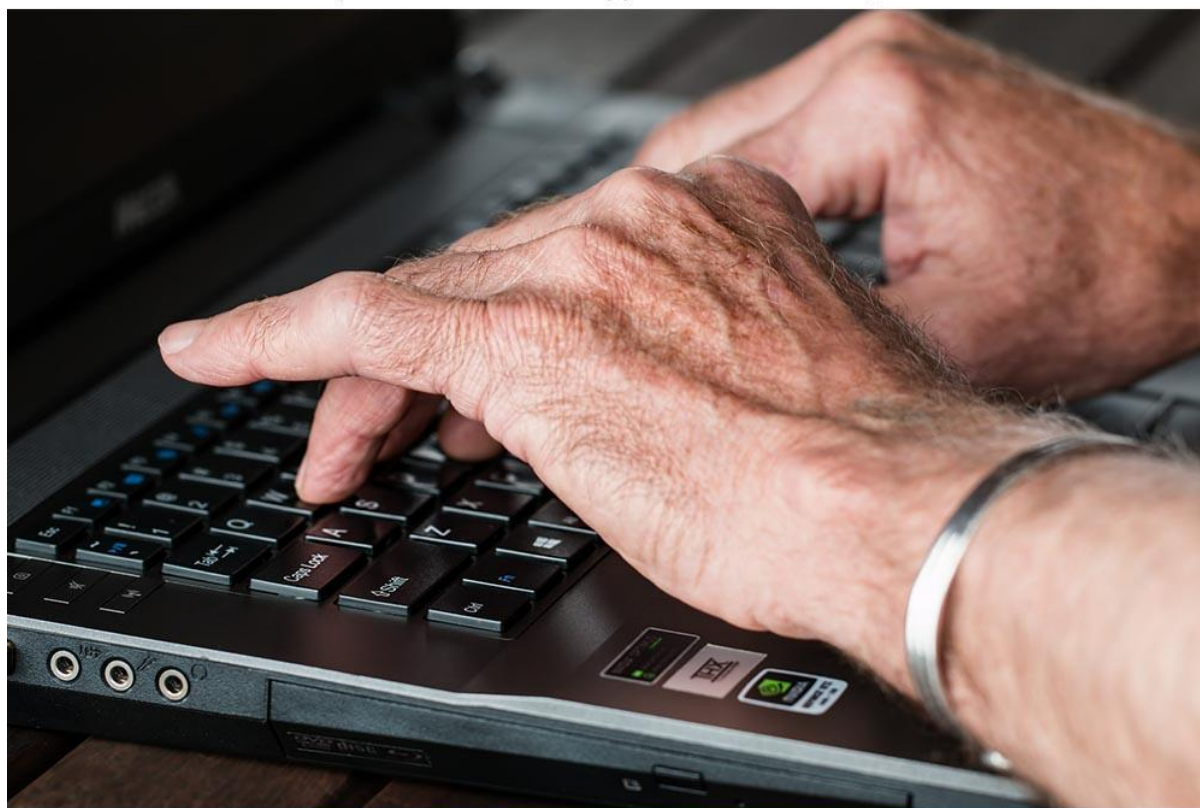


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Metaphors for impotency in Bamanankan

Abstract

This paper provides insight into how the topic of impotency is mentioned in Bamanankan. Direct reference to certain concepts may be regarded as offending or embarrassing. That is why, language users resort to alternative expressions – metaphorical euphemisms – having the potential to be accepted as innocent words. This article is an attempt to explore the mechanisms used to mention impotence in Bamanankan. The study originated from personal experience and observations of various casual conversations and discussions among peer groups. The data were gathered from a wide range of sources including not only casual conversations, but also the tributes from Radio Klédu about sex and its related activities. The study concludes with the submission that Bamanankan speakers resort to metaphor in an attempt to mention males' sexual dysfunctions.

Key words: Bamanan, Bamanankan, euphemisms, impotency, metaphor.

Introduction

There are areas of interdiction in more than one cultural and linguistic behavior. The Bamanan culture is not an exception. That is why softer expressions are used to mention concepts having the potential to cause abrasion if described bluntly. Metaphor is one of the techniques employed to circumvent the use of embarrassing words in Bamanankan. The

avoidance of harsh or crude words is well performed by using euphemism. Accordingly, language users regularly make accommodations to promote smooth communication and avoid friction while touching on issues that may shock or offend. Obviously, Bamanankan is not an exception in encouraging polite language. Based on the unmentionable nature of certain concepts in a polite setting, this study sets out to explore the phenomenon of euphemization in Bamanankan with a particular focus on metaphoric substitutes with regard to impotency.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the euphemistic expressions surrounding impotence. To achieve our purpose, we proceeded to describe some features common to the Bamanan cultural dimension.

Research questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. How is sexual impotency addressed in Bamanankan?
2. What are the cultural dimensions underlying sexual dysfunction?

Review of related literature

Traditionally, metaphor was viewed as figurative language. But recent studies have showed that metaphor is not in language but in thought. In this regard, Lakoff (1993) opines that we use metaphor in order to perform abstract reasoning, that is, abstract subjects are understood in terms of concrete subject matters.

Cognitive theorists such as Tversky (1977) and Ortony (1979) hold the view that understanding a metaphor involves combining or contrasting properties of metaphor topic and metaphor vehicle in order to identify the properties they have in common. For example: he is a pig; understanding this metaphor involves selecting a set of properties of the vehicle

(pig) such as “being messy, filthy” or “smelling funny” can apply to the topic and attribute to it. Any other property of the vehicle (e.g. pigs have tails) is rejected or suppressed (Gernsbacher et al, 2001). In relating metaphorical thinking to context, Kovecses (2009: 182) concedes that “when we speak and think metaphorically, we are influenced by these two factors and that the effect of context on metaphorical conceptualization is just as pervasive, if not more so, as that of the body”.

Metaphor, according to Agyekum (2013), is a figure of resemblance which makes direct reference to something as being another one. He also points out that metaphoric expressions are nurtured by “nature and environment, trees, plants, animals, the solar system cosmology” (p. 81). In general, these elements are referred to in mentioning attributes of human beings. This view is consistent with Afreh (2011) that the meanings of linguistic expressions are reflections of concepts in the minds of speakers which are taken from “our collective biological capacities and our physical and social experiences as beings functioning in our environment”.

That metaphor is a device used in indirect speech can also be gathered from Paivio (1979: 150): “metaphor is a solar eclipse. It hides the object of study and at the same time reveals some of its salient and interesting characteristics when viewed through the right telescope”. So, there is ground to say that metaphor involves understanding one domain of experience in terms of a very different domain of experience.

This paper is based on Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, henceforth CMT. This approach broadly stipulates that metaphor is capable of structuring our cognitive system and providing a particular understanding of the world in making sense of our experience (Fernandez 2008). There have several studies devoted to expressions used in mentioning humans’ intimacy. Some of them are discussed in what follows.

Dare (2005) looked into sexual discourse in Niyi Osundare's poetry which deals with sexual issues that inevitably employ those lexical items socially regarded as repugnant. Dare further observed that Osundare's poetry and the accompanying linguistic choices are controlled, indicating that he is conscious of the limits imposed on him by the Nigerian social conventions. In order to conform to the Yoruba convention that allows the speaker to mention sex organs only of animals or in allegory with material things, the poet resorts to periphrastic statements. Dare further argued that periphrastic euphemisms are the main method by which the Yoruba and English traditions avoid the use of the socially unacceptable linguistic expressions. Yet, he concludes that when periphrases are without euphemisms, as it is the case in Osundare's poetry, sex is made even more explicit than otherwise. Dare's (2005) study gains support from Batibo and Kopi (2008) who investigated sex-related euphemisms in Setswana, Botswana. Their study indicated that sex matters have been recently brought to the open because of the advent of HIV/AIDS (Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) pandemic even though sex is not usually talked about in Setswana communities. The authors of the study are of view that euphemisms have been created to camouflage the embarrassing nature of various references to sex matters. Therefore, sex-related topics include private parts, sexual activities, sexual secretions, sexual diseases, and related phenomena. The research equally focused on the nature, origin, and types of these euphemisms along with their place and role in the social interaction of the people of Botswana.

Fernández (2008) also looked into the relatedness of euphemisms and sex. Thus, he discussed the euphemistic and dysphemistic figurative language used to designate the taboo of sex. The study was carried out within Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Fernandez claimed that conceptualization is crucial to both the use and interpretation of sexual metaphorical euphemisms and dysphemisms. He further analyzed the function of

conceptual metaphors in euphemistic and dysphemistic use, striving to study the way in which a particular domain is likely to be a feeding ground for verbal mitigation or offence. The analysis he undertook showed that metaphorical terms and phrases referring to sexual taboos can be described in terms of Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive view of metaphor.

Ham (2005) diachronically studied the formation of English euphemism by extracting examples from three British novels: Jane Austen's *Emma*, D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, and Fiona Walker's *Well Groomed*. In studying euphemism formation, Warren (1992)'s *Model of Classification of the Main Devices for Constructing Euphemisms* was examined and the rules and categories suggested by this model were tested against euphemisms from the novels. It became obvious that improvements were required of the model in order for it to account for all examples. The author of the study proposed a modified version of this model to encompass all of these euphemisms, as well as other examples from notable sources.

On the basis of what precedes, it comes out that the reviewed literature focused mainly on sex-related euphemisms. Because none have particularly touched upon the issue of how impotency is addressed, there is ground to embark on investigating impotency-related expressions in Bamanankan.

Language, Methods and materials

Bamanankan is the language spoken by the Bamanan people in Mali. Of all the 13 Malian national languages, Bamanankan is the most widely spoken one. This assumption finds support in Adegbija (1994) that it is spoken by 30% of Malians. Besides, Skattum (2002) delves deeper and maintains that Bamanankan is not only spoken as mother tongue by some 40% of Malians but it is also the second language for 40% of the population. Bamanankan dialects include the regional varieties of Ségou, Bélé Dougou, Sikasso,

Wassoulou, and Bamako. For the purposes of this study, I draw all the data from the Bamako dialect to which I am exposed for over 22 years. The justification is that my intuition as a native speaker will be crucial in the analysis of culture specific metaphors. The data were gathered from a wide range of sources including casual conversations, the tributes from Radio Klédu about sex and its related activities. After collecting a number of linguistic expressions from the above-mentioned sources, I inferred their interpretations on the basis of mappings following Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, henceforth CMT.

The Metaphorical domains for Impotency

Force	→	Fangadɔgɔya =	the decrease of force
State	→	A tɛ cɛya la =	his not in man's State
Telephone	→	A bɛ erepondɛri kan =	he is on the answering machine
Bridge	→	A ka pɔnkarilen do =	his bridge is broken.
Matches	→	alimɛti jikinnen=	wet matches

From the above examples, we propose that euphemisms used to mention man's sexual dysfunction can be grouped under the following conceptual metaphors:

IMPOTENCY IS LACK OF POWER

TO BE IMPOTENT IS NOT TO BE A MAN

TO BE IMPOTENT IS TO BE ON RESPONDER

TO BE IMPOTENT IS TO HAVE WET MATCH

IMPOTENCY IS A BROKEN BRIDGE

The euphemisms pertaining to the above-mentioned metaphors are categorized in reference to man's cloth, man's force and state, and animals in the house as discussed below.

To facilitate reading, the following clippings have been used in the transcription of the different expressions:

Part = particle;

Poss = possessive;

Post.pos = post position

The data collected from casual conversations and the tributes informed us that men's sexual incapacity is viewed with the lenses of the material protecting their intimacy. The expression that follows is an instance.

(1)

Kulusijalalagosi

Pants belt weakness

[Weakness of the belt of pants].

Belt is used to maintain the pants on the hip; when it is loose, the pants will drop down. This image is employed to illustrate male's incapacity of performing sexual act. *Fangadɔgɔya* for "Decrease of strength" is articulated in a similar context as *Kulusijalalagosi*. This implies that the male subject is sexually weak, even powerless to perform a normal sexual encounter. The example below illustrates that impotence is connected with disease that has not been properly treated.

(2)

Cɛ caama ka fangadɔkɔya ju ye koko ye.

Men many poss. force weakening cause is pile post pos.

[Many men's weakness is due to hemorrhoid].

State

Impotency is also described in terms of state. Hence:

(3)

A tɛ cɛ yala.

He not man + state post pos

[He is not in manhood].

alludes to the impotent condition of a man. This expression is composed of *cɛ*(man) inserted between *tɛ* (expressing negation) *ya*(state) and *la* (locative postposition). The same is true for *a tɛmɔgɔya la* (he is not in personhood): the noun *mɔgɔ* is preceded by the negative word *tɛ*(not) and followed by *ya*(state) and *la* (locative postposition) meaning that he is not a man, sexually speaking.

Cat and mouse

Sexual dysfunction is mentioned in terms of animals. Using componential analysis, we proceed to characterize these animals, and then the expression follows.

Cat:

Predation

Carnivore

Cleans the house of mice

Mouse:

Weak

Is a hunted target

Destroyer in the house

Is food for cat

(4)

*A ka jakuma tɛ ɲinɛ minɛ.**He poss cat not mouse catch*

[His cat does not catch mouse]

This expression derives from the cat/mouse image which literally translates “his cat does not catch mouse”, a euphemism composed of two antagonistic animals. In indeed, any cat that fails to catch a mouse has no access to fresh meat. By analogy, the man suffering erectile failure is deprived of sexual pleasure. In this context, “cat” refers to penis and “mouse” refers to vagina and the expression can be used in any situation without affronting the audience’s face. The image of the cat hunting the mouse to eat is used to speak about sexual intercourse. Based on the CMT, two conceptual metaphors come to the fore: SEX IS PREDATOR and SEX IS FOOD. In this context the male counterpart is not only presented as playing the active role but also as a potential aggressor or “eater” and this image lends some support to the Bamanan philosophy of men’s dominance over women.

(5) *A ka alimeti jikinnen*

He poss Matches wet + post p.

[His matches are wet]

Casual conversations provided us with the assertion that any man who does not erect is described metaphorically as having “wet matches” simply because a wet match does not spark. Matches should provide fire, heat. The match in question must be construed in terms of the impossibility of lighting a fire with a wet match. By analogy, this expression presents man’s erectile problem as a match (penis) that does not spark (erect). A normal match that sparks and produces heat is equal to a normal male sexual performance. When it is the contrary that occurs people allude to the presence of two ladies in the room who, under normal conditions, are not able to have sex as shown in the sentence below:

U b’a fɔ ko cɛ in ka *alimeti jikilendo*. A muso bolila ka d’akan *muso fila* tɛ se ka kɛ so kɔnɔ shu fɛ.

[They say that this man has a **wet match**. His wife ran away because **two ladies** cannot sleep in a room].

(6) Bridge

A ka pɔn karilen don

He poss bridge brak +post position

[His bridge is broken]

This is the illustration of the conceptual metaphor that *impotency is a broken bridge*. Bridge is used to join two points and if it happens to be broken, then the connection proves to be difficult and even impossible. When the metaphor of the broken bridge is transposed on sexual issues, it projects an image of a man's incapability to erect. Thus, he is unable to meet the female sexual appetite. All of the euphemisms under the sub-titles "cat and mouse" and "bridge" are used in the conversation below where a person's impotence is discussed.

(6.1) A bɛ erepondɛri kan

He be responder on

[He is on the answering machine].

The euphemistic reference to the responder was coined with the advent and popularization of mobile phones in Mali some 15 years ago. *Erepondɛri* is the corrupt form of the French word "répondeur", which translates "responder", "answering machine". It is a borrowing, which, if metaphorically used to picture the state of the country as *jamana bɛ erepondɛrikan*, "the country is on the responder", means that the government faces financial problems. When the answering machine is on, you can only leave a message and as a result, direct communication is impeded. Therefore, *erepondɛri* is connected with a state of inability to reach or give appropriate reply. Seemingly, once a man's sexual organ does not react to the solicitation from the other sex; he is labeled as being on the responder. Accordingly, "answering machine" is a more acceptable expression to address that person's impotency.

(6.2) Koko fura bɛ n bolo ani erepondɛri fura.

Pile medicine is me hand and responder medicine

[I have medicine against hemorrhoid and **responder**].

(6.2) above is not only an instance of using *erepondɛri* (answering machine) to entice, for instance, an audience to purchase a healing product but also it has become a fashion. When employed in the appropriate context, the term has the potential to mitigate the inconvenience relative to the description of impotency.

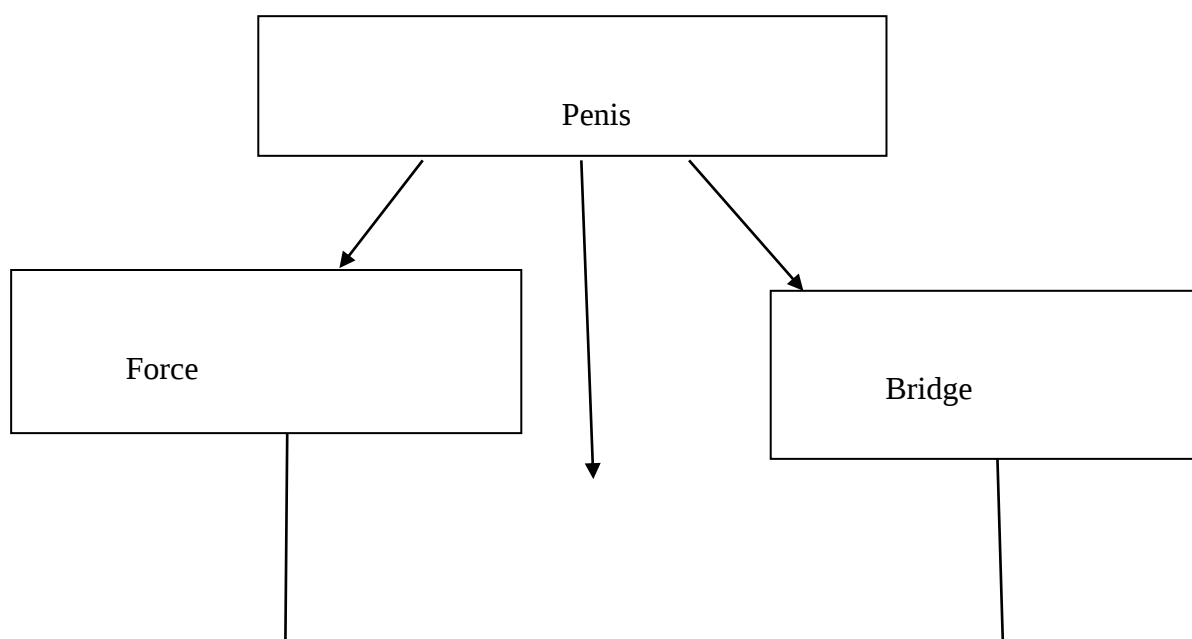
(7) *A ka dabada mandi.*

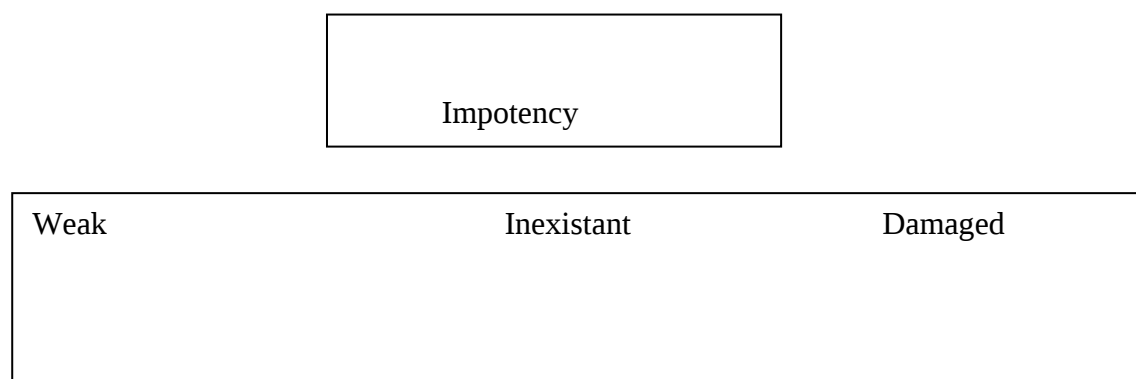
He poss hoe-blade not sharp

[The blade of his hoe is not sharp].

As the Bamanan people are mainly peasants, it is not unusual to meet expressions constructed around tools used to cultivate the land. (7) is an illustration of how the reference to “hoe” and its “blade” is made to describe sexual unfitness and making love is portrayed as “cultivating one’s farm”. The upshot of all this is that woman is equated with a farm – a property – that is nurtured by its owner only (the husband) (Agyekum, 2010).

The domain of impotency and its apparent categories are presented in the figure that follows.





Because people want to be polite, they don't use "penis" as shown in the figure. Instead, in an attempt to describe impotency, they use the force metaphor that may be weak or inexistent and the bridge metaphor that may be damaged.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that impotency is not overtly mentioned in polite settings. Overall, reference is made to trousers, bridge, telephone, matches, and hoe in an attempt to mention impotence metaphorically. If taken separately, each of the above mentioned concepts relate to things people use routinely. Thus, in the Bamanan conception of dressing, trousers are exclusively designed for the males. Bridge and telephone are used to facilitate movement and communication between people regardless of distance. The hoe is the basic tool the Bamanan people would utilize to cultivate their farms.

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