from informants to analyze the impact of these oral communication characteristics. Pragmatically, the analysis has thus outlined many communicative aspects to convey knowledge, to inherit social and cultural practices, and to educate the young generation, while serving adults as guides. This topic contributes to cultural diversity and traditional apprehension around different concepts in African societies generally, and the Saalum community particularly.

Keywords

pragmatics, analysis, wedding songs, saalum

1. Introduction

In African societies, values are based on cultural and traditional foundations that vary from one community to another. The celebration of marriage holds religious and customary aspects. This transversality conveys common significance, mainly the transmission of values and beliefs. Marriage in the traditional patriarchal society of Africa is performed with great importance and dignity. With this social practice of marriage comes other traditional customs which are very much indispensable in African society without which marriage is incomplete (Bedana, Longjam, & Sangeeta Laishram, 2014). On wedding days, women sing traditional songs, not only to show their happiness; but also to educate the bride and bridegroom (Mtose & Xoliswa, 2011, pp. 96-102).

All cultures undergo changes, but the residues of culture survive into the civilized area in the forms of traditional songs, games, narratives, and customs (Tylor, 1871, p. 1).

Wedding “involves several ceremonies each of the ceremonies may have its own songs and dance, and other rituals” (Tylor, 1871, p. 1).

From these basic principles, the celebration of marriage had an impact on lyrical songs, promoting interactions on behalf of the customs and habits of a given linguistic community.

Based on oral tradition and linguistic facts, the society of the Saloum in the view of others performs a lyrical historical and cultural narrative to convey messages with such wedding songs. The songs or words of marriage transmit pragmatic meaning and moral, religious, and cultural values.

1.1 Problem

This article is a pragmatic contribution that aims to discuss the cultural meanings and functions conveyed through song lyrics among the Senegalese people, especially the Saalum community. Thus, two fundamental aspects are highlighted as a traditional aspect from an oral basis and linguistic facts. Otherwise, the language of the wedding songs is essentially based on the oral tradition, leading to making a junction between literature and linguistics. Findings reveal that the majority of Saalum wedding songs focus on motivating the couple, especially, the bride as a pivotal role in this union. An accomplishment that requires the assistance and supervision of parents as mandatories.

2. Method

Pragmatic analysis of linguistic facts underlines the characteristics of wedding songs that convey a meaning specific to the Saalum. Around twenty (20) elderly Saloum women are taken as key informants, performing the songs of which they had extensive knowledge and experience. The process of data collection includes observation, questions, and focus-group discussions too. The study proceeds to present a collection of songs from which each verse will be translated and pragmatically interpreted.

2.1 Literature Review

The important aspect of wedding songs in the society of Saloum mainly considers social, educational, and traditional issues. Indeed, some works have supported such views with songs for these respective purposes.

“Wedding songs are generally believed among the Hausa to bring about conformity to the approved modes of behavior regarding married life. For example, there are songs that are instructive as they teach the bride to obey and respect her husband, her parents-in-law, and her husband’s close kin. Similarly, there are songs that warn the bride to be careful with her co-wives (in case of a polygamous household), and be ready to defend herself from any mischief from them. There are also songs that the bride sings to lament the loss of her girlhood freedom or to praise her intended bridegroom. Likewise, some songs are directed at the would-be husband-in which he is urged to be a good husband by treating his wife fairly and respecting his in-laws (Bichi, & Abdu Yahya, 1986).

“In African values transmission, wedding ceremonies became one of its main functions. During these occasions, life skills and knowledge about married life were shared with the young couple through jangwa songs” (Mugandani et al., 2016, pp. 1-15).

“Members of a community engage in group singing as part of organized activities with specific functions, where knowledge is shared through songs” (Mugandani et al., 2016, pp. 1-15).

Many daily social issues are taught and followed thanks to these songs, in which the traditions are ruled in.

2.2 *The Oral Basis of African Wedding Songs*

Riggs (2006) describes African marriage as a combination of religious and traditional practices. It is clear that religious marriage ceremonies (Islamic and Christian) also follow traditional practices adopted by communities. Tradition has an important aspect that the orality underlines. Many authors and researchers have marked this traditional importance in African marriage.

“We are Ibos. When we want to marry an Ibo girl, we follow the Ibo custom to connect with the parents.”

This implies a need to take root and embrace the girl’s parents. Moreover, the same author points out that Obi Okonkwo, who studied in England and moved to Lagos to work, rejects the weight of the custom that forbids her to marry Clara who is “Osu”, that is to say, a caste class. “Osu is like “leprosy” in people’s minds. So, the strength of tradition imposes all its rigidity (Achebe Ch., 1960, p. 71).

According to Jagua Nana, the heroine of the novel of the same title, her short marriage is an attempt to force her to conform to the customs and traditions of Ogbu (Cyprian Ekwensi, 1961).

Indeed, literature has always been a part of the oral basis, leading to putting a connection between theories and orality. With regard to Negro-African literature, a distinction should be made between “works written in European languages and oral literature that is expressed in African languages” (Kesteloot, 1981, p. 6).

Indeed, traditional African literature is understood mainly by its oral character. It constitutes literature through which speech plays a fundamental role in the transmission of socio-cultural values from one generation to the next. Thus,

“The inexhaustible source of interpretations of the cosmos, beliefs and cults, laws and customs; systems of kinship and alliance; systems of production and distribution of goods; modes of political power and social stratification; ethical and aesthetic criteria; concepts of representations of moral values” (Kestelot, 2001, p. 13).

“Speech conveys many values in traditional African society” (Eno Belinga, 1965-19, p. 9).

The word remains [...] the priority and majority cultural support par excellence in so far as it expresses its traditional heritage and weaves between past and present generations. This link of continuity and solidarity is without which there is neither history nor civilization (Chevrier, 1986, p. 13).

In summary, tradition and customs practice does not exclude anyone regardless of social or financial standing. All these ideas reflect, among other things, the importance of oral literature, whose study

makes a junction with the lyrical songs of marriage, in which semantic characteristics are set.

3. Results

The wedding songs in the Saloum are governed by a playful and moral eloquence in view to the participants and actors. Indeed, women who have experienced these traditional requirements in the sacred unions explain to their younger generation the need to follow their steps and successfully prepare themselves as they did. Those people involved in these cultural practices find that the worshipping conditions should be adapted to social needs. These songs reflect all the devotion that a woman must show to keep her home safe.

An extract of the songs is drawn for semantic studies in a glozing corpus.

1. Si ñaar Kamara du ñakk rekk a waral yaay di jooy ci doomam,
Noun Subj. Neg. mark V.1 Quantifier Link. V2 Subj Aux. V2 Det. Obj.
Si ñaar Kamara, du ñakk rekk a waral yaay di jooy ci doomam. (bis)
“Signare Kamara, it’s not because of a loss that you as a mother are crying, when you marry your daughter”
2. Da ñu lay naxee ba yɔbbu la, soo demee yaadi rooti taxanee
Modality Aux. V1 Prep. V2 Comp. Conjunc V3 Aux. V.4 V.5
“They tease you for the only goal of bringing you into a marital home, as soon as you reach in you become the firewood fetcher.”
3. Da ñu lay naxee ba yɔbbu la, soo demee yaadi jaami waañ wa.
Modality Aux. V1 Prep. V2 Comp. Conjunc V.3 Aux. V.4 V.5 Art.
“They mollify you for the only goal of bringing you into a marital home, as soon as you reach in you become the cook’s slave.”
4. Da ñu lay naxee ba yɔbbu la, soo demee yaadi rooti taxanee,
Da ñu lay naxee ba yɔbbu la, soo demee yaadi sɔkki laalo
Modality Aux. V.1 Prep. V.2 Comp. Conjunc V.3 Aux. V.4 V.5
“They mollify you for the only goal at bringing you in a marital home, as soon as you reach in, you become the gooey food fetcher” (...)
5. Waaye na nga sɔlloo ngor ak jom ca waar wa,
Prep. Mod. Aux. V Obj.1 Prep Obj.2 Det. Compl. Det.
Sɔllool ngor ak jom ca waar wa.
Imp.V Obj.1 Prep Obj.2 Det. Compl. Det.
“But, put up with dignity and self-respect in the issue,
Put up with dignity and self-respect.”
6. Fonkal sa njureel doom, sa alal,
Imp.V. Possess.Pron. Obj. Subj. Possess. Pron. Compl.

boo fonkee nj̄boot buur Laahu teral la.
 Conj. V1 Obj. Subj1 V2 Comp.

“Respect and care for your descendants, your wealth,
 If you love children, God will care for you.”

7. Fonkal sa sey doom sa moomeel,
 Imp.V.1 Possess. Pron. Obj. Subj Possess.Pron. Compl.
 boo nekee jeegu puso yaadi defar.
 Conj. V.1 Subj. Aux. V2

“Take care of your household as your ownership my daughter,
 If you become a relative bonder, you will be the wellness-maker.”

8. Jagal, jagal doom nga jagal,
 Imp.V.1 Imp.V.1 Subj. Aux. V.1
 bu jagee nga am lu leer ci jagal.
 Conj. V.1 Pron. V.2 Obj. V.3 Det. V.3

“Restore restore my daughter restore,
 If you restore breaking you will possess bright things.”

4. Discussion

According to the oral tradition, African children generally follow the rules taught through songs, proverbs, tales, riddles, etc. This allows the young generation not only to acquire knowledge, but also transmit it to the next generation. Since children had been raised under their parents’ attention and care, they must understand how to follow their steps.

As such, the traditional realities made people prepare for their marital life while referring to the elders’ instructions. The couples have reached the level of wise behavior, especially, the women who care about the bonds of marriage. Saalum marriage like other communities has taken a way for people to perpetuate their bloodline, but also the sacrality of bounding links into families and relatives, while keeping rigorously these links. Indeed, the pragmatic aspects reveal that women are guiding the relatives’ connection for wider links relations. Those who are lost with the nature of the relationship among relatives refer to the women who guide them. Many roles and ideas are drawn from these songs and the meaning has been pragmatically interpreted.

4.1 Women as Hardship-Bearers

2. *Da ñu lay naxee ba yòbbu la, soo demee yaadi rooti taxanee.*

“Signare Kamara, it’s not because of a loss that you as a mother are crying, when you marry your daughter”

3. *Da ñu lay naxee ba yòbbu la soo demee yaadi jaami waa ñ wa.*

“They mollify you for the only goal of bringing you into a marital home, as soon as you reach in, you become the cook’s slave.”

4. *Da ñu lay naxee ba yòbbu la, soo demee yaadi rooti taxanee,*

Da ñu lay naxee ba yòbbu la, soo demee yaadi sàkki laalo.

“They mollify you for the only goal at bringing you in a marital home, as soon as you reach in,
you become the goeey food fetcher” (...)

As the part of the song outlines, sadness reveals a hidden reality. The words point out a sad mother for marrying her daughter with no choice. In fact, the tears of a mother do not only mean giving her daughter in marriage as a loss but also the awareness of the sacrifice she will do in her household. In fact, women undergo chores in their homes to provide services to the members of the in-laws’ family in all situations. Whether the sun is hot or it rains, sooner or later, the good African woman is always the one who faces these moments.

4.2 *Women as Fertile Ressources*

6. *Fonkal sa njureel doom, sa alal,*

boo fonkee njòboot buur Laahu teral la.

“Respect and care for your descendants, your wealth,

If you love children, God will care for you.”

Indeed, based on kinship guidance, is noted in the wedding songs that women hold main roles in the societies’ settings and rules. The supremacy of the family is held by the woman thanks to her devotion to fertility. Her ability to produce her descendants within her marriage is the main issue of her strengths. Thus, the song illustrates the sacrifice she must face to reach such a level of fertility. Allowing her to rest in an estimated period, while gaining respect and appreciation of her in-laws.

“In Africa, The reproductive capacity of women is a major assurance of permanence and stability in marriage, in the family, and in the clan. This vision is manifested in the characters of ‘Idu and Adiewere’ who were entirely devoted to their union. Their happiness appears as ecstasy but unfortunately slows down by an absence of fertility” (Nwapa, & Flora, 1970).

Nwapa lets us understand that in the African tribe, motherhood holds a prominent role, and prior is given to submissive and perfect mothers. We understand from these lyric words, the faith of a heavy destiny in the lives of women who bear such responsibility.

4.3 *Women as Family Bonds*

7. *Fonkal sa sey doom sa moomeel,*

boo nekee jeegu puso yaadi defar.

“Take care of your household as your ownership my daughter,

If you become a relative bonder, you will be the wellness-maker.”

The song reveals that despite fertility as a core purpose in marriages, the behavior of the wives is considered to be the main principle to link the in-law families. Women are devoted to their kinship as well as one of their in-laws, due to the descendants she cares for. Women who will care for their children will care for their in-laws too. This is why, through these wedding songs, prior is given to women leadership as social characters. Otherwise, the woman holds a great responsibility to keep the

two families united while ensuring good relations between them. The wife has an outstanding role in family decision-fulfillment.

Indeed, the wives are mainly implicated. In the Saalum community, the goals of the wedding songs judge the personality of the women based on their actions. Indeed, the woman is the bride who leaves her home to join her husband and in-laws home to care for the alliance of both families. It is thus understood that women more often return to neighborly families and relatives to strengthen ties of blood and sometimes brotherhood.

4.4 Women as House Managers

8. Jagal, jagal doom nga jagal,

bu jagee nga am lu leer ci jagal.

“Restore restore my daughter restore,

If you restore breaking you will possess bright things.”

Wedding songs are considered the art to dance when women illustrate the ability to move and create social attractiveness. Such facts would indicate a willingness to impose themselves and manage what belongs to them in their household. Thus, such strategies would participate in the good household and husbands' management and similarly transmit the skills to her property.

Apart from human resources, women generally hold economic activities in their households as livestock, agriculture, and trading. Management skills are helpful for them in such a business. Economically, the women who own cattle learn to manage them with the aim of creating and expanding wealth. The words teach women not only to care for their owners but also to be able to restore any of this which would fall into breaking.

4.5 Marriage As a Means of Priesthood and Education

5. Waaye na nga s'alloo ngor ak jom ca waar wa,

S'alloo ngor ak jom ca waar wa.

“But, put up with dignity and self-respect in the issue,

Put up with dignity and self-respect.”

The priesthood of marriage in the Saalum context concerns main women as union savers and family carers. An alleged judgment against the woman in her devotion would justify the neglect of her property. This implies that eventual mistakes would be the cause of the disunity of the in-laws' families, as well as her children. Besides, obedience also becomes an important character of the woman to accomplish her dogma. If a woman proves evidence of obedience, she will make satisfied with the choice made upon her. From this submission, love or desire would be based on a target union, conceived by parents or elders. Marriage, therefore, requires patience, support, and motivation to succeed in such a priesthood union.

Considering the above arguments, sustaining the problem of this research paper; it must be known that the involvement of parents in traditional marriages plays a fundamental role in their success as well as their failure. The marriage of an African woman, whatever the conditions, is bound to the instructions

of the parents. Indeed, parents are taken as the backbone of the union of their children. This is why girls mostly accept the choice of their parents with no objection. At last, one might notice that obedience and self-denial are fundamental characteristics of housewives. This is the reality that all young African women, as part of families of standard morality must take into account. From this point of view, marriage becomes a priesthood that requires a good educational and moral basis to assume it. The household reconstruction is based on moral and cultural principles adapted to social norms, which often excludes the desire to love before getting engaged in a couple. One mere remain connected to social realities to make progress in such unions.

This is the main idea that wedding songs give, although they hold different themes. The semantic aspect is set as a topic issue, leading to emphasize the song's message, transmitted from the old to the young generation in Wolof society, especially in the Saloum community. Thus, the songs of marriage in such a context are purely motivational and conservative, and the words are facts of evidence.

All this knowledge is taught thanks to the songs' Semantics, leading to enriching cultural diversity and traditional beliefs within the community of Saalum. Thus, the Semantics of the wedding songs bear messages, wisdom, and sacrifice toward couples, especially women.

Pragmatic analysis of songs has led to conveying messages, educating young people, expanding knowledge in future generations, securing social relationships, and managing resources. We understand some basic virtues behind these unions planned by old people to care for their living and beliefs.

This old practice of wedding songs has basically founded traditional societies with human civilizations. Similar to neighboring cultures, the wedding songs govern the will and parental decisions. This implies much responsibility and motivation towards the concerned couples.

However, this pragmatic sense of traditional marriage embodied in songs does not exclude contentment in some other cases. Indeed, it exists through these unions couples who mutually loved each other and receive the parents' care for their unions. Some people engage naturally in a couple of relationships among relatives or neighbors without having one's parents' arrangement. But parents are always ready to assist such unions for success. Such facts lead to understanding the crucial decisions of parents in these unions, who aim to maintain family relationships, ethnicity, or social belonging.

This tendency to accept a conjoint for the purpose of maintaining or strengthening family or ethnic relations may reverse depending on moods, faults, or even misconduct of the couple. Culturally, sacredness is taken into account to solve any eventual issues raised by the unions.

4.6 The Study Objectives

The issues of cultural identity and beliefs are set in the African world where their practices are bound to social norms and realities. This study shows a short link between religion and culture as being essential parts of human existence. Indeed, through songs and other oral basis, people are mainly bound to such cultural beliefs, while preserving their religious instructions in the management of marriages in traditional societies. These pragmatic meanings of the wedding songs have given wide aspects in African civilization, based on moral principles as well as values.

Moreover, this topic issues contributes to cultural diversity, allowing people from different geographic areas to apprehend other cultures around the world. It also expands cultural knowledge, leading to a better understanding of people's beliefs within different communities.

4.7 Findings

African people have developed some beliefs and practices based on tradition to perpetuate them. We expect from this topic issue a desire to give women the leadership of self-engagement in couples, without hampering their happiness. Indeed, some developed ideas around the issues of marriage as being only sacerdotal and donation are mainly developed in tradition to charge women. Therefore, marriage is seen as a commitment of women who endeavor in their household.

Besides, the responsibility given to women as union carers and savers thanks to their devotion should be shared by husbands and in-laws as well. Many theories led to the understanding that the failure of marriage in Africa is under the responsibility of women so that, they put up with all situations. As a result, some ideas and thoughts were developed in traditional African society about the dedication and sacrifice of women to save arranged or sponsored marriages. Among these theories, are cited proverbs, riddles, tales, songs, etc. which this topic has treated. Thus, the community established songs, likely to characterize the feeling of grief, proudly expressed to manage hardship and keep the tradition. These criteria of marriage, although considered as irresistible to some, are perceived as the foundations of a social responsibility, conveyed by responsible people.

5. Conclusion

The African Oral Tradition has much cultural diversity due to the facts of social norms related to the historical context of the African marriage. Wedding songs convey particular messages. The importance of such a practice would justify the adoption of traditional and societal values, namely, respect for elders, their speech, respectability, personality, and wisdom. Thus, songs have a crucial role in building societal values, creating relations, educating young people, etc. based on conventional rules. Apart from marriage themes, other topic issues have been raised from the same context.

The topic issue has thus considered wide aspects of the marriage in which the pragmatics reveals through such song.

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