

The Interface Between Language and Culture A Case Study of Marriage in Traditional Abagusii Community of Kenya

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Abstract: This study investigated the interconnection between language and the culture Abagusii traditional marriage. In a people's culture, language use is very peculiar and is normally symbolic. Even very ordinary words could have very different meanings depending on the context. Such is the case with the language used in Abagusii traditional marriage though no research had been conducted to unearth such usage. The objectives of the study were to examine language used in traditional marriage of Abagusii community and to interpret language use in the context of Abagusii traditional marriage. The study employed two theories which are relativism theory of Foucault (1981) and Chambers (1995). This theory looks at language as a societal environment, control people's thinking and affects meaning people give to certain concepts in their language. It is a social structure like gender family, economy it is a social affair. May (1986) looks at language as an instrument of communication between human beings thus instrumental theory. It is an exchange of ideas between man and man, man and society, society and society and man, society and environment. Methodology used involved snowballing starting with the researcher's own maternal grandmother then to others a total of four respondents aged between 70-80 years. The respondents had gone through traditional marriage and easily remembered and narrated what took place. The data collected was translated analyzed and language used interpreted. The results showed that in the context of marriage, language used was special and was culturally bound. Even very ordinary words had special meaning. The study is a boost to studies on language and culture.

Keywords: Language use, culture, Abagusii, traditional marriage, betrothal, and wedding.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper we are analyzing how language is used in a special and peculiar way in marriage by the Abagusii community. This paper covers all that takes place right from betrothal / engagement to the wedding and the concluding ceremonies before the couple is considered married. When giving a preface to the book the Route ledge language and cultural theory Reader by Ferdinand de Saussure [1] has this to say: In the lives of the individuals and society, language is a actor of greater importance than anyother. For the study of language to remain solely the business of a handful of specialist would be quite an unacceptable state of affairs. Here de Saussure is lamenting about linguists who don't give cognicense to other branches of language use like sociolinguistics, anthropological linguistics, e.t.c. all of which are very important for they deal with the actual language use on the ground. He goes on to argue [2]. In recent years the development and advances in the study of language and cultural criticism have

brought to the fore a new set of questions. The shift from a purely formal analytical approach has created an interest in the role of language in social, political and ideological realms finally of what use is linguistics? Very few people have clear ideas on this point Linguistic questions interest all who work with texts, historians, and philologists' e.t.c. Still more obvious is the importance of linguistics to general culture in the lives of individual and societies speech is more important than anything else De Saussure underscores the importance of language when considering a peoples' culture. It's with this in mind that this paper examines how language is used among the Abagusii community especially in the wedding 'ceremony. Coupled with this is the fact that for a long time, the western scholars have had this notion that Africans had no recognized marriage but a temporal affair. History has it that in America if an African slave wanted to marry, he was made to cross a broom together with the wife to-be and from hence

they were considered married. This shows how lightly marriage was taken something this paper discounts.

Betrothal/Engagement

"Sending the go-between"

According to all my informants engagement is very vital; and compulsory in the process of marriage. Without it marriage could not take place. The age at which one could marry was determined mainly by one's show of physical and biological maturity e.g. growing of beards for men or breasts for women or if the elder siblings had been married and hard work which earned one wealth e.g. a herd of cattle and goats. Nyandege [3] said However the initiative of looking for a girl to marry was not taken by the bridegroom but his parents and preferably his father. The father of the bridegroom **Omonyuomi** omihad to contact his relatives especially his sisters (aunts to the bridegroom) to look for a good girl his son could marry

This term **Omonyuomi** seliterally translated means the one marrying and can only be applied in the context, of marriage and nowhere else. At this stage someone is sought who knows both families well i.e. the bride's side and the bridegroom's. This person is considered very special because all the success or failure in the whole process of marriage is attributed to him. Such a person is called *esigani* which can be translated, as the go-between. This one knows where to get a good girl for the bridegroom. The person could be a man or woman but had to be a mature person preferably of middle age. The entire process of getting a girl to be married is termed as **ogosigana**. Note the marriage between clan members or between some clans which were considered related was prohibited. People who were even remotely related were not supposed to get married, it was a taboo. This is unlike for most Indo-European cultures where we have various marriage systems as Claud Levin Strauss in Burke. L. *et al.* states [4].

Here we have a very simple type of marriage rule called the generalized form of exchange or circular system because any number of groups can be connected by using this rule. Anthropologists call it marriage with mother's brother's daughter – group A is taking wives from group B, group B is taking wives from group C again from group A and on – A kind of circle. You have 3, 4, 5 of groups organized according to this system.

As can be seen from the above quotation in such an arrangement relatives could easily marry within the circle which is quite different from the Abagusii culture. When I asked on the importance attached to this **esigani** Bochaberi [5] had this to say: *Esigani* is extremely important in any form of marriage relationship. He/she is the one who knows both families well and can look for a good and dutiful girl. He knows the family background of

both families so cannot recommend a girl from a bad family e.g. of murderers, witchcrafts, sorcerers e.t.c. nor can she recommend a girl to such a family. All mis-happenings between the two ".Families were often attributed to the bad choice by the go-between **esigani**. All messages between the two families were relayed through him/ her. Before any marriage negotiations could start every couple had to have a go-between.

The *esigani* can now go ahead and hold talks with the parents of the daughter. He talks with her on the subject of marriage. However both the parents and the girl have the right to accept or reject the proposal in case there had been somebody who had come earlier or if they didn't like the relationship to be. In case the proposal is accepted the go-between relays the information to the **Omonyuomi**'s family. If however the proposal is not accepted, **esigani** goes to look elsewhere for a good girl until he/ she succeeds.

After the *esigani* has succeeded in his mission, the boy to marry plus a few of his age mates visits the girls' home. This visit is termed a short journey. When these boys are alerted (normally about four to five) about a short journey and aware that their friend has been courting they immediately understand what the expression stands for Malinowski[6]. An utterance becomes comprehensive only when we interpret it by its context of situation. The analysis of this context should give us a glimpse of a group of people bound by reciprocal ties of interest and ambitions of emotional appeal and responses. In such a scene the actors are following a purposeful acting and all are set on a define aim; they are all set to act in concerted manner according to certain rules established by custom and tradition

We can deduct from Malinowski (if the use of primitive in his article can be excused or otherwise interpreted to mean 'raw' or 'unadulterated by outside influence') that an utterance can only be understood when placed in its context. Thus the young men rise to the occasion because of the urgency when their age mate requires they take him for a short journey whose meaning they perfectly understand. The go-between has to alert the girls' family in advance. The girl also requests her age mates to assist her receive co her visitors and normally the number of girls corresponds with that of the boys visiting. On the material day each boy carried a walking stick. At the home of the girl it is the **esigani** who first enters the house as the boys wait outside. He/ she has to show the girl being courted the boy who intends to marry her (however secretly not openly) if the girl accepts the man, she tells her friends to prepare the home by arranging the seats (normally goat skins). On the other hand if she rejects him, she and her friends start sweeping lousily scattering dust everywhere (a sign of rejection). If the boy is accepted, the girls go

outside and take the boys' walking sticks each girl to her preference. Later the boys are taken into the house each girl leading her preferred boy (whose walking stick she took into the house). There then follows introduction, meals such as porridge, ugali, beans and vegetables called **chinsaga** specially prepared by cooking it in goats' blood. Songs are sung throughout the night.

Here we need to observe that apart from the use of words in a special way, there is also a lot of symbolic use of language note for instance: the lousy sweeping and scattering of dust to signal rejection as opposed to the taking of the boys walking stick into the house a sign of acceptance these are actions but they symbolize something an ordinary observer may not understand. To this Sapir E in his article "the state of linguistics as a science" in Burke [7]. States It's an illusion to think that we can understand the significance of a culture through sheer observation and without the guide of linguistic symbolism which makes these outlines significant and intelligible to society, language is a guide to social reality..... The fact of the matter is that the real world is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group.

Thus Sapir stresses that it is the cultural group who can understand the symbols used in communication. When I enquired on whether the rest of the youths could start any relationship at this stage Chandi [8] .There is strictly nothing between these youths. The only connection: Aion is that the girls present are helping their friend entertain her guests. If ever any boy felt he should start any relationship with any of the girls, he had to inform the parents who could look for **esigani** who will start the negotiations. It was never like these days where the youths are free that the relationships start and end anywhere.

The last statement of this quote shows the tension that is simmering between the old order and changing times. The following day the boys are escorted for some distance as they return home. When I asked about the importance attached to this visit which is also termed **ekerorano** (literally meaning 'to see each other') I was told by Bichage [9]. This visit is important for this is the last chance the girl is given to either accept the negotiations to continue or stop them it is her first time to have a glance at the suitor and she has to make up her mind. At the same time it gives the couple a chance to be together and familiarize.

Dowry Settlement and Payment

After **ekerorano** has been successfully conducted, it now gives way for dowry discussions. This involves old men, middle aged and youths but the suitor is not supposed to be among them. The event is termed **Okomana** (literary meaning to- open

however this innocent word when associated with dowry negotiations it means the route is now being opened up (the route for the relationship between these two families). A path has been created which they are going to use while visiting each other. It significantly shows that proper marriage negotiations have now started.

The father of the girl now with his party goes for the dowry. Now that the relationship has commenced, the party is welcomed with dignity. The party from the girl's side is first called to see the animals for dowry. The hosts have to be ready before inviting their guests for dowry negotiation. At the girl's home after taking their meals, this party of from 6 - 10 men are led to the cattle enclosure. The animals are driven out but before then they will have negotiated on the number which is done symbolically. The visitors hand over small sticks equivalent to the number of cattle they are asking for. The hosts take the sticks and reduce them to the number they are ready to give. This goes on until a compromise is struck. My informants had this to say on negotiations:-The discussions or talks termed **egekwano** (literary meaning talks) but on such an occasion they are actually negotiations Nyandegé [10]

They never used as they are today where it appears as if somebody is being sold. The normal dowry used to be 25 heads of cows and a bull, a number of goats and a he-goat.: This was later reduced to 12 - 16 cows, 16 goats and a bull and a he-goat.

There however could arise a situation where there was no settlement on dowry in case the girls' family refused the number of animals offered. In such cases there was often a danger of someone with enough animals coming for negotiations and taking the girl finally. The boy's party could then turn to relatives for help which if they didn't get and the in-laws to be refused a debt they missed the girl. On inquiry on whether this wasn't a form of selling the girl to the highest bidder I was told Nyandegé [11]

There were several reasons for taking such an action far from the selling of their daughter. It was clear however that a person with many daughters was considered wealthy but not secure while the one with many sons was considered secure but poor. The girl's father couldn't allow her daughter to be married to a family which couldn't raise even dowry. It showed either the family was lazy, very poor or didn't have good relations with their neighbours. At the same time the daughter could be affected psychologically by being paid for less animals as if she didn't deserve as many as the rest of the women. She could become a laughing stock before others .

After they settled on the number of animals to be given the in-laws **abako** stand at the entrance of the cattle enclosure. As-the animals move out the in-laws strike with a stick the animals they have chosen. However there could be animals which were liked' very much by the host family may be by producing a lot of milk or giving birth to heifers. At this time the suitor's mother is also standing at the entrance and she could strike such animals with a leafy branch of a tree called **omorokawhich** signified the animals could not leave the homestead. She does this before the in-laws choose theirs. The process was termed **ogoaka omoroka**(which loosely translated meant 'striking with(**omoroka** plant). Note that there is a lot of symbolic communication at this stage. When the parties are negotiating on dowry, the presentation of sticks equivalent to the animal's required and subsequent reduction by the other party till a settlement is reached, striking the animals by the suitors' mother, using **omoroka** and the striking of the chosen animals by the in-laws. In all these there were very little talks but a lot of communication was going on symbolically. To the community everybody understood the meaning of every action but to the observer it could be difficult to interpret these actions. Trudgi, I[12] 'Language has a rich use of imagery which enables a group of people to live in harmony. Language is like the heart of man, it is a vehicle to transport a people's tradition the whole purpose is communication Fasold [13]. Language is the of the society. If is only human being who use language to propagate their ideas.It has the responsibility of maintaining and passing on a people's culture for a peoples culture is the people themselves.'

After selecting the animals the in-laws can now either take them or leave them behind to be taken later by the suitors' party. Later the suitor plus his friends go to the bride to be's home for an occasion called **okonywa erongori**(literally translated 'drinking porridge'). For a person from this community if one is told the boys have gone **konywaerongori**(to drink porridge) the message he / she will get is quite different from an observer from outside who might take it literally. The suitors' friend stays overnight. The following day they are escorted which leads to another occasion termed **kogenda omogoba** (literally translated meaning 'to go a side').

At this stage the bride to be is actually 'snatched' as they escort the suitors' friends. She knows what is going to take place but she doesn't or is not supposed to go to her husband's home willingly. After settlement and payment of dowry she is considered somebody's wife. It's actually the suitor who sends the friends to go and bring him his wife. **Esigani**(go-between) has to be alerted such that he/she also alerts the bride's family. The occasion is

termed **koria boko**. If one tried to translate this expression, you will landin problems because literally **koria** means to eat **boko** is that relationship that is there between one and his in-laws. So **koriaboko** cannot be used outside the marriage context. The boys also play the traditional music using traditional instruments such as **obokano** a guitar like instrument with eight strings. As they approach the homestead, they stop as the girls come with leaves called **obwari** to rub their sweat. The old men come to the house, drink traditional beer called **amarwa** and when the pot is half full they ask for it to be refilled a process called **egeichorio** after which they leave **Egeichorio** means something used to fill up but in this context it is a stage at which the old men have to leave.

The following day the girls show their visitors around in the course of which the bride is 'snatched' (of course deliberately and with full knowledge of everybody). She is taken to her husbands' house. She is said to have gone **omogoba** (explained earlier) to test their love). There were several ways of 'snatching' the pride and the boys from her side if aware could conduct a mock fight. When I asked on the significance of the 'snatching' I was informed by **Bochaberi** [14]

The bride's family doesn't give their daughter that easily. They have to express their desire of being with her and thus their discomfort at the departure. The pride also feels like not leaving so that the whole affair is arranged to look like 'a snatching' affair not wilful departure.

In case the bridegroom has other wives, the process was different. This one could go in the morning to the girl's home (outside the house where the girl stays). The mother or grandmother opens the door and finds the man out; she goes and sends the girl to bring her some items which are presumed to have been left outside. When the girl goes out, the mother/ grandmother shuts the door and the girl is taken by the man. The man is supposed to have gone for **ogotomana** (literally meaning gone to have illicit sex). This is different from **omogoba**.

The following day girls from the brides' home go to visit her with food. It's now that they inquire on whether the man is active or impotent and whether she loves him or not. Marriage could break here in case of serious disagreement e.g. impotence on the part of the man or if the girl was not a virgin. In case there was no problem, the girl stays and could ask for permission to go to her home like after two months. This is to prepare for the last stage which will qualify her to be a respectable woman i.e. wedding.

The wedding enyangi)

Among **Abagusii**, the wedding is not optional but a compulsory part of marriage. The go-

between informs both parties and they meet at the bride's home for a function known as **egekwano** (talks). The bridegroom's father comes with 10 -12 age mates **abagaka** (elders). The main house has two doors- one used by all called **boma** the other one is smaller and used by special people on special occasions e.g. in-laws on such occasions called **gesaku**. The two terms are used symbolically for whilst **boma** means the household and the neighbourhood, **gesaku** carries a sense of far off or even a different tribe. The visitors enter the house through the small door **gesaku** and sit with the arrangement — those from the boys' home sit on the upper part of the room known as **eerorogoro** and those from the girl's party on the lower one **eeromaate**. At the centre of the room between these two parties is a small dent where the beer pot is held firmly and it separates these two sitting places. When I inquired on the value attached to such a sitting arrangement I was informed by Bichage [15]

People from the bride's family (hosts) have to sit near the common door so that in case of any attack from anything or anybody they are ready to confront it rather than the visitors. Secondly the in-laws have to sit in such a way that they can be seen and faced by their hosts, when giving, chances for talking, they know how to distribute the chances. Finally it is a sign of respect to the in-laws by being given that section of the house.

After they settle down the guests are given traditional beer **amarwaobori** in a pot which is placed in its rightful place —centre of the sitting room. They use siphons termed **chinkore** to suck the drink from the pot. At this stage a well fed bull is brought for their meal. If they disapprove, the hosts have to bring another until the visitors get the one befitting the situation. They have to ensure the animal has been fattened enough for the occasion. After it has been slaughtered all the meat is brought before the visitors. The guests are the ones who share it out. Women: are given their share and the visitors share is also prepared for them.

The bride's father opens the talks termed **egekwano** literary meaning. 'Talks' but in this sense these are specific talks especially on the number of cattle he wants before the wedding can be conducted. If the figure seems high, the bridegroom's father can reduce it till settlement is reached. The two parents call each other **Korera** literary meaning to 'bring up' like parents do but symbolically it means the two parents brought up the children who are now wedding.

Later a younger brother to the bride goes to the bridegroom's home to ask for what is termed **egesabo** which is derived from the word **gosaba** meaning 'ask for'. However **egesabo** is specifically used in this occasion and not any other. This could

be a cow or a goat^{7d} it now opens the route for the actual wedding. In case there isn't a younger brother to the bride, there isn't the demand for **egesabo**. On the issue of use of words in a people's culture Malinowski[16] Says in order to understand conversation you hope to be informed about the situation in which the words are used, place them in their proper setting of culture. As stated earlier and as Malnowiski argues in the above quotation, unless placed in their context and situation,- some words may have no meaning at all especially for somebody who is an observer. In-page 391 he continues to argue [17]

Utterance and situation are bound up extricable with each other and the context of situation is indispensable for the understanding of the words utterance has no meaning except in the context of situation. After **egesabo** there is a visit to the bride's home termed **Omwania** which when loosely translated means 'peacefulness' but may not be easily translated outside its context. In such a visit, the bridegroom's party sings all the way from their home to the bride's and have to have the best harp player **omobugiaobokano**. At the gate to the bride's home the group stops and a wrestling contest ensues called **emeni**. Two people wrestle at a time —one from each party. Those who win are applauded **egokoyaakwakogikeria** (loud shouts of praise). The winning party is the one to receive the best meat from the animal to be slaughtered for the occasion i.e. the fat meat of the diaphragm **ritana**. The winners in their songs indicate they are brave, strong and tough e.t.c. The singing and dancing is throughout the night. When I enquired on the value attached to this wrestling I was informed by Chandi [18]. It is there to test the strength of the in-laws also a source of prestige for the winners. One could be renowned for having been the toughest wrestler. It was highly valued.

The meat from the animal slaughtered is shared thus — the fore — limp **ekuri** is for the bridegroom, the head, skin and hind-limp are for the rest of the group from the bridegroom's side.

The second limp **ekenama** is for the best-man omongwansi. Later one elder omogaka from the bridegroom's side joins Others from the bride have to arrange the wedding.

The actual wedding

It starts at the end of **omwanania** (that visit to the bride's home by the bridegroom's party). The goat mentioned above which has to be sacrificed is provided by either party. The old man consults a diviner **omoragori** to divine and instruct on what has to be done. The goat is actually suffocated using specialleaves of trees such as **ebirundu**, **emesocho** and a type of grass called

emurwa. When the goat dies it is said to have become a life **yachiremoyo**.

Symbolically the death of the goat signifies life — it has accepted to die to give the young couple life. It has accepted them to live together. Trees are planted at the gate **geita** signifying that there is a new life sprouting. These are such as **emesabakwa**, **ebirundu**, **emesocho** are planted on both sides of the gate. The elder from the bridegroom's home goes back to report that the goat has become alive'. Using the same procedure, similar plants are plated at the gate to the brides homestead. They now look for wedding essentials i.e. **enguba**, **ekiore**, **ritimo**, **ekerogokiegetumbe**, **chisonoi** /**chincharo**, **oroguncharane** **ekerundu**(a shield, crowns, pear, traditional seat for the bridegroom beads, a horn, a special plant and shells). All, these items are brought to the bridegroom's mother's house. Boys (age mates to the bridegroom) enter the house — the upper part of the common room **eerorogoro**. The bridegroom comes in through the small door **gesaku** to the main door **boma**. He stands at the gate where a lass termed **omoimari**(this term cannot be found anywhere outside such a situation so is difficult to translate) is brought here to dress before him. She comes stalk naked. She puts on beads **chincharoro** und the arms and jingle **chindege** round the feet. She then puts on clothes made from very fine skin. The bridegroom is decorated with cowrie's shells, on his head he wears a crown **ekiore** and is given a spear **ritimo** and shield **enguba** to carry. These items mentioned here have their significance i.e. crown — symbolizing leadership — in society starting from his house, spear and shield — that he is now the defender of not only his wife but the community as well.

When I asked on the importance of the lass dressing before the bridegroom and the significance of the spear and shield I was told by Nyandegé [19]

The lass or young girl has to come and dress before the bridegroom as a sign of revelation of all secrets of a woman and the bridegroom will not be curious about anything to do with the woman's body when he comes to stay with his wife. He is given an opportunity to see the private parts of woman and also to drive away shyness. About the spear and shield they are important because for from now on, the man has several responsibilities e.g. he is now mature and is expected to defend the society from outside aggression, wild animals or any danger, secondly he is now married and is the sole protector of his wife who is helpless without him. The two spears and shield are symbolic of his readiness to defend the society

At this point a wedding expert is sought termed **omonyanyangi** and the best Harp player **omobugiaobokano** are invited— the latter from both parties. Two lads are sent to the bride's home as

harbingers — they are called **abaisiaborotenya**. **Abaisia** is understood. It means lads (Young uncircumcised boys) but **borotenya** cannot be explained outside this context. One of the lads carries a horn containing oil in it and plants called **ebirundu** while the other one carries only the plants. When they arrive they are welcomed and given some of the meat from that sacrificed goat. They eat the forelimp **ekuri** and leave the shoulder **rireko** to be taken to the bridegroom's home. After this, these lads run to the bridegroom's home to come with him and his party. The party stops at the gate to the bride's homestead. The bride is then shaved (signifying start of a new life). This party is not supposed to enter the homestead until allowed. As they wait women are said to be eating the kidney **enyigo** and unless and until they say they are through, even if it rains the party remains standing outside. This time girls are dancing and singing while mocking the bridegroom. They say and do anything to provoke him to laugh or even talk. They come with some stinging plants called **enyang'eni** and pass it over his body. The bridegroom stands still without even scratching himself. If the best man is not strong and stern, this torture can be intense for the bridegroom is not supposed to react in any way. After the women have finished eating the kidney **enyigo** of the ox slaughtered for this occasion, the bridegroom is now allowed in. The torture given to the bridegroom is symbolically supposed to teach him tolerance and endurance with his future wife.

In the house, the bridegroom sits on the upper part of the room **eerorogoro** and the bride stays in the other room used by women only **irungu**. The sitting places for the bride and bridegroom are decorated with such plants as **chintamameamamumu**, **emesocho**, **ebirundu**, **emesabakwa** and **emurwa** plus **omogweko** which were covered with skins. Beer was brought in a huge pot termed **enseka** and placed in the centre that separates the upper and lower parts of the room. The wedding expert **omonyanyangi** comes with the drinking siphons and gives them out to, first the best man **omongwansi** then bridegroom **Omonyuomi** and then others. He cuts a piece of the sacrificed goat's meat and a piece of ugali which he gives to everybody in the house starting with the best man again.

The following day the bridegroom and party are sent away for some time and they go and sit in the nearby bush. During this time the bride is decorated, beautifully dressed with beads, given a small gourd, skin, rubbed with oil mixed with red soil termed **eng'enyi**. The beads are passed round the shoulders and some round the head. The oil mixed with soil is termed **etago** and the small gourd with milk in it **enkondo** the gourd corresponds with the shield and spear given to the bridegroom. Whilst a man is supposed to go out and acquire wealth or hunt, a

woman is supposed to preserve the wealth symbolically putting milk in a gourd.

The bridegroom and party come back. The bride snatches his shield which creates an interesting scene. She goes with it and places it in the upper part of the sitting room. The bride groom goes and sits there and between him and the bride sits the bridegroom's maid a lass called **omoimari**. The wedding expert then gives his speech wishing the couple well. The 'snatching' of the shield is a symbol of welcome which the bride is going to do in their new home especially when the husband arrives from hunting e.t.c. One of the songs sung during this occasion runs thus Bichage[20](Eeeriee x 2 **Ntogoreteemborienamanwa, nabotwayegoramwechieriee.** Esariyaagageomotogwae) which when translated goes. Eeeriee x 2 we have bought a goat with a kid X 2, we bought it from a family of bull's ee. Let esaria (a small bird with a red peak) get where to lean.

The song symbolically indicates that the bride has been wholly absorbed into the new home; she is much valued 'a goat with kid' and comes from a respectful and strong family — 'a family of bulls'.

The journey home starts now. The lass carrying flour (wimbi), followed by the bridegroom then bride... .. in that order. Girls escort them for some distance then turn back. This party moves very slowly and nobody is supposed to pass between them. The bride carries the gourd firmly positioned on the lower belly and covers her mouth with the right thumb. On the way the lass can decide to stop until she is given some inducements to proceed (note nobody can overtake her). Girls as well put some leaves across the path until they are given some inducements to remove them. Nobody is supposed to cross such leaves. The party takes long to reach the bridegroom's home. All the way songs are sung but the common song for that occasion is according to Bochaberi[21]

Ee.kumboraomonwachorus: eekumboraomwonwa
Eebachekororachorus: eebachekorora
Eemoriakari obochorus: eemoriakari obo
Eebunaachabeirechorus: eebunaachabeire
Eechierachiokachorus: eechierachioka

Translated it runs

Ee shout loud chorus: Ee shout loud
Ee they come to see chorus: Ee they come to see
Ee their bride chorus: Ee their bride
Ee how she is decorated chorus: ee how she is decorated
Ee full of ornaments chorus: ee full of ornaments.

The song is sung in praise of the bride and also to alert people at the bridegroom's home that the

bride is now arriving. The bridegroom's party also now sings similar songs as they come to welcome the bride and they meet on the way.

At the bridegroom's home

When at last the procession reaches the bridegroom's home, the bride remains outside while the bridegroom enters the house. What happened to the bridegroom at the bride's home (at the gate) now turns on the bride i.e. mockery and passing of stinging leaves over her body. She waits and endures without talking or laughing till her father in law comes to give her a cow. It is now that she can enter the house. By this time the bridegroom has entered the house through the smaller door **gesaku** when she is given a cow, the bride shifts the position of the small gourd which was on the lower part of the stomach to the chest. She also enters the house through the **gesaku** door.

In the house the best man's wife is given some short round metallic tubes which are connected by strings termed **chintere** to tie round the bride's feet to signal she is now a married and wedded woman. Among the **Abagusii**, you didn't have to ask whether a lady is married or not for the rings round the feet told it all. A goat is slaughtered and eaten. That night the couple sleeps together but with the small girl/lass **omoimari** between them so they have no intercourse at all.

The following day the lads take the skin of the goat that had been slaughtered the previous day to the bride's home where it is rubbed until it becomes smooth. They later return it and it is cut into strips which are going to join together the tubes tied round the bride's feet. The best man **omong'wansi** puts this ring on the right leg of the bride and his wife puts the other on the left. This process is termed as **ogotimiaebitinge. Egetinge** is one such ring while **ebitinge** is plural to the same and is understood, but a word like **ogotimia** cannot never be understood outside such an occasion

On such use of language Malinowski op cit as in Burke *et al.* (2003:391)[22] states ; Each verbal statement by a human being has the aim and function of expressing some thought or feeling actual at the moment and in that situation and necessary for some reason or other to be made known to another person or persons in order to serve purposes of common action or to establish ties of purely social communion or else to deliver to the speaker of violent feelings or passions. Here Malinowski shows that each social group has its way of language.

The following day a goat is sacrificed. It is suffocated using some grass **emurwaembese**. The bride's maid **omoimari** is given inducements to help in holding the goat's mouth (it is mandatory she does it). In the process the goat passes some urine which the

bridegroom taps and sprinkles on his wife. The significance of this is that this is a covenant between the husband and wife and they are not supposed to separate unless under unavoidable circumstances like death. The fact that it is done by the man alone also shows the male dominance in this society.

They now look for some meat in the stomach of the goat called **egesieri** (literally translated meaning door) and see whether it is full of blood. We know the meaning of the door but when people are looking for a door after sacrificing such a goat, the meaning of 'door' here is completely different. It means a way, a revelation. If this meat **egesieri** is full of blood then the woman is going to be very productive. They then look for **orobere** (breast) to see whether is long. If so they feel very happy. Tiny strips of the skin from this goat are given to the couple and brothers to the bridegroom to wear on their arms as a way of bonding the family.

Some days later the bride taps urine from a cow and uses it in washing her hands in a manger **orotuba** which now allows her to remove the beads from her head **okoieria egetinti**. **Koieria** means "to drop" but **egetinti** cannot be understood outside this context. Later a young boy/ a lad is given meat covered with leaves from **emesocho and ebirundu** trees to take to the bride's home. When the girls see the boy they start grinding wimbi. The boy is given food which he refuses until he is given some inducements.

Other marriage rituals

At her home the bride's marriage ring **ebitinge** are tightened **ogotimia ebitinge** using the strips of skin which she took with her. Flour (which the girls were grinding) is then put in **ebiee** (traditional bowls). On the way back the lad sits down demanding some inducements **ebonyi** (used as coins) before he can continue leading the party. At the home of the bridegroom, the lad goes straight to the house where beer has been prepared **amarwa emesanchu**. This beer is specifically prepared to be drunk when getting the bride a name. She has to have a new name in her new home signalling a new beginning. She is then allowed to start cooking in this same ceremony **okobwatia ekeburugo** (literally "to make her hold the cooking stick") but symbolically 'permission to cook'. Beer is brought in a bowl **ekee** the bride holds it and an old man starts naming her. He suggests names e.g. **Moraa, Kemunto, Kerubo, Monyangi** When the one she desires is mentioned, she immediately goes and snatches the bowl from her husband and goes into her inner room symbolically showing that is the name she had chosen. She is called again and responds from the inner room **irungu** and from then on she is known by that name. The mother in-law puts a cooking pot on the fireplace. She and the bride hold the

cooking stick together. Later the lad also participates and they act as if they are cooking. From then on the bride can now cook and not before, she now has been initiated officially. This occasion is termed **ogokurugukiaenyongo**. **Gokuruguki** means 'to stir' and **enyongo** is a pot'. However the expression is situation bound.

The woman's maids are then escorted to their home. She now cooks some food in her mother in-laws' house which she takes to her husband. At this time the husband is resting in his house pretending to be asleep. She beseeches him to wake up and eat using such expressions as (**okobongia okobongia boka oragere obokima Kemunto oo akorugeire bororo mbonga ngori**) translated (collector collector wake up and eat ugali your wife **Kemunto** has cooked for your anger is just like a rope) it was very vital that the husband wakes up and eats failure to which was a sign of rejection. She had to entice him by all means. Even when he woke up he could still refuse to eat until he was given some inducements like money **ebonyi**. The significance of this I was informed, "was a way of teaching her to be tolerant and persuasive henceforth even when there developed misunderstanding in the home, she had to handle them through humble words and sweet tongue. However the fact that it is only the woman who has to do the persuasion not the man goes a long way to explain male dominance which is very pronounced in this society.

Later in her new home, she goes to collect firewood in the forest with other women. She gathers hers while the other women come and take it. It goes on until she is the last person to leave the place all of which are supposed to teach her tolerance, openness and generosity in her new home.

Later she goes back to her home and comes back with wimbi flour called **obosie bwemesuto**. She then takes **ebara** salt lick suitable for livestock which she takes to the cattle enclosure. The husband comes along with a stick from **ekerundu** plant and makes a sign of caning her termed **omogirokioe kerundu** which now starts the wife beating affair. By bringing **obosie bwe 'mesuto** from her home it symbolized she still has links there and should there arise a problem like hunger, she can still go for help. Taking **ebara to** the cattle signified she is supposed to look after the animals especially when they are at home. On wife beating **omogirokioekerundu** I was informed by Bochaberi [23]

Wife beating was very essential for maintenance of order in the family. A woman who knew she couldn't be beaten became careless and committed a lot of mistakes deliberately. At the same time it was sort of prestigious for the woman. She could boast before others of her husband who

tolerates no nonsense from anybody and even if she was not hurt, she could scream loudly to tell others that she is being beaten like everybody else. However some beatings were severe. Other men caused a lot of injuries on their wives and these were disliked. It was only moderate beating that was allowed like caning or slapping. A man who couldn't beat his wife was considered weak even by the wife herself.

However much this practice was revered in society I considered it a demonstration of male dominance and inculcation of a culture of subservience on the woman. It is retrogressive and demeaning.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion marriage was considered the most revered and interesting ceremony among the Abagusii. It was considered the only way to create and keep the society alive. During burial if one (especially men) was beyond the marrying age and hadn't married, he was buried with a log of wood **omwaro** to represent the wife he should have married in his lifetime. If there was no engagement, there was no marriage. Today things have changed with times chandi [24]. It's evident that in many cases a people without undergoing a considerable change in type by mixture have changed completely their language and culture and in others people have retained their language while undergoing material changes in blood and culture or both. Among the Abagusii, the change in culture is all over even where there is no evidence of cultural influence Nyandege [25].

There was to be no eloping but if ever it occurred, the couple was mocked through songs and nobody went for dowry unless invited to. Nowadays it's more less the order of the day. Virginity was highly valued and the first sexual encounter was normally hectic and as the bride screamed the father-in-law could stamp his feet down while uttering in low tones (**eeomoisia one nekeremana aretete**) translated ("yes my son brought a virgin land"), while the mother-in-law muttered (**omwana one nekiangangia retete, tacha mono**) translated: my son brought an impenetrable forest work hard" all this are said in low tones in appreciation of the morality of the girl.

If one had a child before marriage which was quite rare but could happen, the girl was scolded and mocking songs such as this one were sang: Bochaberi [26]

Ng'eng'eng'eegechobe X 2 Egesero kio omwana X 2
Ndagerieomwana X 2 Ekio Omwana X 2
Ekio mwana X 2 ekio Omwana ekeendia kio Omwana X 2

Translated (Ng'eng'eng'eegechobe a fox like wild animal, feed for me my child X 2, a child X 2 a child's skin X 2 a child's X 2, a child's milk from

the mother's breast) such a girl could be married as a second wife or wife to an old man with wealth. The situation today is very different getting children out of wedlock is almost the norm.

There was no sex between clansmen i.e. those who don't intermarry and if a boy was found with such intentions he was scolded by his father thus; let your eye blacken, have you planned to go and ambush our neighbor by the river? You will not come to this homestead tonight. If the boy didn't apologize, he couldn't return to that compound as the father had instructed. Today there are no boundaries even close relatives have sexual relations.

There was no sex outside marriage. Today even married women have men and boyfriends. It was a taboo and if one was caught, there was to be a heavy sacrifice and in case of married woman, divorce was given. With girls and boys, it is the order of the day.

Those days there was almost no case of staying without marriage. A girl for example could be mocked very much by age mates in case she wasn't married. Today people stay without marrying out of choice and it has become quite normal.

In the instances and in the marriage ceremony, language was used in a special way both the uttered words and symbolic actions. It's the bridge between the past and present; it is a symbolic guide and culture.

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16. Ekiomwana X 2
17. Ekiomwana X 2
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24. Ekiomwana X 2
25. Ekiomwana X 2
26. Ekiomwana X 2

15. see note 9
16. see note 1
17. see note 1
18. see note 8
19. see note 3
20. see note 9
21. see note 5
22. see note 1
23. see note 5
24. see note 3
25. see note 3
26. see note 9