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Sexism in the use of language : the case of american proverbs

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UNIVERSITY OF BURUNDI

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

SEXISM IN THE USE OF LANGUAGE : THE CASE OF AMERICAN PROVERBS

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of "Licence en Langue et Littérature **Anglaises"**

Bujumbura, February 2004.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this work is the achievement of my own research and it has never been submitted to any academic institution for any award.

Déogratias HABARUGIRA.

February, 2004.

Dedication

To Louis MAYOYA and Stéphanie ZABUKOBWA;

Respectively father and mother;

I warmly dedicate this work.

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been completed if it had not benefited from the participation of a lot of people.

Among them, I would like to thank Mr. Mike Lukundo, lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literatures at the University of Burundi, who accepted to supervise the work after the departure of my former supervisor, Mr. Mutua Mulonzya.

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Thesis Abstract

The universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees the equality and the freedom of all human beings. This work dealt with this plight with regard to relationships between American women and men. Are American women and men equal? Do they equally enjoy freedom and liberty? Are American women full human beings, Or are American men super human beings?

This work consists of five chapters. The first one which is on introduction to the work, entitled 'the reality of sexism'. It is made of the background to the problem,the justification of the study, the statement of the problem, the research questions, the objectives of the study, the delimitations of the study, and the definitions of key terms.

The second chapter is the literature review in which we surveyed what other scholars had written before the present work. We respectively surveyed what was written about sexism, the use of language, proverbs in general American ones in particular. .

The third chapter is concerned with the methodology. We showed how we collected the proverbs and the steps through which we went in analyzing them.

The fourth chapter which is entitled 'sexism in proverbs' is the analysis of the data. It deals with women and marriage, women in the public life, women and credibility, women and economy, and women as sexual objects.

The last chapter is the conclusion of the work.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE REALITY OF SEXISM

1.1. Background to the Problem

Sexism is any prejudice, or wrong assumption towards a person which is based on the differences of sexes, that is, the differences between men and women.

Indeed, sexism began a long time ago and its practice may be believed to be as old as the existence of human beings. Thus, Fox-Genevese, E. (1991) theorises that the tendency to divide the world by gender is apparently as old as human history. However old in practice, the term *sexism* was identified for the first time in the 1960s. At that time, American feminists coined the term on the example of *racism* which was prevalent in America as well as in the rest of the world and which means the unfair treatment or hatred for the reason of *race*. Hence, the word *sexism* means the unfair treatment of a person for the reason of *sex*.

Though some male persons may be, in a way or another, victims of sexism, women are the most victimised as they are usually perceived as sex objects.

We saw above that sexism raises differences between men and women. Those differences are, most of the time, based on economic, social, and political reasons.

In fact, until a recent past in the world, and even nowadays in developing societies, the division of labour in the household forces women to busy themselves with home activities such as rearing children, preparing food, and so on, which are related to consumption. On the other hand, men are allowed to go outside the household and find jobs which are related to earnings. Then, men become the possessors of material property and of women who must be protected. Thus, Ferguson, M.A. (1986) acknowledges that possessiveness in men is associated with protectiveness and responsibility, while it is perceived as selfishness in women. If active people are evaluated in terms of the economic value of the work they do, how come that the enormous work at home is not evaluated when it is done by women,

and evaluated when it is done by employed domestic servants since the latter are paid as a recognition of their work?

Socially, women are seen as second class citizens. They grow up to be enslaved by men. When they marry, they lose their identity by losing their names and by adopting their husbands' names. Masculinity is usually associated with superiority. Thus, Ferguson, M.A. (1986) writes that in literature women are thought to be passive when compared to men who assume the initiative in the sexual act, in business, and in politics. According to the same author, passivity has a lower value since assertiveness is needed for success.

From the political point of view, the difference of sexes is perceived in the fact that there have been very few women who have occupied important political places in history. According to Rhode, D.L. (ed.) (1990), summarising philosophers' points of view, women constitute a threat to the pursuit of the general welfare and therefore they cannot be expected to uphold the principle of utility, and the consideration for the happiness and suffering of all.

All the above forms of sexism are transmitted through the use of language. In fact, literature has shaped a way of interpreting things and people. On one hand, lots of words and expressions, which are related to women, carry negative connotations. As an instance, witch, crone, lady, and so on. On the other hand, words which are related to maleness such as man, father, lord, king, and so on are used to refer to valience, bravery, and even exalted and applied to God.

The use of pronouns itself shows the expression of sexism. In fact the *he* third person singular for masculine may be used to refer to big and strong animals such us lion, elephant, and exalted to God who is perceived as the father. On the other side, the *she,* which refers to femaleness, is sometimes used to refer to objects such as ships, which are used for the benefit of men.

A brief look at American proverbs shows the sexual division of the world. In fact, whereas *a man is a king in his home*, according to one proverb, other proverbs portray women as persons who cannot be satisfied, who waste the wealth of their husbands, and who are the origin of all the trouble that human beings have experienced.

1.2. Justification of the Study

The plight of women around the world raised our curiosity. In fact, whereas men identify themselves with power, women are sometimes recognized as sex objects who live only to satisfy men's desire.

The behaviour and the culture of any people are expressed through the use of language. It is important to mention that language uses various ways to express the behaviour and the philosophy of a people. It can use songs, tales, riddles, poems, proverbs, and so on. In this work, we based our study on proverbs. In fact, the study of sexism in a community is necessarily part of the study of the culture and the philosophy of that community. In addition, NKESHIMANA, B. (2000) says that proverbs reflect the people's philosophy and therefore their culture.

According to Wilson F.P. quoted in the Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs (1975):

> *A justification for the study of proverbs may be found in its usefulness for philosophy, psychology, folk-lore, the history of manners, and for literary studies to help to establish a text or interpret a meaning.*

Indeed, it would have been useless if we had tried to conduct our study of proverbs without trying to interpret their meanings. The present work, which dealt with American proverbs, is important, first of all, to American feminists who are members of the community that uses the proverbs. Americans being considered as the example of people who enjoy and experience freedom, liberty and democracy, this work persuades them to look at how far American women are in this experience. The work is also important to all people around the world in that it raised the need to compare women's situations in their respective countries with the *example* and see how far they are in the process towards the equality of all human beings. From the English language point of view, this work showed how American proverbs, which are part of the English language, contribute to the discrimination against people in general and

against women in particular. As a result, English speakers will feel the necessity of excluding obscene proverbs from the English language.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Racial groups, ethnic groups, political groups, religious groups, and so on usually live separately and each group organises life on its own. Problems between groups arising from differences usually result in conflicts. On the other hand, men and women usually live together in families as husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, fathers and daughters. Thus, Coates, J. (1986) says that whereas other groups define themselves in relation to out-groups and often come into conflict with each other, women and men tend to view each other favourably since they enjoy living together. However, the social position of women in the world, is very different from that of men. The question in this work is to analyse the relationships between women and men deriving from sexism as it is expressed in American proverbs.

1.4. Research Questions

The universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees the equality and the liberty of all human beings. Given that women and men live together, the following questions were raised:

1° Do American proverbs express gender discrimination?
2° Is there any conflict between American women and men?
3° Are American women full human beings like men?
4° What is the stand-point of American feminists with regard to proverbs?

1.5. Objectives of the Study

This work studied sexism as it is expressed in American proverbs. Thus, its first aim was to analyse the relationships, which exist between American women and men.

The second aim of this work was to see whether or not there is any conflict between American women and men.

The third aim was to see whether or not American proverbs describe women as full human beings.

The fourth aim was to see how far feminist theories are related to or different from American proverbs.

1.6. Scope and Delimitation of the Study

In this work, we studied the relationships, which exist between American women and men. We analysed the status of a married woman as compared to that of her husband. What is the place of men and that of women in the household? Then we looked at the place of a woman in the public life. How is she perceived by the world outside the household. This work also studied the economic importance of a woman and how her work is perceived by her husband and by the society. We also analysed how a woman is regarded on the sexual ground, and what the position of men is concerning sex.

The expression used in the title of this work, *American proverbs*, may seem dull to anyone who knows how most proverbs come into existence. In fact, proverbs have various origins and many of them are internationally recognised. Among the origins of most proverbs used in America, the Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs (1975) acknowledges the ancient Egyptian literature, the Hebrew wisdom literature which comprises, among others, the proverbs which were collected by King Solomon, the Homeric writings, as well as the Bible.

Another important source of American proverbs is the English language itself, which is originally spoken in England. In fact, England is the land of origin for the majority of Americans. As people moved from England and migrated to America, they imported with them the English language, literature and wisdom. So, in terms of their origin we would rather look at what is called *American proverbs* as ancient Egyptian proverbs, Hebrew proverbs, Biblical proverbs, English proverbs. With regard to their geographical use, such biblical proverbs would be looked at as universal since they may be found in

any area where the Bible is used as a whole. The British proverbs might be regarded as simply English proverbs for the reason that they are present in the mouth of any English language speaker whether he or she is in England, America, Burundi, or elsewhere in the world.

Thus, the expression *American proverbs* finds its explanation in the introductory note of the Dictionary of American Proverbs (1992) which acknowledges that for all proverbs which are in common use in North America, whether they are international, Biblical or British, they are *American proverbs* since American population uses them frequently as concisely expressed, "traditional bits of wisdom".

1.7. Definitions of Key Words

In this section, we gave definitions of terms such as *proverb*, idiom, maxim, riddle, philosophy, wisdom, culture, and sexism.

According to Guralnik, D.B. (ed.) (1962), a *proverb* is defined as a short saying in common use that strikingly expresses some obvious truth or familiar experience. This definition focuses on the shortness of the proverb and the familiarity of the experience it expresses.

According to Pineaux, J. (1973) a proverb is a well built formula which is generally metaphorical by which the popular wisdom expresses its experience of life. This definition insists on the metaphorical use of a proverb and on its popularity.

In the light of the preceding definitions, we realised that a proverb is a very broad field that it is difficult to decide on a satisfactory definition for everybody's comprehension. What is necessary is to give an operational definition. Thus, our point of view is first to look at the morphological construction of the word *proverb* which is made of *pro* + *verb*. Pro-means an argument in support of something; verb means the part of speech that expresses actions, existence or events. In this regard, a *proverb* is here defined as a verbal expression of actions, existence, and events in a community through the use of an artistic language.

An **idiom** is a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words. According to Peaty, D. (1983) some

idiomatic expressions are used only in formal situations, others are colloquial or slang, others have both literal and idiomatic functions. Curry, D. (1982) says that idioms take the existing words with known meanings, combine them in a new sense, and bring forth new expressions with new meanings.

Stevenson, B. (1965) suggests that a **maxim** is a sententious expression of some general truth or rule of conduct. A maxim evolves and becomes a proverb by winning popular acceptance. It expresses something that people think is a rule for sensible behaviour in a community.
Thus, a maxim is somehow a proverb in its earliest days of existence.

A **riddle** is a question that is difficult to understand, and that has a surprising answer. Riddles usually use a metaphorical and allegorical language. In order to understand the types of riddles as they are given by the Encyclopaedia Americana (1980), we shall look at the section two in chapter two.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (2000) defines **philosophy** as a set of beliefs that guide somebody's behaviour while **wisdom** is the knowledge that a society or culture has gained over a long period of time.

Lenz, E. and Myerhoff, B. (1985) define **culture** as a way of life transmitted from one generation to another, a collective set of agreements about how to perceive and interpret the world. Much of culture is arbitrary, but it has the power to convince all who embrace it of its innate rightness and desirability. Thus, culture is a way of life as lived by a people in response to social, political, and economic challenges.

Tuttle, L. (1986) defines **sexism** as the unfair prejudice against women, the stereotyping of women, the defining of women with regard to their sexual availability and attractiveness to men.

Looking at its morphological construction, we realize that the word *sexism* comes from *sex* which is inherent in the biological differences between male and female. However, according to Tuttle, L. (1986) whom we have just cited above, sexism is any conscious or unconscious assumption which causes women to be treated as not fully human, while men are identified as the norm. More than the biological differences, sexism refers to emotional and psychological attributes which are created by people in accordance with their

culture and their history in relation to physical maleness and femaleness. More precisely the word *sexism* comes from *sex* plus-ism and means unfair treatment of any person for the reason of sex.

While as a number of writers, among whom is Coates, J. (1986), make a distinction between sex as referring to biologically based distinction, and gender as referring to cultural constructions, others such as Rhode, D. (ed.) (1990) acknowledge that a number of feminists emphasize the interdependence of biological and social forces. They argue that increasing attention has focused on the way cultural practices influence the evolution of physiological differences and the way that these differences in turn help structuring social relations. Thus, our work did not try to make any distinction between sexism and gender discrimination. The two were considered as synonymous terms.

CHAPTER TWO : LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Introduction

In this chapter about what other researchers had written before this work, we surveyed four sections which are the general focus on sexism, focus on proverbs, the notion of meaning, and the theoretical framework.

2.1. General Focus on Sexism

In this section, we surveyed what scholars have so far written with regard to the relationships between men and women. We analysed how sexism is related to culture, the expression of sexism through the use of language, and finally we focused on the standpoint of feminists.

Concerning the culture, it is a mirror of how a society thinks, what it values, how it structures relationships between people. According to Lenz, E. and Myerhoff, B. (1985), the cultural explanation of the gap between men and women proceeds from the relationships between the sexes and their socialisation into male-female roles and behaviour. In addition, the united Nations Report on the Advancement of Women (1996) acknowledges that the construction of masculinity gives man power to control the lives of those around him, especially women, while the construction of femininity requires women to be passive or submissive, to accept violence as part of a woman's estate. Indeed, Ferguson, M.A. (1986) maintains that in patriarchal societies the woman who willingly and happily submits to her husband and father is an ideal, the submissive wife. In addition, Rhode, D.L. (ed.) (1990) on her side sees this notion of difference between men and women as sanctioning less education for girls, low wages for women in the labour force, no financial compensation for work at home, and prohibition of women's full engagement in public life. Summarising philosophers' beliefs about women, Rhode, D.L. (ed.) (1990) adds that one charge against women is that they are believed to be the source of sexual disorder unless they are strictly secluded, controlled, in some cases even segregated almost entirely from men.

With regard to sex and language, Coates, J. (1986) acknowledges that language is an important part of the socialisation process, and children are socialised into culturally approved sex roles largely through language. In addition, Lenz, E. and Myerhoff, B. (1985) state that the feminisation of the American culture has intensified the awareness of the difference between male and female styles of communication and of the linkage between this linguistic dualism and social change.

Furthermore, linguists Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley quoted in Lenz, E. and Myerhoff, B. (1985) acknowledge that language helps to enact and transmit every type of inequality, including that between the sexes. Indeed, the fact of male dominance built into economic, family, political and legal structures of society is also central to speech. *When children adopt linguistic behaviour considered appropriate to their sex they perpetuate the social order which creates gender distinction*, writes Coates. Using Spender's words, Coates explains that the persistence of the myth of the talkative women lies in the different expectations of male and female speakers.

While men have the right to talk, women are expected to remain silent. Then, talking at any length will be perceived as talkativeness in women. As an instance, Coates, J. (1986) acknowledges that sex differences in communicative competence are part of folk knowledge. In Britain, for example all people grow up to believe that women talk more than men, that women gossip. Indeed, the following proverb which expresses the popular wisdom assumes the talkativeness of women in the following statement : *Ten measures of talk were sent down from heaven, and women took nine*. In this proverb, it is assumed that women talk quantitatively nine times more than men do.

From the lexical point of view, Bolinger, D. (1980) explains that many loaded terms, particularly those referring to women as sex objects, reflect women's status as property, kept or rented for sexual services. Indeed, in explaining the attitude towards women as sex objects, he shows the history of terms that started out as relatively unbiased or even favourable and were gradually degraded. According to him, terms such as Queen, madam, mistress, and dame, which are, related to female have all acquired degrading meaning, whereas terms such as prince, king, lord and father, which are related to male, are exalted and applied to God.

In addition, Bolinger, D. (1980) continues to write on page 92 that women carry the burden of opposite stereotypes. Women are angels because of their beauty and ability to stand long suffering and lead uncomplaining lives in their subordinate role, but also devils when they scheme to win by guile what they cannot take openly. With the same view point, Ferguson, M.A. (1986) affirms that it is their usefulness to men that has determined women's value in society. Virgins have been valued not only because of youth, possible beauty, freedom from venereal diseases, but also because they could become wives and mothers. Furthermore, Bolinger D.(1980) acknowledges that the sexist use of pronouns goes beyond male-female reference and extends to the personification of inanimate things such as ship often referred to as *she* because it is pictured as something alive that works for the benefit of men.

The treatment of women as different from men on any ground is referred to as *sexism*. According to Michel, A. (1986), the use of the term *sexism* means that gender differences degrading the feminine sex are now perceived as not full natural, or from God's will, but as the result of unjust social treatment of women. The abolition of sexism is the main objective of feminism. According to Tuttle, L. (1986), feminism originally meant having the qualities of females and it began to be used in reference to the theory of sexual equality and the movement for women's rights, replacing *womanism* which was the prevalent term in the 1890s and earlier.

Fox-Genevese, E. (1991) on her side acknowledges that to many women, feminism betokens the destruction of family values and the defiance of divine and natural order. In addition, she writes that many young women simply consider feminism as outmoded, a relic of former times that no longer constructively affects their lives. As far as Tuttle, L. (1986) is concerned, she acknowledges that the fundamental meaning of feminism is in dispute. In some dictionaries, it is the advocacy for women's rights based on a belief in the equality of the sexes, and in its broadest use the word refers to everyone who is aware of women's subordination and seeking to end it in any way and for some reason.

Furthermore, Tuttle, L. (1986) maintains that feminism originates in the perception that there is something wrong with society's treatment of women. It attempts to analyse the reasons for and dimension of women's oppression, and to achieve women's liberation. As far as Fox-Genevese (1991) is concerned, she theorises that the tendency, practically and imaginatively, to divide the world by gender is apparently as old as human history and, in premodern societies, it assumed even greater significance than in our own. In fact, even nowadays, Bianchi, S.M. and Spains, D. (1986) acknowledge that many Americans still expect women to be unpaid caretakers in the home since some people see women's work outside the home as contributing to marital instability.

Within feminism there is the inclusion of sisterhood. According to Fox-Genevese, E. (1991), at the core of the notion of sisterhood lies the affirmation of solidarity and similarity of all women. Tuttle, L. (1986) acknowledges that because women are conditioned to mistrust, compete with and betray each other for men, female friendship can be a form of rebellion ; and many women have always instinctively acknowledged the importance of bonds between women. Fox-Genevese, E. (1991) adds that coming out of a common history of subordination and repression, women are supposed to have developed a tradition of sisterhood that offers a transformative model for society as a whole.

In fact, since time immemorial, women have drawn upon the metaphor of sisterhood to express the quality of their relations with one another to endure and resist oppression. Sisterhood has flourished even among women who remained uninterested in feminism when not actively opposed to it. It has also flourished among feminists, women union and women who simply work to survive.

According to Tuttle, L. (1986), sisterhood, like woman identified women, does not define woman in relation to men, but focuses her attention and commitment on herself and other women, accepting the primacy of women. In fact, Ferguson, M.A. (1986) assumes that if men cannot envision women as their equals, women will be driven to the companionship of other women.

2.2. Survey of Proverbs

According to Harerimana, F. (1998), a proverb gives an account of a common experience. Indeed, it is built according to what people have seen or lived. From the point of view of the Encyclopaedia Americana (1980) proverbs comment on matters of everyday interest. Thus, proverbs are means of communication that, according to Nahimana, S. (2000), people use when they are transmitting messages, ideas, thoughts and suggestions.

All the above authors share the view that proverbs describe a common experience of a community, that they give account about everyday matters and life. In this regard, Ntahokaja, J.B. (1984) admits that a reminder, (which is a proverb), is told to anybody, adult or young when one wants to teach him or her, to advise him or her, to correct or condemn him or her.

As far as their use is concerned, the Encyclopaedia Americana (1980) points out that proverbs must be vivid and easily remembered since they are usually spoken rather than written. And, in her introduction to the Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs (1975), Joanna Wilson writes that the historical use of proverbs dates probably from the time when wisdom and precept were transmitted by story and song which were verbal expressions of real life experience.

Stylistically, proverbs usually use a figurative language. Hence, Nahimana, S. (2000) acknowledges that it is difficult, even impossible to get the message of a proverb unless its context is known since its meaning is not straightforward. Thus, Nkeshimana, B. (2000) writes that we cannot stick to all the literal meanings of proverbs without relating them to the speaker's intention.

In relation to the situational use of proverbs, Harerimana, F. (1998) acknowledges that proverbs do not have one special occasion for utterance. They can be said whenever people are conversing. In any kind of speech act, they are allocated a very important place for they carry truth, advice and are used to give strength and power to what people are saying. Thus, it would be misleading to give a context of utterance of proverbs. Then, Nkeshimana, B. (2000) concludes that while two persons are talking to one another, they may

use proverbs to strengthen their opinions when one is trying to convince his counterpart about a given situation or is trying to deplore a situation.

The structure of proverbs which allows them the use of figurative language makes them undeniably idiomatic expressions. Among other idiomatic expressions we can mention idioms themselves, maxims and riddles.

According to Curry, D. (1982), idioms take existing words, combine them in a new sense, and bring forth new expressions. Idioms are informal in nature . They are often colloquial, often slang, and through overuse, they can be clichés. Idioms may be adjectival, adverbial or nominal, and they may take the form of traditional sayings or proverbs. Peaty, D. (1983) states that an idiom is an expression which cannot be understood from the literal meaning of the words of which it is composed. Curry, D. (1982) acknowledges that idioms are used to give life and richness to the language in enabling it to absorb new concepts. The difference between idioms and proverbs is that the former exist in dictionaries whereas the meanings of the latter are only deduced from their contextual use. Otherwise idioms and proverbs have the same characteristics.

As far as maxims are concerned, Stevenson, B. (1965), mentions in his introduction to the Macmillan Book of Proverbs, Maxims and Famous Phrases that a maxim expresses truth or rule of conduct. Members of a given community consider that a maxim is a rule for sensible behaviour. These characteristics of a maxim are shared with proverbs. The difference between the two is that a maxim is a newly created sentence or phrase whereas a proverb is acknowledged and accepted by the population as "an ancient bit of wisdom". Even a maxim may become a proverb by winning popular acceptance.

Unlike maxims, riddles are of ancient origin. This allows them to find a place in most cultures. They disguise important truths. The Encyclopaedia Americana (1980) points out that riddles use a metaphorical and allegorical language which allow them to be used for secret communication. Unlike proverbs which are statements, riddles are questions put by the speaker and to which he or she expects answers from his interlocutors. The complexity of riddles lies in the fact that, by using a metaphorical and allegorical language the speaker expects his or her interlocutor to find out the exact meaning of the

question and then supply the exact answer by using same metaphorical, allegorical language. The Encyclopaedia Americana, (1980) acknowledges two types of riddles, which are conundrum which usually involves a trick with words that someone asks for fun, and enigma which are used to convey a message between distant important persons such as kings and ambassadors for secret communication, soothsayers and oracles to convey messages from the gods.

2.3. The Notion of Meaning

2.3.1. Semantics and Pragmatics

According to Leech, G. (1981), the distinction between semantics and pragmatics tends to go with the distinction between meaning and use. Thus, the Linguistic Encyclopaedia (1991) defines semantics as the study of linguistic meaning. However, Ronnie, C. (1993) goes further distinguishing between semantics in its broadest sense and linguistic semantics. The latter is the study of meaning as expressed by words, phrases, and sentences of human languages.

On his side, Van Dijk, T.A. (1986) acknowledges the existence of contextual semantics in saying that pragmatics shares with contextual semantics the characteristic of drawing hardly their inspiration from logic. And for Leech, G. (1981), connotative meaning is the communication value an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual meaning. This notion of connotation which is a domain of semantics clearly overlaps with the study of the meaning of what a speaker means when he makes an utterance in a particular situation which is the domain of pragmatics.

Thus, unlike Hurfard, J.R. and Heasley, B. (1988) who see semantics as the study of sentence meaning, which is what a sentence means regardless of the context and situation in which it may be used, Recanati, F. (1987) uses semantics to refer to the study of all aspects of the conventional meaning of linguistic forms and not only to descriptive meaning. Hence, the inclusion of the conventional pragmatics within the field of semantics.

2.3.2. Presupposition

According to Leech, G. (1981), to deal with a presupposition properly, it is necessary to distinguish it from two types of relation which bear a family resemblance. These are entailment and implicature.

Kempson, R.M. (1986) defines entailment as a relation between sentences such that the truth of the second sentence necessarily follows from the truth of the first. Thus, any sentence S_1 will entail a sentence S_2 ; if S_1 is true, S_2 must also be true. Furthermore, if S_2 is false, its entailing sentence S_1 will also be false. However, if S_1 is false nothing follows about S_2. It can be either true or false.

Leech, G. (1981) acknowledges that an entailment relation exists between two propositions which differ only in that an argument of one is hyponymous to an argument of the other. For example, the proposition *I saw a boy* entails the proposition *I saw a child.* He also shows that the hyponymy relation which holds between arguments can be between predicates as well, by virtue of the semantic inclusion of one predicate in the other. The example he supplies is *Turpin stole a horse* entails *Turpin took a horse.* In fact to steal is a kind of taking.

As far as implication is concerned, Leech, G. (1981) mentions that it is generally understood to be a relation of pragmatic implication which is defined in terms of the speaker's and hearer's assumptions and beliefs. However, he adds that this does not mean the irrelevance of the conceptual meaning of propositions in case of implicature. On the contrary, it is generally assumed that the way a person uses and interprets utterances in speech situations depends crucially on his ability to understand their sense.

Concerning presupposition, Leech, G. (1981) distinguishes two types : a logical presupposition and a pragmatic presupposition. According to him, the logical theory treats presupposition as a relation between propositions defined in terms of their truth and falsehood. It differs from entailment in that, in some sense, the truth of an implied proposition is taken for granted that in the uttering of the presupposed proposition X. Furthermore, he adds (P. 279) that if one negates an entailing proposition x, the implication no longer

obtains, but, if one negates a presupposing proposition X, the implication still holds good.

Moreover, Kempson, R.M. (1986) acknowledges that presupposition differs from entailment in two ways : the consequence of S_1 being false, and the consequence of S_2 being false. For S_1 to presuppose S_2, the truth of S_2 must follow from the truth of S_1, but, if S_2 is false then S_1 *will* have no truth value. It will be neither true, nor false. It follows from this that if S_1 is false, S_2 must be true. The logical presupposition shares with entailment the property of satisfying a conjunction test. If one conjoins a proposition X with the negation of its entailment or presupposition, the result is an absurdity, which is not the case with implicature.

The pragmatic presupposition, on the other hand, according to Leech, G. (1981), is treated as a trivalent rather than a bivalent concept : a speaker S, by virtue of uttering X, presupposes that Y knows that. A distinction is usually drawn not between presupposition and entailment, but between presupposition and assertion, where presupposition is the part of the content of an utterance which is treated as if it is familiar, and assertion is the part which is treated as new, or informative. According to Crystal, D. (1971), presupposition is generally referred to as the information people assume when they speak, and the implications which can be deduced from the form of the sentence used are known as conversational implicatures.

To sum up this section on meaning, let us consider what Crystal, D. (1971) writes about concepts such as presupposition and implicature which are an important part of the study of pragmatics. He maintains that they are also relevant for the study of semantics, especially in connection with such classical problems as how to analyse the truth or falsity of sentences. Sentences like THE KING OF THE USA IS ILL can be evaluated in this way by considering the presupposition that THERE IS A KING OF THE USA. Indeed, several of the textbooks on semantics and pragmatics display a considerable overlap.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, we are going to show the steps through which we dwelt into on our journey towards the discovery of sexism in American proverbs.

3.1. Data Collection Procedure

In this study, our instrument of work was the Dictionary of American Proverbs (1992) which was written by people who know well America, and its people. We looked up the proverbs listed under the headings of women, wife, man and husband. It is important to mention that, due to time constraints, it was not possible for us to collect and analyse all the proverbs listed under the mentioned headings. Rather, we were obliged to choose proverbs which we judged that they were more expressive than others with regard to sexism and the corpus of the selected proverbs will be found in the appendix. .

3.2. The Procedure of Data Analysis

Having collected the proverbs, we analysed their meanings. In order to make easy our task of analysing the proverbs collected, we grouped them according to headings which were : women and marriage, women in public life, women and credibility, women and economy, and women and sex. For the sake of clarity, we analysed at least five proverbs under each heading. As we mentioned in the theoretical framework, the present study of the meanings of proverbs was run through the branch of semantics. The departure point to the analysis was the notion of presupposition. Here, we studied the entailment and the presupposition by applying the model of Leech, G. (1981). His examples of defining sentences are presented in the following table

X entails	Y	: X pressuposes	Y
X	Y	: X	Y
True ⟶	True	: True ⟶	True
False ⟶	True or false	: False ⟶	True
True or false ⟵	True	: True or false ⟵	True
False ⟵	False	: ? ⟵	False

The table was interpreted as follows :

- Entailment :

A sentence X entails another sentence Y when :

If X is true, then the sentence Y must also be true;

If the sentence X is false, then the sentence Y can be true or false

If, on the other hand, the entailed sentence Y is true, then, its entailing sentence X can be true or false, and if the sentence Y is false, then, the sentence X must be false.

- Presupposition was studied as a sentence X presupposes another sentence Y if the sentence X is true, the sentence Y has to be true; if X is false, then Y is true. On the other hand, if the presupposed sentence Y is true, then, the sentence X can be true or false; and if the sentence Y is false, then the sentence X has no truth value.

In fact Leech, G. (1981) acknowledges that it is not possible to assert validly a proposition about something which does not exist. The *if..then* relation is symbolized by an arrow→ in the table.

Thus, for example, the sentence *He married a blonde heiress,* Leech, G. (1981) observes, entails the sentence *He married a blonde.*

In fact, if it is true that he married a blonde heiress, this truth value is also observed in the sentence *He married a blonde* However, the negation of the entailing sentence *He did not marry a blonde heiress* can imply a true or a false statement. Thus, the implication of the entailment can be either *He married a blonde* or *He did not marry a blonde.* If on the other hand the entailed sentence *He married a blonde* is true, it can be either true or false that *He married a blonde heiress*, and if the entailed sentence is false *He did not marry a blonde*, its entailing sentence is automatically false.

The example for presupposition was studied in the same way. If the sentence *The girl he married was an heiress* is true, the presupposed sentence *He married a girl* is also true. Even in the case the sentence. *The girl he married was an heiress* is false the presupposition still holds. On the other hand, if the presupposition is true *He married a girl*, its assertive part can be either true or false. He may have married an heiress or not but if the presupposition is false *He did not marry a girl*, the assertion has no truth value for, as we saw on the

preceding page, we cannot assert a proposition about something which does not exist.

In order to know whether a relation is an entailment or a presupposition, we applied the negation and the conjunction tests. In fact *the negation test shows that the entailment is vulnerable to negation, whereas presupposition is not,* observes Leech, G. (1981), but both entailment and presupposition satisfy a conjunction test. That is, if one conjoins a sentence X with the negation of its entailment or presupposition Y, the result is an absurdity.

During the analysis, we considered what feminists wrote about the relationships between men and women. Furthermore, each of the five analysed sections was closed by a conclusion.

3.3. Limitations

During our analysis of sexism in the use of language which was applied to American proverbs we met some problems such as the lack of American informants who would have given us more details about their culture and their wisdom. In fact, the distance which separates us from the United States of America prevented as from running a field research. In addition, the current world security reasons made it difficult for us to get access to the American Embassy from where we would have collected additional data. Our best solution was to rely on a dictionary, which was written by people who know the American culture. That is, a Dictionary of American Proverbs (1992).

Another important limitation was the ambitious enterprise itself of analysing meanings of proverbs of another speech community, which is different from our own, outside American contextual use.

That is why we could not analyse the proverbs from the pragmatic point of view. Thus, we applied the semantic theory though it is not exhaustive for the study of meaning of proverbs which are usually used in context.

CHAPTER FOUR : SEXISM IN AMERICAN PROVERBS

This chapter deals with the analysis itself. We applied the theory of meaning study, that is, presupposition, to the proverbs we collected, in the present case.

4.1. Women and Marriage

Marriage is a legal union of a man and a woman who become respectively husband and wife. Together, they constitute the foundation of a family to which will be added children.

The first proverb we analysed under this section was *A man is a king* in *his home*. By definition, a king is a ruler of a state that has a royal family. If the sentence *A man is a king in his home* is true, then the sentence *A man is a king* is also true. By applying the negation test, the sentence *A man is a king* can be true or false. Thus, we have the relatjon of entailment. All men are not kings. By expending the authority to a man in his home, the proverb aims at strengthening the position of adult male persons.

In fact, this proverb does not take into account the fact that the skills of any human being can be limited. There can exist families in which men are less skilful than their wives or even where women are *kings* or the bosses in the households. However talented they may be, this proverb shows that women cannot take the lead of the families as long as there are men who are considered as kings. This belief is nothing but the result of the labour division between members of the family in which women are allocated the role of rearing children and busy themselves with household activities whereas men control not only the family but the whole community. According to Rhode, D. (ed.) (1990), this notion of difference which sanctions non-financial compensation for work at home and prohibition of women's full engagement in public life is the principal target of feminism.

Another proverb is A good wife and health are a man's best wealth. If this sentence is true, then it must also be true that A good wife and health are a man's wealth. However, its negation A good wife and health are not a man's best wealth will reveal that its implication has to be true. Then, we have a relation of

presupposition. This consideration of women with regard to men is not biological. It is rather cultural. It is based upon the belief that a man is the head of the family.

Indeed, in many societies, being a head of the family may imply a lot, including: property owner and manager, chief income earner, financial controller and chief financer, and nothing can be done by any member of the family under his jurisdiction without the man's approval. Sometimes, he sanctions the moral standards of others (wife inclusive) in the household irrespective of inadequacies in his moral conduct.

According to Casey, M. and Kate, S. (1976) quoted in Tuttle, L. (ed.) (1986), the members of the household, whether women, children or servants are considered to be the property of the man who is the head of the family. Indeed, Mead, M. (1950) acknowledges that human family depends upon social inventions that make each generation of males want to nurture women and children, and these inventions are based upon the specific physical sex relationships between men and women, which are themselves biologically determined. The second proverb aims at showing that a good wife produces, not for herself, but for her husband.

Any production of wealth by a wife belongs to her husband who acts as her master. The proverb deprives women of independence. They are not free because they have to obey their masters' orders. That is the reason why Ferguson, M.A. (1986) acknowledges that the ideal woman in patriarchal societies is that who willingly and happily submits to her husband.

The third proverb we analysed in this section was *When a man takes a wife, he ceases to dread hell.* A dread is a feeling of great fear about something that might happen in the future. In this proverb, there is the presupposition that a man has to take a wife. We saw in the preceding proverb that a wife is counted among a man's best wealth. Then, in this proverb the meaning is that a wife must alleviate her husband's hardships. Then, this other proverb *A true wife is her husband's better half* proves that when a man takes a wife, his hardships are shared between the two. In fact any man who has not got a wife is not yet a complete man. This proverb, at least, can be seen as valuing the woman.

On the other hand, the negation of the proverb was analysed from the point of view of this other proverb that *Women are necessary evils.* Though men must live with women, the latter are evils according to men. By definition, hell is a place where bad people go after death and suffer an eternal punishment of burning. From this point of view, the meaning of the proverb is not that women protect men against hell. Rather, a man who takes a woman becomes accustomed to hell. His sufferings begin in such a way that he finds no reason to fear hell. For any man who takes a wife, the present hardships are as rigorous as the future ones or even more.

These two interpretations of the same proverb show how women are prejudged differently according to the situation. Thus, Bolinger, D. (1980) acknowledges that women carry the burden of opposite stereotypes. They are angels, because they are beautiful and also long-suffering and uncomplaining in their subordinate role, and they are devils when they try to win by guile what they cannot take openly.

Another proverb we analysed was *A woman, a dog, and walnut tree : the more you beat them, the better they be.* In this proverb, the presupposition is that a woman, a dog, and a walnut tree have to be good enough for the pleasure of the man. Our study being on sexism we did not focus on the expression *a dog* which is a pet, and *a walnut tree* which is just a kind of tree. Rather, we focused on the woman who is a counterpart of the man. Then, the presupposition was that a woman has to be good for the man. The use of the comparatives *the better* and *more* shows that though she may be good, the man should not be satisfied by the woman's behaviour. He should beat her more and more so that her being good is endlessly improved.

So, if a husband beats his wife today, her behaviour is improved, then, it would be better if he beat her again and again for the continuity of her behaviour progress. In this proverb again, a woman is classified among dogs and walnut trees. This classification can be looked at as the equation of a woman to dogs and to trees. If a woman is equated to a dog which is an animal, or to a walnut tree which is just a tree, then the relation which ties her to the husband is not love. Rather, it is designed by man to be useful only to him. The joy of forming a family is not shared. Only the husband can enjoy the

pleasure of having a family of his own, while his wife can never satisfy him and never reach the level of free human beings.

Thus, the United Nations and the Advancement of Women Report (1945-1996), (1996) acknowledges that violence against women exists in various forms in everyday life in all societies. According to that report, women are beaten, mutilated, burned, sexually abused and raped, and such violence is a major obstacle to the achievement of peace. And, the same report continues to show that the institution of the family can be a social institution where male sexual power is violently expressed and where a certain type of socialisation disempowers women.

Moreover, Elizabeth Fisher (1979) quoted in Tuttle, L. (1986) acknowledges that with animal keeping and selective breeding came the male desire to own children and by analogy with their treatment of animals, men began to control women's reproductive capacity by enforcing chastity and sexual repression. In fact, Ferguson, M.A. (1986) admits that virgins have been valued because they could become wives and mothers, the legitimacy of whose children would not be questioned and whose property could be lawfully transferred through their offspring.

Accordingly, virginity breeds respect (by a husband) for the wife; breaking somebody's virginity avails man with satisfaction because he feels secure, as he was the first *lover* to encroach on the fair sex. To most men, it (breaking the virginity) is more or less like winning a big competition which normally offers peace of mind to the masculine who generally detest being regarded as incapable or weak, or lacking in sexual prowess. Since he is the first performer the lady knows, she will compare him to no other.

On the contrary, a woman would not mind whether or not her man was a pensin (among societies that do not circumcise males) during the first meeting in bed; after all, women have been raised to believe that men are all brave and feel no pain and therefore some cannot stand a whimpering man (it pains to uncircumcised men) during their first intercourse.

The last proverb we studied under this section was *A woman, a cat, and a chimney should never leave the house.* Here, we emphasized the classification of a woman who is a human being, a cat which is an animal, and a chimney which is inanimate, within the same set. This shows that the treatment of

women is nearly the same as that given to animals and to inanimate things. As we said about the preceding proverb, this way of viewing women as not full human beings, but as animals or things aims at disempowering them.

In fact, a chimney, being a part of a house, its being without the house is inconceivable . On the other hand, a cat is an animal and it is animate. Its difference from a woman is that the latter is endowed with intelligence like any human being of either sex, whereas the cat is not. Then, human beings can control a cat. It can be tied around the house. Thus, if a woman's freedom is controlled like that of animals, it is her humanity, which is questioned. Like a pet, the woman has to be kept at home and controlled as if she were man's pet.

Furthermore, woman is as inseparable from the house as a chimney; it is equally inconceivable to have a house without a woman who is taking care of it. However, Ferguson, M.A. (1986) objects to this belief by writing that the old dream of love as mutually liberating, as a partnership conducive to the greatest happiness human beings can know, can become viable only when women as well as men are free.

In conclusion, marriage puts the husband into the position of master of the household whereas the wife becomes his servant. For men, it is necessary to find a wife since the foundation of a family puts the husband into the position of power which is exercised on his wife and on the household in general. However, women must be controlled rigorously in such a way that they can even be beaten for the satisfaction of their husbands. Their freedom is limited. Then, marriage is the legal disempowerment of women who are accused of the hardships that humanity has endured. Thus, *marriage is both heaven and hell* (says a proverb) for men, but it is essentially *hell* for women. In this section, we saw the relationships which exist between a wife and her husband. In the following one, we analyse the relationships existing between a woman and the world outside the household.

U. B.

4.2. Women in Public Life

The first proverb studied under this section was *The world is full of wicked women.* The presupposition in this proverb is that *there exist a certain number of women who are wicked.* The effect of this proverb is to invite men to be careful with women. Analysing the meaning of this proverb in association with *A woman is only a woman,* we followed the example of Anderson, W.L. (1962) *Business is business.* Such an assertion, although it looks like a simple statement of a fact, it is not simple and it is not a factual statement. The first *business* denotes transaction, the second *business* invokes the connotations of the word. Here, the word shifts its meaning. The sentence means *commercial transactions are matters concerned with profits and not ethics.*

We can also consider, in addition, *Boys will be boys.* The two are not informative statements, but directives, directing us to classify the object or event under discussion in given ways, in order that we may feel or act in the ways suggested by the terms in the classification. The word boy, like the second *business* above shifts its meaning here, and the sentence meaning becomes *Young males of the human species will be liberated creatures,* unlike their female counterparts (girls).

Likewise, in the proverb *A woman is only a woman* the first *woman* denotes an adult female person. The second woman bears the connotation of the word. This other proverb: *Is a woman ever satisfied? No, if she were, she would not be a woman* reveals that among other connotations of *woman* there is someone who is never satisfied. Then, coming back to the first proverb in study, we deduce that it is a warning to men against joining the company of women.

Indeed, Rhode, L. (ed.) (1990) summarising the points of view of philosophers such as Plato's, Hegel's, Bentham's, and others, says that women are identified as the special guardians of love and the special enemies of justice. Representing the interests of the family and of sexual life they are little capable of instinctual sublimations and they are into opposition to civilisation. Indeed, Bolinger, D. (1980) points out that the simple word '*woman*' itself is listed as a synonym of prostitute in Roget's Thesaurus.

Another proverb we analysed was *The fewer women, the less the trouble.* In this proverb, the presupposition is that there should be less trouble. In order to achieve this situation, there should exist few women. This proverb is related to the following : *Next to no wife, a good wife is best.* In fact, if the situation of fewer women creates the situation of less trouble, the existence of no wife would be the equivalent of no trouble. The objective of this proverb is to prove women as the origin of human problems. The hardships that the humanity has experienced are supposed to be caused by women. Indeed, another proverb says that *Women and dogs cause too much strife.* A solution to all the problems caused by women would be to have few or even no women. This is why *A woman's place is at home* and *Women should never leave their house.*

All these proverbs produce the effect of restricting women to home activities and not allow them to be active in public affairs. Thus, a house can be perceived as a prison where women are obliged to stay during their lives while men come home from time to time to regulate women's efficiency; in their activities. The public life out of the house is a matter of the man alone. Thus, Rhode, L. (ed.) (1990) acknowledges that one charge against women is that they are the source of sexual disorder unless they are strictly secluded, controlled, in some cases even segregated almost entirely from men.

The third proverb we studied under this section was *There was never* a *conflict without women.* The presupposition is that there have been many conflicts. The question is to know whether or not women have played a role in those conflicts. Then the answer is that there was never a conflict without women. Women have taken part in all conflicts. Thus, at any time a conflict between people breaks out one might think of women as the originators of that conflict. Women should not be judged innocent. They are considered as the source of all conflicts that the world has experienced.

The analysis of this proverb can go side by side with the following. *Women are the roots of all evils.* Here, the presupposition is the existence of evils. The question is to know the source of those evils. Then, the answer is that all those evils take their source in women who are their root. This proverb aims at creating a gap between men and women, and widens the gap that prevents women from engaging in public life. In fact, the effect of such a proverb is to push men to flee from women; and whenever one experiences

evils, he has to search for their origin in women. Indeed, Rhode, D.L. (ed) (1990) analysing philosophers' perceptions of women, acknowledges that as far back as classical Greece, women were perceived as subversive of the public good because of their orientation toward the sphere of private life and their feelings for those close to the pursuit of the general welfare. Plato regards them as a significant source of corruption.

The last proverb in this section was *A woman is the greatest contradiction of all.* In this proverb, the presupposition is that there exist several contradictions among which there must be one which is the greatest. That is a woman. In fact, in a proverb such as *Choose a wife on a Saturday rather than on a Sunday*, it is clear that it is the man who decides to live with a woman, and who chooses her. On the other hand, proverbs such as *The fewer women the less the trouble* show that there is no reason of taking a wife unless one prefers trouble to happiness.

The contradiction of a woman lies in the fact that she is necessary to man, he chooses her and she causes too much strife to him. Thus, the proverb *Women are necessary evils* finds its place. Though they are not too good to dwell with, this proverb encourages people to take them as they are, not to flee from them. Then, acknowledging the contradiction in the treatment of women by language, Bolinger, D. (1980) writes that women are the angels because they are beautiful and also long suffering and uncomplaining in their subordinate role, and they are devils when they scheme to win by guile what they cannot take openly.

In brief, these proverbs prevent women from acting in public affairs. These are the matters of men alone. In fact, women are considered as the cause of all the trouble which can erupt in a community. However, they have an important role to play at home, since philosophers such as Plato, Hegel, Bentham, and others identified them as the special guardians of love who represent the interests of the family and of sexual life. In this section we analysed the relationships between the woman and the World outside the household, in the following one, we analyse how far women are trusted in what they do or say.

4.3. Women and Credibility

The word *credibility* refers to the quality that somebody or something has that makes other people believe him or her, or trust him or her. In this section, we studied how far do men trust or do not trust women. This does not mean that the proverbs treated earlier in this chapter do not depict women as incredible, but credibility is given exclusive attention.

Thus, the first proverb we studied under this section was *Women are the devil's nets.* In religion, the devil is believed to be the most powerful being which is an enemy to human beings. It is synonymous to what is referred to as Satan. On the other hand, a net is a tool which is usually used by fishermen in order to catch fish. In this proverb, a net is used to refer to something used not to catch fish or any other animal but men.

However, the net which is used to catch men is not that type of material made of strings, threads, or wire woven together with small spaces in between, but it is a woman, who is a female adult person. So, this proverb means that women are used by the devil in its fight against humanity. Women are presented as a weapon that the devil uses to fight against men considered to be the norm, the righteous. Then, as men are afraid of the devil which is considered as their greatest enemy, they should be of women who are its weapons. They should flee from the company of women. Some people believe that in its fight against humanity, the devil does not use the usual weapons such as spears, arrows, guns, or missiles. Rather it uses tricks. This method of trickery catches a lot of people.

In fact, women may be used by the devil in its process of tempting men. Thus, this proverb means that however what women do and say may seem good and convincing to men, they should be careful and not trust women. Again, this proverb aims at creating a gap between men and women. In this line of ideas, Michel, A. (1986) acknowledges that sexism, that is, practices, prejudices and ideologies lowering women with regard to men, is among the most serious and overwhelming pains of humanity since women, on the one hand, suffer from that situation and, on the other hand, all communities are without huge intellectual and human qualities which are ignored or despised.

The second proverb which fell under this section was *A woman's hair is long; Her tongue is even longer*. Anatomically, there is no difference in the length of human tongues, whether it is man's or woman's. It is true that, the normal hair of women is longer than that of men. In this proverb, there are two comparisons. On the one hand, the length of a woman's hair is compared to the length of a man's hair. On the other hand, the length of a woman's tongue is compared to the length of her hair. Then, if a woman's tongue is as long as a man's tongue, and if a woman's hair is longer than that of a man, then a man's tongue is also longer than his hair, and even than a woman's hair.

However, the structural observation of the human body shows that the hair, at least the head hair, is longer than the tongue. The difference between the utterance of this proverb and the human anatomy proves that the meaning is not literal. This proverb's meaning must be sought from the imaginative side. Whether one's tongue is literally long or not, there is no importance in that. What is important to human beings is the use of the tongue. Among others, the tongue's use is speaking which is focused in this proverb. Some people may talk much while others talk less. Referring to the talking, those who talk much will be judged as having, figuratively, longer tongues than normal. Thus, if women are believed to have longer tongues, this length is measured on the basis of their speech. Indeed, the length of the woman's tongue is compared to her hair which is normally, longer than a man's hair. This proverb means that women talk more than men. It is true that Lenz, E. and Myrehoff, B. (1985) acknowledge the difference between men and women in language use.

According to them the feminisation of American culture has intensified the awareness of the difference between male and female styles of communication and of the linkage between this linguistic dualism and social change. This is also a general belief. However, Spender (1980a) quoted in Coates, J. (1986) rejects this belief by explaining that the persistence of the myth of the talkativeness of women is due to the fact that people have different expectations of male and female speakers. In fact, while men have the right to talk, women are expected to remain silent. As a consequence, talking at any length is perceived as talkativeness in women. So, there is no

difference of talk between men and women. Only expectations are different. Besides, they are considered to use language differently.

The third proverb we analysed in this section was *Blessed is the woman who can keep a secret and the man who will not tell his wife*. In this proverb, the use of *can* expresses a possibility. It shows that women are usually unable to keep a secret. Thus, any woman who can keep a secret is blessed. She is seen as a superwoman. In fact, this other proverb, *The only secret a woman can keep is that of her age* shows that, in general, women cannot keep a secret except that of their age. Indeed, this other proverb *'A woman over thirty who will tell her exact age will tell anything'* proves that women must keep secret their age. Indeed, showing the expression of sexism in language, Bolinger, D. (1980) explains that being old and female puts one on the verge of being an outcast since she becomes unattractive and sexually useless.

In addition, Ferguson, M.A. (1986) acknowledges that a single woman beyond the marriageable age of, say, thirty has been pitied or ridiculed with the exception of the nun admired for giving herself up to a supernatural cause. Thus, her age is the only secret a woman can keep since every adult woman would like to look as if she were as young as a twenty-year old woman. Then, any female person who is able to keep a secret will be regarded as if she were unusually skilled. The second part of the proverb *the man who will not tell his wife* is in the future tense. This expresses as an advice . That of not telling anything to one's wife. The word 'woman' in the first part of the proverb refers to any female person.

On the other hand, the word *wife* has the sense of the woman that one is married to. She is the female person one shares everything with. Thus, it would be normal for men to tell everything to their wives since they live together and share everything. However, men are required to never tell anything secret to their wives. This shows that any woman, even one's wife, cannot be trusted. The utterance of such a proverb prohibits people to tell anything secret to women since they are not able to keep it. So, every male person is encouraged to keep a secret to himself and not to tell his wife. Any man who is able to keep a secret apart from his wife is blessed.

In addition, the utterance of this proverb *A woman could keep a secret, but she needs another* shows that women are unable to keep a secret. In fact, when someone tells something to her, she cannot avoid telling it to another woman. The effect of such a proverb is to create suspicion between women and men. It also aims at keeping women and wives away from important matters regarding the family.

Thus, Coates, J. (1986) acknowledges that sex differences in communicative competence are part of folk knowledge, that we all grow up to believe that women talk more than men that women gossip, that men swear more than women; that women discuss topics which are essentially trivial.
Another proverb, which attracted our attention, was *He knows little who will tell his wife all he knows.* In this proverb, it is presupposed that one must keep a secret away from his wife. In the present proverb, it is assumed that a man can tell his wife something. In the previous proverb, we saw that one must tell his wife what he knows. However, he is not supposed to tell her everything. As an instance, he must not tell anything which is considered as a secret since women are unable to keep it. If he says all he knows, he will say everything, which means, he will not have any secret to keep to himself. Like the preceding one, this proverb aims at advising men to always keep a secret.

In fact, the following proverb adds information to the preceding one. *Tell a woman and you tell the world.* If one tells a woman, the whole world will know what he says. Indeed, one woman cannot keep a secret. She needs someone else to help her. In this way, the secret is published. As a result, anything that one does not want to be known by the public, he must not tell it to his wife. Then, if one tells everything to his wife, whether he does not know her very much, that is, he knows little about her and must accept the outcome; or he does not have any secret to keep away from the public. We also saw that the only secret a woman can keep is that of her age.

This shows that men, as opposed to women, have many secrets to keep for themselves. Then, if a man tells his wife all he knows, he is like women. He does not have any secret to keep for himself. However, Barrie Thorn and Nancy Henley quoted in Lenz, E. and Myerhoff, B. (1985) state that language is intimately bound up with the social differentiation of the sexes, with the structure of male dominance, expressed and maintained through

language about women and men, as well as in the ways men and women use speech, and with the division of labour by sex.

The last proverb we analysed in this section about credibility was *A woman knows a bit more than Satan.* In religion, Satan which is also referred to as the Devil, is believed to be the most powerful evil being. Whereas God is believed to be the creator of everything and the author of all good events which happen to human beings, Satan is assumed to be the most powerful enemy of human beings. Hence, he is the author of all unpleasant events which happen to humans. It is considered as the most astute being who usually swindles human beings out of their friendship with God. That is, out of their wellness and happiness.

Thus, this proverb presupposes that a woman knows to do evil and causes no good things, but like Satan, she causes unpleasantness to men. In addition, it is asserted that women do evil, not only like Satan, but more than Satan. This means that women cause much trouble to men than Satan does. This shows that, women are regarded as the enemy number one of men. In its fight against people, it is assumed that Satan uses its adversaries themselves and makes them execute unpleasant things. Then, people should not take advice from their enemy. In the same way, the proverb aims at forbidding men to take into account any advice from women.

In fact, in another proverb we saw that *Women are the devil's nets.* This means that the advice given by women come from Satan since they are its weapons. Thus, men are invited not to trust women, and to see them as their enemies who have to be fought against. This state of affairs is due to the fact that the masculinity construct which gives man power to control the lives of those around him especially women. Within this respect, Coates, J. (1986) acknowledges that while women are believed to be more polite than men, the latter are characterised by the spirit of superiority and aggression.

In short, all the proverbs seen in this section show that men are encouraged not to take into account any advice from women and not to tell anything important and secret to them. This state of affairs originates from men's abuse of power over women. It matches with what, Collins, M.W. et al. (1988) observe that the abuse of power which occurs when power holders

exploit those they control signals problems for the relationship and the one who is seen as powerless can be less and less valued by the other.

4.4. Women and Economy

In this section, we studied meanings of proverbs which describe the role played by women in the economic field.

The first proverb whose meaning was studied is *A woman can throw out the window more than a man can bring in at the door*. Here, the presupposition is that women throw out while men bring in. The assertion is about the quantity. Women throw out more than men bring in. In this proverb there are two oppositions which are *throw out and bring in* on the one hand, *window and door* on the other. Looking at their normal sizes, a window is narrower than a door.

In addition, a door represents the usual way in or out of a house while a window stands for the unusual way which may be theft or cheating. Thus, another presupposition in this proverb is that while men produce for the whole household, women are assumed to be cheating the household. This proverb aims at showing that though a man can follow the right way and work hard in order to bring in much through the right way, a woman is assumed to follow the wrong way unknown by the man and spend much more than his earnings. She is the source of the ruin of the household.

Then, the following proverb finds its place here and helps to understand the preceding one : *Man pays, but woman spends*. A man is assumed to nurture the family. In fact, the labour division obliges women to stay at home and busy themselves with home activities while men are allocated outside activities which are usually related to earnings. This proves that while a man is interested in what he can bring to the household, a woman is essentially interested in the way the earnings are used for the well-being of the household.

However, the first proverb shows that the man is not satisfied by the way what he earns is used and he is always suspicious of the way his wife uses it. Then, the first proverb aims at showing that men do not trust women, and advising them to control rigorously their wealth since a woman is accused of being a waster of a man's property. This shows women's dependence on

men who control everything. This lack of women's economic independence is one of the factors which contribute to women's oppression. In fact, the United Nations and the Advancement of Women Report (1996) acknowledges that denying women economic power and economic independence is a major cause of violence against women because it prolongs their vulnerability and dependence.

Another proverb, which attracted our curiosity, was *A woman is a dish for the gods.* Gods are believed to be superhuman beings with supernatural power. Then, some people may worship them. In this proverb, there is the presupposition of the existence of those superhuman creatures. The assertion is that a woman is a dish for those gods. Literally, gods take a woman as food. They eat women. On the other hand, the word *dish* may be considered as something from which one eats. In this case, women will be referred to as the instruments that gods use when they are eating men.

However, we considered the word *dish* in the sense in which it is generally used. That is, food prepared for meal. Then, this proverb means that women belong to gods. They are possessed by the gods. This means that they are controlled by those evil spirits. Thus, the proverb aims at showing the presumed laziness of women. In fact, men believe that women are inferior to them and are their slaves. However, instead of working for them, they are controlled by evil spirits according to the judgement of men who are supposed to be their masters. Then a man should not expect anything interesting from a woman. This proverb may be describing the beginning of the awareness in women of the inequality between men and women. This situation may be describing women's first steps of their seeing things as they are scientifically presented and not from the point of view of men.

In fact, Coates, J. (1986) reporting Tajfel's theory of inter-group relations and social changes says that, if members of an inferior social group refuse to accept their inferior position in society, they will try to redefine characteristics which have previously been defined in negative terms by society. Indeed, Ferguson, M.A. (1986) insists that if men cannot envision women as their equals, women will be driven to the companionship of other women, that is, sisterhood; and would mean their separation from men.

Another proverb whose meaning was analysed is *Choose a wife on a Saturday rather than on a Sunday.* Here, there is an opposition between Saturday and Sunday. Saturday is a day of work when people put on their usual clothes whereas Sunday is a free day when people put on their best clothes, and visit their friends or go to church. In this proverb, the presupposition is that women are chosen as wives by men who become their husbands. It is asserted that any wife has to be chosen on a Saturday rather than on a Sunday. The opposition between the two days proves that on Sundays, people look more beautiful than on any other day since they do not work and they put on their best clothes.

On the other hand, Saturday is a day of work like any other day of the week. On this day, people put on their usual clothes. In addition Saturday is the last day of work. This presupposes that people are tired by the work of the whole dveek; Then, they do not look as beautiful as they do on Sundays. Then, this proverb advises people to choose wives by looking at their usual appearance. They should judge them by their habit and not by their extraordinary or assumed behaviour however good it may appear. Then, this other variant of this proverb will have a literal meaning: *Judge a woman by her everyday clothes, not her Sunday best clothes.* We saw that Saturday is a day of work.

Thus, one should choose a wife on Saturday. Hence, he should judge her by her work. Here, there is the idea that when one chooses a wife, he chooses a servant. Then, a wife is not economically equal to her husband, but she is a servant who works for the benefit of her husband.

This proves women's economic dependence on men which may be perceived as a kind of enslavement of women by men. In fact, the United Nations and the Advancement of Women Report (1945-1996) (1996) acknowledges that among the historical power relations responsible for violence against women are the economic and social forces which exploit female labour and the female body. Indeed, Ferguson, M.A. (1986) admits that the careful negotiation of bride price, and the vesting of all property rights in the husband are aspects of the economics of marriage.

Another proverb that we analysed was *Men must work, women must weep.* To weep is to cry of sadness. The presupposition is that either men or women have an obligation of a certain kind. The assertion in this proverb is that while men have to work, women have to weep. The use of *must* shows an obligation. Men must not rest; they must work hard for the satisfaction of the household. In fact, it is a man who supplies what the family needs.

Thus, men busy themselves with work outside the home and this work is most of the time money bringing or any other form of earning which may be used for the interest of the family. Instead of working, women are expected to relax and complain to men for not giving them enough. This means that the work that women do at home is not acknowledged. This state of affairs may be due to the fact that women's work at home is not related to the earnings, but to a large extent, it is related to the use of the money earned. Thus, Bianchi, S.M. and Spain, D. (1986) say that many Americans still expect women to be unpaid caretakers in the home, and they ask themselves, whether it will always be that women, more than men, put the needs of children and family ahead of their own labour force advancement.

The last proverb under this section was *It is cheaper to find a wife than to feed her.* It is presupposed that one has to find a wife. But, once he has found her, he must feed her, give her what she needs. In fact, once one founds a family he becomes responsible of children, servants and his wife as he becomes the father of the family. Thus, Miller, C. and Swift, K. (1976) quoted in Tuttle, L. (1986) say that the implication of the family is that the members of the household whether women, children, or servants are originally considered to be the property of the man who is its head. Indeed, Tuttle, L. (1986) explains that the word *family* comes from the Latin *famulus* which means servant. In fact, the labour division gives the woman the role of keeping home and rearing children. A job which is not money bringing. On the other hand, the husband works outside the household and earns money, which contributes to the progress of the family.

Then, while the wife possesses nothing of her own, the husband earns money which gives him independence over the other members of the family. This process which makes the wife a servant and somehow a slave of the husband urges Mead, M. (1950) to believe that the human family depends

upon social inventions that will make each generation of males want to nurture women and children. Moreover, Bianchi, S.M. and Spain, D. (1986) acknowledge that in two parent families, until such time as wives command salaries equal to their husbands' salaries, on average, it is unlikely that men will devote as much time and energy to the nurturance of the family.

In briefly, this section on women and economy proved that men choose women to satisfy their own material needs. In fact, they need producers who can preserve their home. However, the proverbs studied show that women are lazy. This presumed laziness may be due to the fact that women occupy home activities which cannot be valued neither in time, nor in terms of earnings. Then, men are considered as the fathers of the families and have to nurture women and children. However this situation is caused by the fact of the women oppression which denies women's rights to choose by themselves their work which would guarantee equal independence between both men and women, and would allow members of the household to be complementary instead of being competitive and quarrelling. In the following section we analysed the of the sex in the perception of women by men.

4.5. Women and Sex

In this last but section of the study of sexism in the use of language, we analysed how women's life is influenced by men's understanding of their sexual behaviour.

The first proverb we analysed was *The hell of women is old age*. In this proverb, there is the presupposition that every human being encounters hardships among which there are some which are more difficult than others. Then, the most serious hardship for women is their old age. In fact, if others can find solutions, there is nothing to do when one is facing his old age. However, old age is only a problem to women and not to men. Indeed, men can enjoy their old age with pleasure since another proverb says that *An old man in a house is a good sign* and though *a woman is old as she looks*, says one proverb, *a man is never old till he quits looking.*

This means that men are always useful at any age whereas old women are useless.

This matches with what, Bolinger, D.(1980) writes that being old and female puts one on the verge of being an outcast since one is becoming unattractive and sexually useless according to terms found in the English language which are applied to women and which do not have male equivalents. Such terms are hag, crone, witch, and so on. This situation of equating women with their sex is what Tuttle, L. (1986) calls objectification. That is, the defining of women with regard to their sexual availability and attractiveness to men. Thus, men on the basis of nothing but their sex.

The proverb, which followed in this section, was *When a woman is speaking, listen to what she says with her eyes.* The presupposition is that women can speak like any other human being. People normally speak with their mouths. According to this proverb, a woman can speak with her mouth as well as with her eyes. This means that a woman can express herself with her body language. This is the communication with others by using body movements, gestures and other signs instead of using words. Then, in this proverb, men are invited not to listen to the oral expressions of women however much their importance may be. Rather, they should follow the signs women make.

In fact, it is believed that women express themselves by using various parts of the body which are deemed to express their sexual prowess, or femininity, which weakens men's strength of heart. Thus, body language in women signals seduction or wooing. Then, the proverb invites people not to pay their attention to various other women's topics but sex. However important they may be, other domains of expression are of little necessity. Only sexual expression can be looked at as really important in women. Thus, a woman's mind is not to be analysed apart from her sexual behaviour. In this line of ideas, Rhode, D.L. (ed.) (1990) quotes Freud year's idea that women represent the interests of the family and of sexual life.

Another proverb was *A woman never forgets her sex. She would rather talk with a man than with an angel any day.* An angel is a spirit who is believed to be a messenger or a servant of God. And sexual needs are not satisfied spiritually. So, a spiritual being like an angel cannot help for the satisfaction of sexual desire. One needs the bodily presence of the opposite sex. Any normal human being feels these sexual desires. However, this proverb shows the particularity for women which is that they never forget their sexes.

At any time, they busy themselves with sexual affairs. So, they are always ready to entertain themselves with human beings rather than with angels though they are God's messengers. Women put sex ahead, at the top of their other interests. This proverb assumes that women are only interested in sexual satisfaction. Such an assumption is judged as sexist. That is, what Tuttle, L. (1986) considers that it is the stereotyping of women and the unfair prejudice against women which cause women to be treated as not full human beings, while men are identified as the norm for the society.

Another proverb studied under this section was *All women look the same after the sun goes down.* The presupposition is that women do not look the same during the day. They are different. In fact, women are assumed to be servants of men. Their difference is acknowledged in accordance with what they do as day activities. That is rearing children, preparing food, and keeping home. Then, after the sun goes down, that is, during the night, they can do nothing else except trying to satisfy their sexual needs. The proverb means that women are sexually alike. They are never sexually satisfied. Then, their sexual resemblance is well captured in the following proverb which is the last of the proverbs we analysed under this section.

Is a woman ever satisfied? No, if she were she wouldn't be a woman. According to Bolinger, D. (1980), the simple word 'woman' itself is listed as a synonym of prostitute. We saw above that a woman is a person who is never satisfied. Here, the proverb means that a woman tries to satisfy her need by sexual intercourse. Then, though a woman cannot have enough, her gratification of sexual needs can be regarded as a solution to all her problems.

However, this kind of solution is only partial and a woman is never satisfied. Unlike the folk wisdom, Ferguson, M.A. (1986), supports this ideas by stating that it is their usefulness to men that determines women's value in society. Virgins can be valued because of the possible beauty of youth, and freedom from venereal diseases.

To conclude, this section dealt with the study of how women's life is influenced by men's assumptions on women's sexual behaviour. It was demonstrated that women are looked at as sex objects.

In fact, they are identified with their sex which is a part of their body. They are assumed to put their sexual interests above all. They are also assumed to try satisfy their needs by sexual gratifications.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This work analysed how American proverbs express sexism. We demonstrated that in a family, there is no equality between husband and wife. The husband is the absolute master whereas the wife is considered as a servant just like a slave who can be beaten for pleasure of her master who abuses his authority. Women are given the same place with pet animals such as dogs, cats, and are even considered as inanimate things such as chimneys and walnut trees.

With regard to public life, women are denied the right to appear in public and to be active outside the home. They are considered as the origin of all the trouble and conflicts that humanity has experienced. However men must not be away from women. They need them. There is something to be appreciated in them and this makes them the greatest contradiction of all.

As far as credibility is concerned, we saw that women are not trusted. They are liars, they cannot keep secrets and they are devil's instruments that he uses to fight and to catch men. Then, men are encouraged not to consider any advice from women and not to tell anything important and secret to them.

Economically, though they produce their husbands wealth, their productive activities are underestimated. They are assumed to spend unnecessarily what their husbands earn. The only thing one can get from women is their weeping. They are lazy since their work is never done.

With regard to human sexual behaviour, women are identified with their sex, and any work they do has to be first considered as a sexual expression since women are supposed to be only interested in sexual satisfaction. Indeed any women's need, be it economical, social, political, and so on, is assumed to be satisfied through sexual gratification.

In this work, our first objective was to analyse the relationships which exist between American men and women. We saw that there is a conflicting situation since men are always superior and never equal to women who are looked at as their servants. The latter are beaten and their work is never appreciated positively.

The second objective was to discover gender discrimination in american proverbs. This gender discrimination exists since all men are positively prejudged without considering their *prowess* while all women are prejudged negatively not due to intellectual and physical achievements or disabilities, but due to their sex.

The third objective was to see whether or not American women are viewed as full human beings. We saw that their humanity is essentially denied. They are put in the same rank as cats, dogs, chimneys, nets, and so on. They are considered as sex objects. In fact, their personality is evaluated on the basis of their sex and sexual availability. A woman over thirty years is no more looked at as a full human being. She is regarded as a witch, a hag, a crone, and so on.

The fourth objective was to see how far feminist theories are related to, or different from, American proverbs. We found that proverbs stand in opposition to feminists since these seek to reach the equality of men and women while proverbs seek to weaken women and at the same time to strengthen men.

In the achievement of this work, we met some problems such as the lack of American informants, and the analysis of meanings of proverbs of another culture which is different from our own was in itself a major problem to the full realisation of the work.

However, the first problem was partially solved by relying on a dictionary which was written by people who know well the American culture. The second one was solved by relying on the linguistic knowledge which allowed us to analyse the presuppositions and entailments expressed in each proverb. However, it would have been better if we had found additional works which deal with American proverbs properly, instead of relying only a dictionary .

Another problem was that of insecurity which caused the departure of the former supervisor of this work when it was in its beginning. That problem of insecurity made also impossible for us the access to the American Embassy where we think we could get additional data about American feminism and wisdom.

Though we met such enormous problems, our objectives were achieved. However we cannot say that this work exhausted this area of research. For further studies one can continue this research and analyse, for example, how to solve the problem of sexism through the use of proverbs, how other fields of literature such as poems, novels, riddles, and so on, express sexism and how to solve that problem. If we studied sexism expressed in American proverbs which are indeed English proverbs, one can study how proverbs in other languages such as Kirundi, Kiswahili, French, and so on, express sexism.

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APPENDIX

LIST OF PROVERBS WHOSE MEANINGS WERE STUDIED IN THIS WORK

A man is a king in his home.
A good wife and health are a man's best wealth.

When a man takes a wife, he ceases to dread hell.

Women are necessary evils.

A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree : the more you beat them, the better they be.

A woman, a cat, and a chimney should never leave the house.

Marriage is both hell and heaven.

The world is full of wicked women.

A woman is only a woman.

Is a woman ever satisfied? No, if she were, she would not be a woman.

The fewer women, the less the trouble.

Next to no wife, a good wife is best.

Women and dogs cause too much strife.

A woman's place is at home.

There was never a conflict without women.

Women are the roots of all evils.

A women is the greatest contradiction of all.

Choose a wife on a Saturday rather than on a Sunday.

Women are the devil's nets.

A woman's hair is long. Her tongue is longer.

Blessed is the woman who can keep a secret and the man who will not tell his wife.

The only secret a woman can keep is that of her age.

A woman over thirty who will tell her exact age will tell anything.

A woman could keep secret, but she needs another one.

He knows little who will tell his wife all he knows.

Tell a woman and you tell the world.

A woman knows a bit more than Satan

A woman can throw out the window more than a man can bring in at the front door.

Man pays, but woman spends.

A woman is a dish for gods.

Men must work, women must weep.

The hell of a woman is old age.

An old man in a house is a good sign.

A woman is old as she looks, a man is never old till he quits looking

When a woman is speaking, listen to what she says with her eyes.

A woman never forgets her sex. She would rather talk with a man than with an angel any day.

All women look the same after the sun goes down.