

Communicative Intricacies in Reality Television Romantic *Tujuane* Dating Episode

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Abstract: Language is fundamental in any form of communication whether verbal or non-verbal. In a relationship, language is crucial from the moment people first meet, progressing to courtship and marriage or subsequent sustainability of the relationship. The choices of words as well as the nonlinguistic cues play important roles in the process of interactional communication. To unravel such communicative intricacies, *Tujuane*, a dating programme on KTN, a Kenyan Television Channel forms the basis for such data. It may be said that whenever people come together for the purposes of interaction, their nature of speech changes significantly. This change may or may not be for the purposes of accommodating the partner in communication. This paper makes an attempt to delve into how the choice of words and nonlinguistic cues on a first dating episode may affect the future of a potential romantic relationship.

Keywords: Dating, Interaction, Accommodation, Relationship.

INTRODUCTION

This paper confines itself to the possible language inappropriateness during the initial romantic dating especially amongst the youth and early adults. In Kenya, the marriage institution may be viewed as an endangered institution. Karina [1] writes that in Kenya, a lot of people in marriages are not enjoying the union hence cases of marriage breakages are numerous. Karina adds that lack of contentment in Kenyan marriages is as a result of incomplete stages in romantic relationships.

The nature of language use during romantic dating or courtships defines the depth and possible success or failure of relationships. The male and female speeches during courtships have been studied and found to differ highly, not only in contexts but in regions as well [2]. However, a general understanding, which is highly presumed, is that females are the more choosy sex, while men initiate, develop and sustain relationships [2]. From a different perspective, Renninger, Wade and Grammer [3] qualify this by noting that the patterns of non-verbal cues that men employ during courtship contexts are highly influential in eventual union with the females. The writers add that it starts with understanding of the female glances which may signal a welcoming or repelling attitude to a dating episode. This present paper keenly looks at this perspective and tries to note whether appropriateness

and inappropriateness of language use are to be praised and blamed for strength of relationships.

Over time, nature of relationships has changed. Karina [1] brings up the issue of modernity in relationships, especially teenage relationships. Hence, there is an expected huge shift in approaches that are used in relationships in the world and Kenya is not left behind. For instance, Hershtatter [4] notes that in China, there is a huge difference in patterns of courtship between urban and rural areas. Viki, Abrams and Hutchison [5] define true romantic relationship as one combining traditional aspects with modern aspects. Crucial in this is the social psychological approach of sexism. They add that this whole perspective can be enhanced by using appropriate language for both genders in a relationship.

Naturally, developing a romantic relationship is an aspect of human impulse and so there is a great desire among humans to look for the love of their lives. This quest is nowadays faced by various challenges. Grabianowski [6] identifies some of these challenges including the possibility of an individual hating the bar scene, or the illegality of dating co-workers or simply not being in the mood to meet with a soul mate while doing shopping. Among the solutions to these obstacles is the introduction of online dating. This is a method of meeting people via the various sites available that are

constantly on the rise. There are different sites to fit the needs and specifications of each individual [6].

In online dating sites, one is required to create a profile, which includes basic information for instance gender, age range you are interested in, residence. It may also include one's email address. Furthermore, one includes some personal attributes such as height, weight, hair color, body type. One may post a photo of themselves though it is not obligatory. A person is also expected to highlight aspects of oneself such as personality and describe oneself in a manner that would make people contact you [6].

Another aspect of dating would be through chance pairing and being placed on real television dating. By definition, reality TV is essentially unscripted programming that does not employ actors and focuses on footage of real events or situations. Reality shows also often use a host to run the show or a narrator to tell the story or set the stage of events that are about to unfold. Unlike scripted shows like sitcoms, dramas and newscasts, reality TV does not rely on writers and actors, and much of the show is run by producers and a team of editors [7].

According to Morreale [8], reality television programs have taken over every medium in the television arena. Morreale likens reality programs to viruses in the manner in which they reproduce. Reality programs reproduce themselves by hijacking pre-existent forms: cop shows, dramas, soap operas, sitcoms, game shows, and self-improvement shows. They are now in the process of altering our cultural forms and identities.

In Kenya, reality shows are on the rise with shows such as *Tusker Project Fame*, *Ultimate Challenge* and *Tujuane* among others. It is a trend that is coming up and is gaining popularity as more and more people are glued to their seats to follow them. With respect to this study, *Tujuane* has been chosen because of its relevance as a dating programme.

Tujuane is a Kiswahili word for 'let's know each other'. It is a Kenyan reality show that used to air on KTN TV every Tuesday evening as from 8:00 pm – 9:00 pm. It was launched on November 2, 2012, directed by Rolyn Enterprises. The show has two hosts namely Alonzo and Ivan, who walk along the streets of Nairobi looking to match-make various people that they meet on the streets. The host first picks an eligible male or female from passers-by on the street, and then approaches an equally eligible member of the opposite sex for a date. Once the match is made, a camera crew follows them around and later goes to their homes to find out what they are really like. The newly matched couple then goes on a date. They each give a report on the success or failure of the date and what they really

think about each other in interviews aside of the date and these interviews are integrated within the show as it goes on. In between the show there are relationship experts who give their take on what a first date should entail, how the couple should behave, tips on body language, how they should present themselves and which topics should be avoided as well as which topics are safe for a first date [9].

For the purposes of scope of this paper, focus would be based on aspects of verbal communication as a distinct indicator of failure in romance between individuals in the dating set-up. According to Fussell [10], verbal communication is a form of communication that has been employed even to communicate emotions. It is possible for partners in communication to use spoken communication to express their deep feelings towards one another. Another scholar Ellgring [11] is of the view that the best form of expression is the vocal expression, as opposed to non-linguistic expression. This is because its impact is immediate and there is a possibility of getting immediate response. It therefore becomes an important form of communication when partners are expressing their love emotions and expressions. For instance, a man may wish to have immediate response from a lady he may be dating or courting for marriage. By speaking to her directly, he gets a good chance of getting immediate response, and gauging compatibility he may have with the lady in case of need for marriage.

Closely related to the process of dating is culture which is highly embroiled in verbal communication. Hence, as noted by Juslin and Laukka [12], it is important to employ different modes of communication when communicating between cultures. The cultural aspects of passing a message from one point to another are highly applicable in verbal communication. A failure to evaluate cultural elements in a communication may eventually lead to misunderstanding, and in the case of building relationships, failure is the end result.

There is also an intimate relationship between communication and culture. Communication is the means of human interaction through which cultural characteristics are created. Cultures are a natural by-product of social interaction. According to Wikihow [13], one should manifest constructive attitudes and beliefs. This is because the attitudes you bring to communication will have a large impact on the manner of interaction. One should choose to be honest, patient, optimistic, respectful, and accepting others while being sensitive to their feelings and believing in their competence.

In addition to these, McQuerrey [14] argues that attitude can also impact communication in both positive and negative ways. An individual with extreme

points of view may find it hard to see one another's perspective because each has the attitude that the other must be wrong without taking time to analyze the situation. In the same way, people with similar attitudes may overlook instances of miscommunication because they have the attitude they are always in agreement with one another.

McQuerrey [14] further identifies the impact of pre-established attitudes. If one has a firm attitude about a particular issue, you are likely to communicate about it with a 'black-and-white perspective'. The way of thinking impacts one's ability to accurately understand and accommodate anything other than what you already believe. This results in an inability to judge accurately. Attitudes can also impact the ability of people to fully and effectively communicate with one another. This results to incomplete delivery of information and consequent misunderstandings which can have a negative impact. Additionally, individuals who have conflicting attitudes may find it hard to communicate in a civil manner. They would limit all forms of interaction that could lead to a variety of miscommunication problems, especially because neither party is likely to step forward to clarify or accept responsibility for problems that arise as a result of their joint failure to communicate.

Communication Accommodation Theory

This paper utilizes Communication Accommodation Theory in the analysis. This theory was developed by Giles, Bourhis and Taylor [15]. The core of the theory's argument is that whenever people come together for the purposes of interaction, their nature of speech changes significantly. This change may be for the purposes of accommodating the partner in communication. The concepts of convergence and divergence are the mainstay of this framework. The theory essentially assumes that in communicative interactions, people use strategic behavior, mainly based on language, to achieve a desired social distance between themselves and their interlocutors, that is, to maintain perceived separation or nearness with interlocutors [16]. According to Lucas [17], exchange of words has to occur, whether the interaction is private or public. It therefore means that the nature of exchange of words will significantly change depending on the nature of interaction. For example, private interaction requires a confined kind of communication. On the other hand, public communication is structured in nature, and is devoid of unnecessary deviations.

The Communication Accommodation theory looks at the adjustments or accommodations done by the speaker that are necessary for linguistic communication. Adjustments are made by speakers according to their personal characteristics, speech style and specific language usage. These adjustments aim at evoking the addressee's social approval, to promote

communicative efficiency between speakers, and maintaining a positive social identity [18]. The Communication Accommodation Theory was used as the analytical toolkit for the data.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study employed purposive sampling to select the *Tujuane* episodes that were relevant for use in the study. A total of ten episodes were watched from the various episodes. Only two of these were used because of their relevance and applicability to the objectives of the study. In the main study from which this paper is extracted there were two contrasting dating couples exhibiting a failing and successful episodes used as sources of data. The researchers used qualitative data collection technique of direct observation through video playback and live observation. Data analysis was done using content analysis method. Content analysis is a data analysis method that can be used in both quantitative and qualitative studies. When used qualitatively, emphasis is laid on social meaning both explicit and implicit in the categorizations used [19].

DATA AND DISCUSSION

For the purpose of this paper, we have selected a single dating session between two participants namely George and Mirfat whose verbal communicative activities signaled a failed attempt at starting a relationship. The paper has also focused mainly on the verbal aspect although the larger project had comparatively looked at several dating sessions containing both verbal and non verbal communication mannerisms. Unavoidable references to non-verbal communication have been made too in the data analysis. George is a Director of Photography, while Mirfat is a production assistant for Imagine Pictures, a local production company. The entire dating session took place at a local restaurant in Nairobi, Kenya.

First Impressions

George comes dressed in a round-necked, pink and white striped sweatshirt. This seems inappropriate to Mirfat for she thinks a Director of Photography would not dress as casually, and on several occasions criticizes his dress code.

George: By the way, you look...*unakaa poa*(you look good).

Mirfat: Thanks...thank you very much

George: I like your outfit

Mirfat: You are not bad; you should lose the sweater at least.

George: Why?

Mirfat: You are dark, you need bright colors

This conversation is part of their initial talk after just meeting. In this dialogue, George offers her a

complement. His choice of language is an attempt to look for the best way he can express his appreciation of her and strike a rapport. He engages in phatic communion in an attempt to create a relaxed atmosphere. He says *'I like your outfit'* which is an attempt at improving their initial communication hence a convergence of identity and good relationship. George further intimates that Mirfat is beautiful by stating in Sheng *'...unakaa poa.'* (you look good) which is a way of increasing their communication efficiency and gain social approval and a desired level of social distance between interlocutors [16].

However, Mirfat responds with a negative criticism and this seems to discourage any warm relationship or stopping any lengthy conversation. This is what Giles *et al.* [20] refers to as the divergence concept. Mirat's choice of words *'You are dark, you need bright colors'* show disapproval of George's dress code and even her offer of advice of how he should dress further exposes her distaste. She puts her opinion in such a way that does not impress George. We get to know this from George's aside interview where he protests by saying:

By the way huyo dame ka hajawahi skia dark and handsome, manze ndio sisi hapa me najitrust me ni mhandi man eeh

(It is like the lady has never heard of a dark and handsome person)

A further exchange in the initial stages of their meeting enhances an instant negativity between them seemingly perpetuated by the lady, Mirfat.

George: Really? *Si we ni mweupe basi* you need dark colors for your outfit?

Mirfat: Excuse me I'm a diva you don't tell a diva what to do.

In the above exchange, George seems sarcastic by asking her to put on dark clothes because she is light skinned but she retorts by dismissing him. She calls herself a diva. This word causes a miscommunication. This is because her meaning of the word *'diva'* differs from George's own knowledge of the word. George, as evident in the interview aside, imagines that *'diva'* is the name of soap readily available in the Kenyan market. Mirfat's intention in using the word *'diva'* is not achieved due to this difference in worldview as pertaining to the meaning of the word. George said in the aside interview:

Aliniambia yeye ni diva, manze unajua kitu moja me najua diva ni sabuni. So nilikuwa nawonder huyu dame kwani ataisha...

(She told me she is a diva which I know is soap. I then wondered if she would wear off like soap!)

Also, Mirfat has already placed herself way above George by stating that *'...you don't tell a diva what to do.'* Therefore, she has clearly removed herself from George's world and signals the fact that she may not be ready to listen to anything George is likely to put forth. It also clear that George misunderstands Mirfat and is not world wise.

This is reflected further in their continued conversation when they were to order for food.

George: What's your order? Can I order you fries?

Mirfat: Fries? Are you serious?

George: Yeah, why not?

Mirfat: Do I look like eating fries?

George: okay, okay, uum, steak?

Mirfat: No steak is a manly dish.

In this dialogue, George and Mirfat respond to a question with another question. This is not an appropriate way of response by people who are getting to know each other especially since these are among the first things they say to each other. Mirfat's choice of words in this case is because she feels offended to be offered fries which she thinks is beneath her. This is seen in her comment in the interview aside:

I don't do fries. Look at me, look at the way I dress, look at how I look like, how I present myself then you come and order for me fries. Am I a chips fungu (packed fries) or something? Please, order real food for a real lady.

George on the other hand may have offered to order her fries because he thought it was acceptable as a result of probably coming into contact with many ladies who enjoy such a meal. Mirfat's words take him aback and causes him to wonder what the problem with her was. He says in the aside interview:

Nilimuuliza chenye atadishi, kwanza nikaanza kusuggest unajua nikasuggest fries. Eeh boss, dame aliruka manze mpaka ananiuliza 'naka fries' unajua. Eeh nilimuwach for a while nikajiuliza kwani huyu dame ana nini?

(I asked her what she would take then I suggested fries but the lady became annoyed and asked me if she looks like fries. I just looked at her and wondered what her problem was.)

It is quite obvious, therefore, that this dating couple is from different social backgrounds. George imagined that French Fries (potato chips) would be a good meal during their date but Mirfat feels that would

be a 'cheap' meal befitting only low cadre women. She protests by saying 'Look at me, look at the way I dress, look at how I look like, how I present myself then you come and order for me fries.' She exudes a class above simple meals such as fries. Kenyans consider the readily available French Fries as a cheap fast food and usually a popular take away meal referred to as '...chips funga (take-away fries) of which Mirfat wants to disassociate herself from completely.

This being their first date, Mirfat is already expressing her individuality. Watson and Gallois [21] confirm that the interpersonal history between two communicators also influences their initial orientation. This has effect on one's accommodation choices and evaluations [21]. This is what Gudykunst, Lee, Nishida and Ogawa [22] also call interpersonal factor in communication. Mirfat clearly distances herself from sharing the same 'food' thoughts as George. George's next attempt at a 'steak' meal equally receives a negative rebuttal 'No steak is a manly dish.' Mirfat is not making it any easier by suggesting what she prefers. We therefore denote a divergence of perception towards such foods.

Diction and world view

The diction in their communication becomes quite significant. The initial conflict as seen seem to emanate from the way each participant speaks. This is more evident even in the subsequent transcripts.

George: So where do you pack?

Mirfat: Sorry?

George: *Unapack wapi?*

Mirfat: Where do I live?

George: Yeah

George: Okay, I'm a cool guy, I don't talk much

Mirfat: You don't talk much? And you say you are not shy. So if you don't talk much, how are you not shy?

George: It doesn't mean I'm a shy guy when I don't talk much.

There is also miscommunication here. The word 'pack' in the question 'So where do you pack?' that George chooses is unclear to Mirfat and causes her to seek clarification. George's version of English is still not compatible to Mirfat's and he then switches to *Sheng*, a Kenyan slang language which is a bastardized language making no sense to Mirfat. Further misunderstanding in terms of meaning is seen when George considers talking less as a sign of being 'cool' while Mirfat sees that as translating into being shy. Mirfat says 'You don't talk much? And...not shy?'

Further conversation between George and Mirfat on their hobbies and favourite pass times ignited

more heated arguments. These fuelled their extreme differences in their social perceptions. The following excerpts from their conversations reflect the growing gap between them.

Mirfat: I like soul music, RNB and techno. Classic music, not noisy music; ragga and dancehall. Ghetto kind of things.'

George: So, where did you grow up from? Which hood?

Mirfat: Which hood? I just told you I live in South C. That's where I grew up. That's where all the celebrities, if you've done production as you say, come from. True or false?

George: Yeah. Maybe that's the difference cause I stay...me *hukaa eastlando* most of the time

Mirfat: I can tell by your....

George: The way I talk?

Mirfat: Yeah.

Mirfat: I actually enjoy tennis. I recently watched the Australian Open. Andy Murray do you know him?

George: No. In sports maybe Wayne Rooney, Manchester United

(She rolls her eyes dismissively goes unnoticed)

Mirfat: I also love fencing.

George: Who is that? *Huyo ni nani?*

Mirfat: Fencing is a kind of sport!

Mirfat: please, plastic money, for ghetto people.

In the above excerpts, Mirfat's choice of words is all to show her social class and status. This sets her apart from George because he is completely different from her. In the first transcript in this section, her use of comparison is to show the difference 'I like soul music, RNB and techno...Ghetto kind of things' She also criticizes his social class by using 'not noisy' and 'ghetto kind of things'. Their socio-cultural knowledge likewise makes them incompatible hence they do not seem to have anything in common to communicate about. This causes a divergence of sorts and as Giles and Coupland [23] put it divergence refers to the way in which speakers emphasize on the differences between their verbal or nonverbal behavior. In this case, a speaker wishes to maintain their distinctiveness. This happens when an individual feels that they belong to a certain social class or group that has some prestige. Thus, concepts such as fencing or a Tennis player such as Andy Murray are not familiar to George but Mirfat chooses to talk about it in order to enhance her social status. This alienates her from George who seems to be just familiar with football considered quite 'ordinary'

and not in the same rank as ‘exotic’ games like Tennis and Fencing.

George realizes this when in his interview aside he says:

Sawa ana hiyo rangi, so alikuwa anatake kujiweka pale unajua? Anataka kujiweka pale. So me nikaamua kutulia nimuwatch chenye anataka ku do.

(Okay, she has the class and wanted to place herself high up there. I decided to relax and just watch her.)

Mirfat eventually observes George’s difficulty in their verbal interaction. Hence:

Mirfat: Are you finding it hard to converse with me?

George: Why?

Mirfat: Cause uum what I’m seeing it’s hard for you to communicate directly in English, in correct proper Swahili and the words that are coming from your mouth I can’t understand what you are saying.

Mirfat’s choice of words in this case is as a result of observation of George’s difficulty in conversing in English. She highlights the fact that she cannot understand him due to his choice of language and makes it known to him that he should probably change his language to one that she understands. She appears bullish and condescending by seemingly enjoying the fact that George is not ‘fluent’ and to her linguistic standard. In her interview aside she comments about this and says:

Communication was a problem. I think ladies like me intimidate him or maybe he’s never gone on a date with a person like me.....his lingua was just not up to my standards actually I didn’t even understand most of the words that he said.

Further to George’s perceived language difficulty, she intimates he lacks table manners. Thus:

(As they wipe their hands with a cloth after washing them...)

Mirfat: Don’t wipe your face with it!

George: (smiles)

In this transcript it is obvious that Mirfat’s enjoys being harsh and intends on making George look foolish. She is of the view that people from the ghetto do not know table etiquette. This is a rather prejudiced comment which George chooses not to comment on and just smiles back. He has resigned to the fact that nothing can grow out of their date. However, he is

offended by it as is seen in his comment in the interview aside in when he says:

Boss, huyu dame kwani anafikiri me niko down aje. Me ni fala nini? Maze nimego places mob bana, hoteli mob, restaurant mob na najua ni za hands tu alafu kuwipe out dirt.

This lady thinks I am so ignorant of table manners. I have gone to many restaurants and I know such towels are for the hands.

Failed Relationships

George chooses to share some information about his former girlfriend and how their relationship came to an end. He thought this would be a sign of honesty and not holding back issues from your partner to be. The following exchange shows how it went:

George: *nilikuwa na hiyo feeling alikuwa ananiplay so I had to.*

(I had that feeling that she was being unfaithful so I had to.)

Mirfat: *Sorry, ulikuwa na hiyo feeling?*

(Sorry, you had that feeling)

George: *Nilikuwa tu nafeel, unajua vile mtu anaweza kuact towards you, utajua there’s something cooking up ama kuna kitu inafanyika.*

(I just had the feeling. You know it’s just the way someone can act toward you. You will know there is something cooking.)

Mirfat: *Okay*

George: *So, aah, sorry to say this but nilitake phone yake...*

(Sorry to say this but I took her phone.)

Mirfat: *Hold on, hold on you did what?*

George: *I took her phone*

Mirfat: *How do you take someone else’s phone?*

This unprecedentedly turns out to be inappropriate since it causes conflict of ideas between the two participants and also makes George appear vulnerable and insecure. On a first date your main intent is to impress and sharing personal information that would show a bad side of you does not achieve this. This revelation by George turned out to be a major blunder. This kind of information is not material for conversation on a first date as Piet Evert Van Altena, a dating coach, comments and says:

How you communicate with your partner on your first date is a major contribution to the success...there is a danger in over sharing. You have an urge to over share information and that’s

the wrong kind of communication. My advice is this; allow some mystery to remain.

The choice of words and the choice of language of this couple greatly affected the course of the date. They both left feeling unsatisfied mostly because they could not understand each other. By the end of the date they were not left with any urge to continue to courtship and know each other more. This is a clear consequence of what inappropriate language, attitude, perceptions of partners and revelations can do to a dating session and how it can deter the development of a relationship. In the aside interview Mirfat comments about the date in general and says:

All in all, the day wasn't going as I hoped, this guy was just not up to my standards. And, I just couldn't sit there and torment myself listening to this guy talking crap, first and foremost, second of all his language is just not there.

CONCLUSION

The dating episode between Mirfat and George clearly confirms what McQuerrey [14] argues about attitude that it can impact on communication in both positive and negative ways. An individual with extreme points of view may find it hard to see one another's perspective because each has the attitude that the other must be wrong without taking time to analyze the situation. Mirfat sees George as a person of a lower class right from the onset and this clouds her mind denying her the chance to give him a chance. George on the other hand looks naïve to the attitude Mirfat is showing her. His honest approach to their dating further distances him from Mirfat. He says certain 'truths' that hurt this dating episode, for instance, when he talks about his break up with his girlfriend.

George and Mirfat's date is a clear case of divergence. The two maintain their distinctiveness as seen in their choice of language. This is because each wants to maintain and make clear the social class that they belong to which oppose one another. This contributes a lot to the failure of their date. George uses Sheng most of the time which looks incomprehensible to Mirfat while she herself uses terminologies that are alien to her partner.

This is supported by Tajfel's [24] proposal that social classes in which people belong are important sources of pride and self-esteem. They give one a sense of social identity and belonging. Similarly, McLeod [25] states that people enhance the status of the group they belong to increase their self image. They may also discriminate and hold prejudicial views against the group they do not belong. When Mirfat suggests that George changes the place he lives and his dress code, she shows that his style is not acceptable to her class. She also discriminates against his choice of music by

terming it 'noisy and ghetto-like'. Her emphasis on sophisticated sports such as fencing, mention of tennis players, her association with top television personalities and her emphasis on her place of living as where most celebrities come from are all attempts to enhance her social class and downplay George's class. This constant attempt at differentiating herself from him makes the outcome to the date unsatisfying.

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