

The Sociolinguistic Implications of Inanimate Metonymies in Dholuo

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Cite this article in APA

Mbara, J. A., Oloo, P. A., Tunai, C. K., & Boke, J. W. (2026). The sociolinguistic implications of inanimate metonymies in dholuo. *Journal of languages and linguistics*, 5(1), 34-43. <https://doi.org/10.51317/jll.v5i1.981>



A publication of Editon Consortium Publishing (online)

Article history

Received: 2026-03-21
Accepted: 2026-04-13
Published: 2026-05-04

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Abstract

This study aims to explain the sociolinguistic implications of Dholuo inanimate metonymies based on ‘when’, ‘where’ and ‘why’ questions, as the guiding principle. The Kisumu-South Nyanza dialect of Dholuo is used in the investigation in this study because it is considered a standard variety. This study focuses on inanimate metonymies used as reference points for inanimate objects in Dholuo to explain their sociolinguistic implications, which would add value to the knowledge base. This study is anchored on the Causal Theory of Reference advanced by Kripke (1980), and The Refining Causal Theory of Reference for Natural Kind Terms advanced by Kitcher and Stanford (2000). This study adopts the descriptive research design. The study was conducted in Homa Bay County, where the researcher reached out to mourners, traders, sportsmen/women, musicians and travellers as the population of interest. A sample of 5 respondents from each of the five identified groups was selected using purposive sampling because of the observable recurrent use of metonymic expressions. This study, therefore, uses a total sample size of 25 respondents because a smaller group produces the mean it is supposed to represent (Fitz-Gibson and Morris, 1987:42). Further, samples bigger than 20 per cent suffer from “data saturation” (Robson, 1993:199). Data for this study were qualitative in nature and comprised actual metonymies collected using focus group discussions and interviews. Data was analysed using discourse analysis approaches, where both linguistic and content elements are examined. Presentation of the analysed data was descriptive. The findings of this study illustrate that inanimate metonymies communicate hidden, coded or culturally sensitive meanings and reflect obligations and protective mechanisms. This study, therefore, adds a knowledge base in metonymic expressions in the field of academia.

Key terms: Discourse analysis, Dholuo, inanimate, metonymy, sociolinguistics.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of metonymic expressions in Dholuo is a common linguistic phenomenon experienced in Dholuo-speaking regions. The earlier researchers focused on animate metonymic expressions. For instance, Thomasson (1994) focuses on the Mormon language of the Kpelle to discuss metonymic association with names and gives the example of 'leopard' to metonymically refer to 'a boy'; Zheng (2014) focuses on analysing metonymic translation between English and Mandarin Chinese, giving the example that 'skirt' metonymically refers to 'woman'. This study, however, focuses on Dholuo inanimate metonymic expressions to explain their sociolinguistic implications. Dholuo is a language spoken by the Luo of Siaya county, Kisumu county, Homa Bay county and Migori county.

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which one word is substituted for another on the basis of some material, causal or conceptual relations (Preminger and Brogan, 1993). The metonymic references involve the use of part/part relation, part/whole relation, adjacency relation, constitution relation, and containment relation. This study establishes the sociolinguistic implications of Dholuo inanimate metonymies in Homa Bay County where the Kisumu-south Nyanza dialect of Dholuo is spoken. It is considered a standard dialect among Boro-Ukwala dialect and Trans-Yala dialect speakers.

Dholuo people are generally called Joluo and occupy Siaya, Kisumu, Migori and Homa Bay counties. Their neighbours include the Luhya to the north, the Kalenjin to the east, Gusii, Kuria and Masai to the south-east and south. Luos belong to the Nilotic group of languages (Ogutu, 1975), and their language is Dholuo.

Dholuo is characterised by three main dialects spoken in different regions. They are: 1) The Kisumu-South Nyanza dialect spoken in Kisumu county, Homa Bay county and Migori county (Stafford, 1967).

It is considered a standard dialect because it is spoken in a wider geographical area (Atoh, 2001); 2) The Boro-Ukwala dialect is spoken in fewer regions because it is considered less prestigious. These regions are: Ugunja, Ukwala and Alego-usonga (Atoh, 2001; Stafford, 1967);

3) Trans-Yala dialect spoken in Ugenya, Alego, Imbo and parts of Gem (Stafford, 1967). Although mutually intelligible, these dialects are varied enough to identify the speakers with specific regions (Atoh, 2001). This is because: 1) it has a wider geographical range, 2) and 3) it has smaller regions. This study focuses on the Kisumu-South Nyanza dialect because it is the standard variety and the variety spoken in the area of study.

Languages are naturally metonymic (Zheng, 2014). Therefore, Dholuo, being a natural language, is naturally metonymic on the basis of the foregoing statement. Metonymies are frequently used in discourses in Dholuo because metonymic concepts are naturally grounded in the people's experience and language. Metonymic use enables Dholuo speakers to express their thoughts concisely and can achieve certain sociolinguistic implications of metonymy in communication. These implications are: 1) Metonymy as social protection: A speaker creates a new word or a new name for the intended referent when the speaker does not want to reveal the real identity of the referent for social protection (Barbara, 2015); 2) Metonymy as secret codes: The speaker similarly, creates a new word or a new name for the intended referent to communicate hidden, coded or culturally sensitive meanings (Barbara, 2015). These social implications of Dholuo inanimate metonymies are constantly encountered in Dholuo discourses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Related Literature on Metonymy

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which one word is substituted for another on the basis of some material, causal or conceptual relations (Preminger and Brogan, 1993). For proper substitution, however, it requires some form of description as suggested by Fauconnier (1985). Papafragou (1996) says that metonymy is a 'figure of speech' that is a departure from the linguistic norm, and it demands suitable training for its successful use and comprehension. The foregoing argument contravenes Zheng's (2014) input that metonymy is grounded in people's experience. This argument demonstrates that language is naturally metonymic. Fauconnier (1985) views metonymy as a case of 'deferred reference' in which a speaker uses a description of 'A' and succeeds in referring to 'B'.

There is, however, not enough description to lead to the intended referent as Kripke (1980). Therefore, a causal link is necessary for accurate referring. Thomasson (1994) notes that metonymy involves ‘naming by association’, a metonymic process of linking two concepts or persons together in such a way as to tell us more about the latter by means of what we already know about the former. Mboya (2014) asserts that metonymy is a figure of speech functioning as a linguistic strategy in communication.

Sociolinguistic Implications of Metonymies

Social implications of metonymy operate on the basis of mutually manifest assumptions, recurrently used ‘mini-codes’ for quick and easy referent identification purposes. The speaker creates a new word or a new name for the intended referent when the speaker does not want to reveal the real identity of the referent for social protection and security. Speakers often rely on metonymy to obscure referents, primarily for reasons of social protection, cultural appropriateness, and communicative discretion (Barbara, 2015). This section expands upon two major areas: Social contextualises them within the Dholuo speech community, using the Causal Theory of Reference as a guiding theoretical lens.

Nina (2022) provides further support for the sociolinguistic role of metonymy in her study on Afrikaans-speaking toddlers, highlighting that metonymic reasoning emerges early in language development. Through the analysis of one-word utterances, she found instances of metonymic overextensions, such as:

(No — said while pointing to a dangerous object (e.g., a hot stove) linking the cause (object) to the effect (harm)).

The study Nina (2022) focused on using inanimate for animate metonymy, contrary to this study, which focuses purely on inanimateness.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metonymic expressions enable the construction of in-groups and out-groups by relying on shared cultural context and experiential knowledge. Metonymy’s capacity for indirectness makes it a powerful tool for encoding secrecy and layered meaning. In this function, it goes

beyond facilitating communication to shaping socio-linguistic boundaries—distinguishing those “in the know” from outsiders. This selective accessibility enables metonymy to function as a linguistic cypher. For example, *Watergate changed our politics and is emblematic of this phenomenon*. To outsiders, “Watergate” may refer simply to a location. To insiders, it evokes an entire socio-political scandal, complete with notions of betrayal, surveillance, and democratic erosion.

This phenomenon replicates within the Dholuo-speaking society, particularly in culturally bound activities such as fishing. A speaker might say: *The net is dry today* to mean bad luck. The metonymic relation between the reference and the referent involves inanimate and animate metonymies. This leaves a gap for research based on inanimate metonymy, which this study focuses on.

Auma (2020) contributes to symbolic metonymy by exploring Dholuo oral narratives, songs and riddles to highlight the manner in which real objects and images act as motivational sources of abstract cultural values and collective memory.

Her findings reveal that metonymy is a defining characteristic of encoding moral lessons, preserving history, and expressing communal identity. For example,

“A broken pot”

This expression implies loss of lineage or the end of the family line in funeral dirges.

Khaemba (2024) analysed the concept of political discourse-oriented metonymy, focusing on Dholuo political rhetoric, campaign slogans and media framing. The findings reveal that names and icons were used as stand-ins. For instance, “*State house*” stands for the presidency. Thomasson (1994) argues that metonymic names can function protectively. In some African cultures, children are given misleading or derogatory names to mislead evil spirits.

Though the practice might seem superstitious, it demonstrates the sociolinguistic power of metonymy to deflect attention or reassign identity. For example,

“Leopard” (boy)

Krzysztof (2024), in a comparative study of British and Nigerian English, demonstrated that metonymy’s meaning shifts dramatically across dialects based on cultural experience. For example,

(**BE:** *They live on the east coast of Scotland — “Coast” as shoreline.*

NE: *He has gone to the coast — “Coast” as an urban city.*)

Such differences highlight the flexibility of metonymy and its dependence on social, economic, and historical variables.

Zheng (2014), who focused on metonymic translation between English and Chinese, found that cultural salience often determines which feature becomes the metonymic vehicle. For example,

She has a sharp tongue and is understood in English as a person who speaks harshly.

However, in Chinese, an equivalent expression might focus on the “mouth” rather than the “tongue”, demonstrating how cultural cognition shapes metonymic focus. Metonymy similarly relies on culturally salient triggers, often privileging tools, landscape features, and inanimate artefacts with embedded communal significance, as evident in African languages. For example,

The drum has spoken, signalling an important message, often from the chief or elder, has been communicated.

The expression metonymically encodes both the instrument and the act, rooted in cultural understanding. The study Zheng (2014) carried out used animate and inanimate-based data for analysis, as demonstrated in the examples given in his dissertation. The approach leaves a gap for inanimate metonymy, which this study embarks on in explaining its sociolinguistic implications.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Causal Theory of Reference (CTR) advanced by Kripke (1980), and Refining Causal Theory of Reference for Natural Kind

Terms (RCTR) advanced by Kitcher and Stanford (2000).

Kripke (1980) authored the Causal Theory of Reference. Kripke argues that a reference is fixed on an object by virtue of a causal-historical chain that originates in a naming event or “baptism”. The initial event fixes the reference by associating a name with an object in a given social context. Once this referential link is established, it is transmitted along a communicative chain, enabling subsequent users to refer to the same entity even without complete knowledge of its defining features. Kripke’s theory extends beyond names to a broad range of linguistic phenomena, including metonymy. Kripke’s insight that names function through Causal anchoring rather than semantic mediation provides a powerful explanatory model for metonymic terms that become conventional through shared use rather than intrinsic descriptive precision.

Stanford and Kitcher (2000) proposed two refined models—CTR₁ and CTR₂—that seek to integrate causal and descriptive elements in a more nuanced manner. These models recognise the need to accommodate perceptual conceptual features of referents while retaining the causal-historical continuity emphasised by Kripke (1980). CTR₁ incorporates the observable characteristics of the referent, linking the perceptual predicates with the causal chain of the reference. It mediates between perceptual experience and linguistic fixation. CTR₂ introduces four parameters:

1. (A set of representative samples of the kind (e.g., various types of cameras).
2. A set of foils—objects that are clearly not of that kind (e.g., binoculars, eyeglasses).
3. A defining predicate $\phi [x]$ which captures the semantic profile of the referent (e.g., an instrument used to record a moving image).
4. A speech community capable of applying the predicate meaningfully.)

Application of the Theory to the Present Study

The application of the theories to the present study is based on the benefits of the inanimate metonymy from the integration of philosophical and cognitive theories. These expressions often originate from

embodied experience, metonymic projections or pragmatic necessity and subsequently undergo a process of conventionalization and stabilisation. Over time, what began as an intuition becomes lexically entrenched, with users employing the term without invoking its figurative background (Kripke, 1980). This semantic abstraction is characteristic of conventional metonymy as supported by the reference mechanism.

The philosophical foundation of naming reveals the interplay between individual innovation and collective semantic ratification. That is, an individual's metonymic insight grounded in perceptual analogy is socially ratified and linguistically stabilised through the operation of reference mechanisms that combine causality, description and communal practice (Stanford and Kitcher, 2000).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study focused on the qualitative approach to research. That is, methods are more descriptive and narrative in nature. This section comprises the area of study, research design, data collection, analysis procedure and ethical considerations.

The study was carried out in Homa Bay County because it is the home to the Kisumu-South Nyanza dialect of Dholuo, which is considered a standard variety. Further, the region is rich in oral traditions and active participation in communal events, which enhance observing and recording inanimate metonymic expressions.

The study was anchored on a descriptive research design suited for determining the 'when', 'where', 'what' and 'why' aspects of a research phenomenon. This research approach facilitates an understanding of the sociolinguistic implications of a phenomenon in society; it was therefore the most appropriate design in examining metonymic forms and their implications on everyday communication among Dholuo speakers.

The population of the study comprised adult native speakers of Dholuo aged 18 years and above. These were residents of Homa Bay County at the time of the study. Particularly, they were drawn from five sub-counties: Homa Bay, Rangwe, Ndhiwa, Rachuonyo North, and Rachuonyo South. The adults were

selected because of their conversance with cultural expressions and traditional moods of metonymic usage. From the population, five groups were identified: mourners, travellers, sportsmen/women, traders and musicians. Each identified group was represented by 5 purposively sampled respondents. Therefore, 25 native speakers of Dholuo constituted the sample. The total sample of 25 respondents conforms with Fitz-Gibson and Morris (1987:42), who argue that the smaller the group, the more likely it is that the mean produced actually reflects the mean it is supposed to represent. Robson (1993:199) further says that in normal circumstances, samples bigger than 20 per cent are likely to suffer from what has been termed 'saturation of data'. The field work was done between January, 2021 and May, 2021.

The study focused on qualitative data drawn from natural conversations and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to ensure in-depth and appropriate triangulation in the process of collecting inanimate metonymic expressions in Dholuo. Five FGDs were instituted; one in each of the 5 sub-counties of Homa Bay County, purposively sampled. Each FGD comprised 5 respondents selected through purposive sampling. This enriched the qualitative data through meaning-making and debate around shared metonymic expressions.

Data was transcribed and translated from the language of study (Dholuo) into English. It was classified into two types (social protection and secret code) for data analysis, as informed by the Causal Theory of Reference by Kripke (1980) and Refining Causal Theory of Reference for Natural Kind Terms by Stanford and Kitcher (2000).

Each participant signed a consent form in which he/she agreed to take part in the research. The participants were encouraged to exercise their free will in deliberating on the topic of discussion. Further, they were informed that they were free to discontinue at any point. Participants' confidentiality was paramount. They were assured that the information they were to give was to be secured and used only for the purpose of the study. Where the information was to be shared in conferences or publications, the consent of the respondents was sought. The

researcher, therefore, ensured that any data given by the respondents was kept confidential.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study presents the following as sociolinguistic implications of Dholuo inanimate metonymies: inanimate metonymy as social protection and inanimate metonymy as secret code.

Inanimate Metonymy as Social Protection

According to Barbara (2015), a speaker creates a new word or a new name for the intended referent to hide the real identity for social protection. For example

Gimarach miya salulu

‘The malignant one causes me a severe pain’

In the Luo traditional society, there are some underlying health conditions which are not mentioned by their real names because Dholuo speakers believe that the source of the disease is associated with evil spirits. The natives hold the belief that calling the illness by their real name evokes the evil spirits believed to have caused them to inflict severe pain on the victim. One of such diseases is *Gimarach's* ‘malignant one’, whose real traditional name is *Tong Juok* ‘egg of an evil’, and just as the name suggests, it is believed to be caused by an evil spirit. It refers to anything, be it in abstract form or concrete form that is fearful, harmful or injurious to a human's well-being. *Tong juok* refers to ‘the one born of evil’. *Gimarach* is the metonymy in the statement, a speaker in a night vigil at a funeral, used in the context of illness to refer to a severe disease that mostly attacks the finger tips and ends up disfiguring the affected fingers.

The descriptive analysis of *gimarach* and *tong juok* reveals close relatedness between them, which culminates in the development of a causal link between the two entities. Kripke (1980) argues that reference fixation is by virtue of a causal link. Kitcher and Stanford (2000) also argue that descriptive and causal elements are integrated in reference grounding. Dholuo speakers hold the belief that anything born of evil is fearful, harmful and injurious. So an ad hoc name is created to confuse the pain-causing evil spirit. It is in this traditional background that the speaker made the utterance in (1) as a protective mechanism against the powers of the evil spirit. The speaker, therefore, used

gimarach as the salient entity in context as the metonymic reference for the other entity, apparently to imply safety for the sick person. The second example under this category is:

Kite ne oketho olemb afuoto mang'eny

‘Stones destroyed many watermelon fruits’

Certain happenings in Luo traditional society are considered catastrophic and are attributed to evil influence, which demands that some kind of traditional ritual be performed to appease the evil spirit and stop such destructive happenings. One such happening is when hail falls alongside a thunderstorm. The speaker, a businessperson selling watermelons in an open-air market, lamented the destruction of the watermelons by the hail just before harvesting them, thus reducing their quality. The metonymy in the utterance is *kite* ‘stone—a hard, earthen substance that can form large rocks and boulders. Hail refers to balls or pieces of ice falling as precipitation, often in connection with a thunderstorm.

The descriptive contents of the two entities apply in reference fixing because Kitcher and Stanford (2000) argue that descriptive and causal elements integrate in fixing a reference on an object. Further, the physical analysis of the two entities reveals adjacency relatedness, creating a causal link between them based on Kripke (1980), that a reference is fixed to an object by virtue of a causal link and associating it with the object in a social context. Since it is considered evil, and based on the Luo traditional ideology and ethics, an ad hoc name is created to confuse the evil spirit from being evoked to cause more harm by making more hail fall. It is on the basis of the foregoing statement that the speaker made the utterance in (2), in communicating to the in-group. The speaker used *a kite* because of its saliency in context—a metonymy implying safety. Another example in this category is:

Ka ijapap to ritri gi soksi

‘If you are a promiscuous, protect yourself with sock’

A *matatu* driver in a bus stage, in the context of promiscuity, made the utterance in (3) to pass a cautionary message. Apparently, he was targeting

other *matatu* drivers whom he was aware were promiscuous. Luo tradition holds the belief that sex related issues are not said explicitly in public. This is because the most respected relatives, more so mother-in-law, father-in-law, and biological father and mother, might happen to be around, which Dholuo speakers consider a *taboo* (calamity) when such an utterance is made within their earshot. The metonymy in the utterance is *soksi* 'sock'. The physical feature analysis and functionality of the two entities yield similar results of the same shapes and functions of safety provision. These are descriptive elements which Kitcher and Stanford (2000) assert, integrate with causal elements in reference grounding in a social context. This analysis creates some close relatedness between the two entities, giving rise to a causal link. Kripke (1980) notes that a name is fixed on an object by virtue of a causal-historical link by associating the name with the object.

Warren (2006) noted that socks is a slang expression found in a Dictionary of Slang used in reference to condoms for safe sex. So in conformity with the traditional norms held by Dholuo speakers, the speaker used *soksi* as the metonymic shift to refer to 'condom' in context, implying the practice of safe sex. The final example in this category is:

Konya gi yadh alot; mara orumo
'Help me with medicine for vegetable; mine is over'

Example (4) originated from a speaker in a night vigil at a funeral who went to a neighbouring home to ask for salt to put in the cooking food. The metonymic shift is *yadh a lot*. Medicine in traditional perception is any object supposed to give control over natural or magical forces, to act as a protective charm, or to cause healing. In the context of this study, the perception adopted is that of attributes of control over nature because salt, being referred to as *yath* 'medicine', controls the nature of the vegetable by enhancing its flavour, and offers protection against evil spirits from neutralising its flavouring effect.

Salt is a common substance used extensively as a condiment whose nature, especially on vegetables, gives the perception that it has control over nature, just as medicine does. *Joluo* associates vegetables with

people of relatively low income because of their unpleasant flavour, and so there is a need for enhancement to taste. The shared effects of the two entities are the basis of their adjacency, which develops a causal link between them. Kripke (1980) explains that grounding a name on an object is by virtue of a causal link and associating the name with the object in a social context.

Luo traditional belief prohibits mentioning 'salt' by its name—*chumbi* in late evening hours, especially when it is begged for from a neighbour or bought from a shop. It is believed that calling it by its name during such hours evokes some unknown forces that neutralise its condimental value. In the experience of Dholuo speakers, evil spirits are known to hover around homesteads during such hours of the night and are believed to be behind the forces. So, to arrest this social superstition, an ad hoc reference is created to confuse the evil forces. Apparently, the speaker heeded the traditional ideologies and ethics as cautionary measures against the powers of the evil spirits by use of *yadh a lot* in reference to salt. The implication of the metonymic shift in the speaker's proposition is superstition that salt might lose its condimental value. On a saliency basis, the entity which is salient and easily coded is fronted for use in context. So the speaker fronted *yadh a lot* as the salient entity for use to mean salt.

Inanimate Metonymy as Secret Code

Secret inanimate metonymy in Dholuo refers to the use of non-human, non-living elements as substitutes to communicate hidden, coded or culturally sensitive meanings; usually within restricted contexts like taboos, or indirect warnings. These expressions are often metonymic and secret because their meanings are contextually bound and understood only by insiders or culturally knowledgeable members. This kind of metonymy reflects Dholuo communicative norms that value indirectness and respect, especially in situations involving elders, death, illness, and taboo topics. Barbara (2015) says that a speaker creates a new word or a new name for the target entity when the speaker hides its real identity for secret purposes. The first example in this category is:

Kaw tikli bang' tich
'Take the instant one after work'

The transport sector is full of symbolic language, such as metonymy. The statement in (5) originated from a *bodaboda* rider communicating with a fellow *bodaboda* rider plying the urban routes. *Bodaboda* is a kind of transport system in which a motorcycle/bicycle is the basic means. *Tikli* is the metonymy in the context of brew. It is a Dholuo word which functions both as an adverb and an adjective. In the context of this paper, it functions as an adverb because the manner in which the target entity takes effect on the user is manifest, creating adjacency-relatedness.

This kind of relationship is the ground for a causal link between the abstract entity (effect) and the concrete entity (*tikli*). The descriptive contents of two entities and the causal link between them are grounds for reference assigning in a social context. The metonymy—*tikli* arises from a baptism event where a name is associated with the object by virtue of a causal link (Kripke, 1980) and the integration of descriptive and causal elements while the historical chain is retained (Kitcher and Stanford, 2000). The speaker used *tikli* as a metonymy referring to an illicit drink sold in one of the slum areas in Homa Bay town because such living conditions offer a ready market for illicit drugs to which *tikli* belongs. So, as a means of protection, an ad hoc name is used as a secret code among the in-group to confuse the agents of authority from arresting the possible users. The foregoing argument and its saliency form the basis for the speaker to use the metonymic shift in context. Another example is:

Mwandunigi dwaro kwesini iwuon
'Your wealth requires your own tobacco pipe'

A speaker, apparently a businessman in the context of weaponry, made the proposition in (6). *Kwesini* is the metonymy in the proposition arising from a baptism event. Kripke (1980) argues that a reference is grounded on an object by associating the two entities and by virtue of a causal link in a social context. Further, Kitcher and Stanford (2000) explain that descriptive and causal elements are integrated in name grounding. *Kwesini* satisfies the descriptive content of being a device with a bowl at one end of a hollow stem used for smoking tobacco, and that of a 'pistol' as a handgun with a chamber integrated in the barrel used for firing bullets. The physical feature

analysis underpins the adjacency relatedness, which is regarded as the causal link between the two entities.

A growing business attracts robbers who pose security threats to entrepreneurs. The feeling of being insecure calls for personal protection, which is guaranteed by applying for the ownership of a personal gun, which cannot be displayed publicly, but can be referred to by use of symbolic expressions such as metonymy. The speaker, in making the proposition, in an attempt to give advice to another businessman within the precinct of an enterprise, used *kwesini* as the secret code and as the salient entity in context to refer to the target entity—the pistol.

The final example is:

Iserunyo tigo?
'Have you counted the beads?'

The utterance in example (7) came from a sportsman who believes that any undertaking should be presented to God first. *Tigo* is the metonymy in the utterance. It is a small round object with a through hole in the middle. Rosary, however, is a string of beads used in praying by members of some denominations, creating a sense of contiguity relationship between the bead and the rosary. Both the descriptive contents and causal link formed by the contiguity between the two entities give rise to name grounding in a social context as outlined by Kitcher and Stanford (2000) and Kripke (1980).

In worship, different denominations practice different doctrines as a way of making the faithful cohesive in spirituality. Certain denominations hold the belief that certain prayers are said using a rosary. Others do not, arguing that it is not Godly, but for worshipping an image presumed to be Mary, the mother of Jesus. The belief formed the basis of the utterance the speaker made to another sportsman with whom he shared the same belief of using the rosary in saying prayers because of its potency. This was when they were just about to go to a competition with another team. And being in the midst of other denominational faithful, the speaker used *tigo* as a secret code in reference to the rosary, to communicate with the in-group. Warren (2006) used the same example in "Propositional Metonymy, " "He was counting his beads' to mean 'rosary'. This is a demonstration that secret metonymy

is applicable in social setups. Therefore, in using *tigo* in reference to rosary, the speaker relied on saliency and easily codified principle—the salient and easily coded entity is fronted for use to refer to the backgrounded entity.

Summary

This study established that the sociolinguistic implications of inanimate metonymy play a crucial role in socio-cultural preservation discourse among Dholuo speakers. These implications are embedded in traditional communicative norms that promote the use of euphemistic expressions. Speakers often coin new terms or names to mask the actual identities of referents, especially in sensitive contexts. Additionally, Dholuo inanimate metonymies often function as secret codes distinguishing in-groups. This enables speakers to communicate discreetly within a group while excluding outsiders who may be physically present.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: Metonymic expressions originate from embodied experience and subsequently undergo a process of conventionalization. Causal Theory of Reference, authored by Kripke (1980), and Refining Causal Theory of Reference for Natural Kind Terms,

authored by Kitcher and Stanford (2000), are used in the analysis and understanding of the data. Reference is fixed on an object by virtue of a causal-historical chain (Kripke, 1980). Additionally, causal and descriptive elements are integrated in reference grounding (Kitcher and Stanford, 2000). Over time, what began as an intuition becomes lexically entrenched, with users employing the term without invoking its figurative background. The foregoing arguments form the basis of explaining the sociolinguistic implications of inanimate metonymies in Dholuo in the findings and discussion section. Therefore, as a sociolinguistic strategy, metonymy allows speakers to invoke one ad hoc concept to represent another concept for social protection and secrecy in socio-contextual situations.

Recommendations: This study recommends the use of inanimate metonymy in Dholuo not only in literary works to enrich expressions and linguistic ornamentation, but also in radio and television broadcasting, among others. This will create an enhancement in reservation and enrichment of Dholuo inanimate metonymy as a means of cultural preservation and eventual documentation for future academic reference.

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