

The Impact of HIV/AIDS Message in Selected Kenyan Primary School Texts: A Linguistic Perspective

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Abstract

In Kenya, HIV and AIDS education has been integrated into the school curriculum as an effort to curb transmission of HIV and AIDS. The current study identified the phrases with HIV and AIDS message in selected textbooks of English, Science and Social Sciences in primary schools which were classified according to Mills (1995). Standards of textuality in the phrases were then examined and their impact on the readers evaluated as per Beaugrande & Dressler classification (1981). The target population were class seven pupils and their teachers, in five randomly selected primary schools in Nakuru Municipality Division, Kenya.

Oral interviews and elicitation tests were used as data collecting tools. Evaluation of 39 phrases identified from 6 textbooks showed that none of the standard of textuality was upheld 100%. However, acceptability scored the highest (71.7%) while informativity scored the least (29.2%). Cohesion & Coherence, Intentionality, Situationality and Intertextuality had average scores ranging between 45 to 67.8%. It was concluded that the extent, to which each standard of textuality is upheld, correlates to a text's appropriateness. Therefore, text book writers should design material that upholds all the standards of textuality to enhance effective communication. Such a move would ensure that the education system achieves its objectives.

Keywords: Cohesion, Coherence, Intentionality, Situationality, Informativity, Acceptability, Intertextuality

1. Introduction

According to NASCOP (2001), Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has become an extremely serious problem in many countries around the world. It is causing a myriad devastating health, social, economic and development problems particularly in developing countries where many governments have declared it an emergency. In Kenya, most people contract HIV through heterosexual contact while a significant portion of mothers pass the virus to the child through pregnancy, delivery and breastfeeding. It is estimated that 5% to 10% of infections in developing countries like Kenya is acquired through blood transfusion (NASCOP, 2001). After the government of Kenya declared HIV and AIDS a national disaster, the national AIDS Control Council was formed to guide the control efforts and mitigate the impact of the epidemic. Against the reality of a fast growing epidemic and the prohibitive cost of anti retro viral drugs, more efforts are aimed at prevention through increased awareness about the risk of transmission; a new challenge to the Education system according to World Bank (2002).

AIDS education was introduced in primary schools to help learners acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes that would assist them adopt behaviour that would prevent them from HIV infection (KIE, 1992). Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) produced the first AIDS syllabus in 1999 amidst a lot of protests from some religious and political leaders who saw this move as an introduction of sex education in schools (Chukwu, 2003). At first, HIV/AIDS was taught as a subject on its own but this module changed in 2003 when the concepts were integrated within other teaching subjects. Different units are spread throughout the eight years of the primary school curriculum. The full implementation of this new module was achieved in 2006 in Kenyan primary schools. Some religious and political leaders complained that AIDS education was going to be more harmful than beneficial especially to the primary school child. They argued that no language would be appropriate enough to communicate such concepts to children in an acceptable manner. This paper in analyzing the impact of the language used in primary school text books seek to establish whether these concerns are valid or not. The specific objective is to discuss the effects of some identified stylistics on the reader as seen from the context of the standards of textuality.

According to Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), a text is a communicative, occurrence which meets seven standards of textuality. These include, cohesion which refers to the sticking together of the various elements of the text to signal a continuously developing theme and coherence which refers to the continuity of senses among the knowledge activated by the expressions of the text in such a way that they link the meaning of utterances in a discourse or sentences in a text (Abushihab, 2010). Others are intentionality which refers to the purpose of the writer in producing a text, acceptability referring to the text receivers' attitude in communication and informativity which designates the extent to which a presentation is new or unexpected for the readers. The other two standards are situationality and intertextuality which refers to facts which render a text relevant to a current situation or occurrence and the way in which production or reception of a given text depends upon the participants' knowledge of other texts, respectively. According to Fox (1995), intertextuality is a feature of every text.

The paper provides empirical data on the kind of language that is used in these text books and the effect that this has on the primary school reader with regard to HIV/AIDS and education. The observations also help to determine whether education as an interventional programme for HIV/AIDS transmission is making any positive contribution in society. These findings also have pedagogical implications which are of benefit to teachers and the general society.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Study Area

This research was a case study of Municipality Division of Nakuru District, Kenya and it targeted all the primary schools in the Division. Due to cost and logistic reasons however, sample schools were purposefully selected from across the five Zones in the Division depending on the text books that the schools were using. The Division had seventy three Primary schools and only five schools were randomly selected to comprise six percent of the target population.

2.2 Permission and Ethical Issues

Authorization to carry out the research was awarded by the department of Literature, languages and linguistics, Egerton University. The District Education Officer (DEO) also gave written permission to collect data from schools in the Nakuru Municipality Division. The head teachers, the deputy head teachers and the class teachers in the schools selected gave the consent and facilitated in the collection of data. The information given was handled with confidentiality and only for purposes of the current study. As a result then, neither the names of the respondents nor those of their schools are mentioned in this study.

2.3 Target Population

One of the assumptions of this study was that text book readers were both teachers and pupils. Therefore ten pupils from class seven were randomly sampled in each of the five schools, providing a total of fifty respondents. Two class seven teachers were also selected out of those who taught the targeted subjects, giving a total of ten respondents. Class seven was purposefully chosen as the most ideal for this study because it was the class that had been exposed to the integrated curriculum for a longer time considering that class eight texts were designed for revision mainly.

2.4 Selection of Subjects and Textbooks

Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) has recommended five core subjects in the primary school curriculum. These are Mathematics, Science, English, Kiswahili and Social Studies. The study purposefully selected three out of the five subjects and these included English, Science and Social Studies. Following a preliminary survey to establish the recommended textbooks in the primary schools for the selected subjects, two text books in each of the three subjects were randomly selected giving a total of six text books. The six text books titles were *Primary Science*, *Explore English*, *Understanding Science*, *Comprehensive Social Studies*, *Primary English* and *Our Lives Today*.

2.5 *Data collection Tools*

These included unstructured interviews and the reader-response elicitation test.

2.5.1 Unstructured Interviews

The study used an unstructured oral interview for the teachers with the researcher conducting them in person. The questions were based on the study text. The teacher being interviewed was supplied with a copy of the text books in the subject he or she teaches. They were given time to read through the section on HIV and AIDS. The researcher then interviewed each one of them separately. The questions were designed in such a way that the respondent provided his or her own answers regarding the textbooks and how the learners respond to them. The information obtained was coded into the seven standards of textuality.

2.5.2 The Reader Response Elicitation Test

The test was designed to determine how the standards of textuality have been upheld. The standards of textuality provided the categories within which the questions were coded. A one hour test was given and it constituted of questions whose marks added up to a total of thirty. The readers were also supplied with copies of the text books for reference because some questions were picture based. All the pupils responded to the test but only ten scripts were randomly sampled for marking in every school. The researcher then marked all the readers' responses and awarded marks as per category (standard of textuality) and also the totals as per respondent.

2.6 *Types of Data Collected*

The data comprised of thirty nine sentences or phrases identified from the text books and from responses and answers to the questions given out in both the interviews for the teachers and the reader response elicitation test for the pupils. The researcher had read all the six sampled texts and identified the 39 phrases or sentences that had HIV and AIDS related message. These thirty nine phrases constituted the study text. Other written records include the information that was obtained during the interviews, and the responses from the pupils' reader response elicitation test, since they were in written form. The interviews of the teachers from each school were audio recorded. Each respondent was first supplied with a copy of the text book on the subject he or she teaches and was asked to refer specifically to the section containing information on HIV and AIDS. Each one of the interviewees was given time to read through the excerpts after which a personal interview was conducted. A total of ten interviews were done and the responses were analyzed and recorded. Stylistic features used in the school textbooks with reference to HIV and AIDS concepts were identified and the effects they had on the readers. The identified thirty nine phrases were coded into different stylistic devices (linguistic choices) according to the classification described by Mills (1995).

3. Results and Discussions

The results of the research were based on how far the standards of textuality were upheld as seen from the reader's perspective. This was made possible by the fact that the elicitation test

was constructed on the basis of the seven standards of textuality proposed by Beaugrande and Dressler (1981). These standards were cohesion, coherence, intentionality, situationality, informativity, acceptability and intertextuality.

On cohesion and coherence, only two respondents managed to score 100% which translates to 4 per cent while 33 per cent out of 50 respondents achieved a score above 50 per cent. On intentionality, 12% of the respondents scored 100% while 82% achieved a score above 50%. For acceptability, fourteen respondents scored 100% in this category which translates to 28% of the research population, while only 6% scored below half of the total mark. The summary of the readers' responses to cohesion and coherence, intentionality and acceptability are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Showing reader's responses (%) to cohesion and coherence, intentionality and acceptability standards following an elicitation test.

Score (Scale of 5)	Cohesion & Coherence	Intentionality	Acceptability
0	2	4	-
1	8	4	6
2	24	10	28
3	40	18	38
4	22	52	28
5	4	12	-
Total	100	100	100

On informativity, 50% of the research population obtained only one score while 4% couldn't respond to some of the items correctly. On situationality, the research established that none of the respondents were able to respond to all items in this category correctly, while five did not score any mark. On intertextuality it was established that only 6% of the respondents could respond to all items correctly. Table 2 shows the readers' responses to these three standards of textuality.

Table 2. Shows the reader's responses (%) to informativity, situationality and intertextuality.

Score (Scale of 6)	Informativity	Situationality	Intertextuality
0	4	10	2
1	50	20	6
2	24	20	30
3	12	32	36
4	8	18	20
5	2	0	6
6	0	-	-
Total	100	100	100

The linguistic choices referred to, are stylistics features that the identified phrases were coded into. These phrases which were obtained from the textbooks, provided the researcher with the primary data that made an analysis of the 'effects' possible. This was achieved through constructing the reader response elicitation test and the oral interview for teachers on the basis of the standards of textuality and the stylistics features identified. Some of the phrases were coded under euphemisms for instance, "the killer disease" (Ngugi and Njoki, 2004) which is used to refer to the disease, HIV/AIDS. Others were coded under transitivity choices for instance, "people who are infected by the HIV virus are said to be suffering from AIDS" (Nyoro and Muguti, 2004). There are others still that were coded under presupposition and inferences for instance, "AIDS has no cure as of now" (Karaka *et al.*, 2004). This study is founded on the premise that a text is a communicative occurrence that meets seven standards of textuality. The seven standards are cohesion, coherence, intentionality, situationality, informativity, acceptability and intertextuality (Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981, p. 181). The impact on the reader in each case is determined by how far the standards of textuality have been upheld in the text books. According to Beaugrande and Dressler (1981), the upholding of these standards is what determines a text's appropriateness.

Cohesion is the sticking together of various elements of the text. It also refers to the manner in which the components that the readers see on the pages in print are mutually connected. This study established that cohesion has been upheld in most of the phrases. For instance consider the following phrases:

- a) "HIV/AIDS has no respect for age, race, religion profession" (Nyoro and Muguti, 2004);

- b) “Anybody can get infected with HIV/AIDS” (Karaka *et al.*, 2004);
- c) “Anytime we handle an AIDS patient we have to avoid infection” (Karaka *et al.*, 2004).

In these phrases, the syntactic organization patterns upon the surface elements of the text were easy to follow and understand according to the teachers who were interviewed. With reference to examples drawn from Karaka *et al.*, (2004), there is cohesion realized through paraphrase whereby an idea is repeated through different expressions as seen in the example of phrases below:-

- a) “People with HIV/AIDS suffer from several different diseases”;
- b) “People infected with HIV/AIDS have weakened immune system”.

The study also established that cohesion in the texts is supported by tense and aspect as illustrated through the examples given above. In such cases, distinctions such as past, present and future times are made by the reader. For instance, the examples from the above mentioned text, through the use of the present tense signal the view that HIV /AIDS issues are a current debate. This study observed that cohesion alone was not enough to enable the reader derive meaning that would enable him or her respond to the elicitation test. This is because the message conveyed through the various cohesive ties needed the aspect of meaning before a reader could appropriately respond to the issues raised in the elicitation test. According to Morgan and Sellner (1980), cohesive devices present in a text are there as a result of the coherence which derives that text. This explains why the two standards of textuality were put in the same category in this study.

Coherence is the continuity of senses among the knowledge activated by the expressions of the text. According to Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, p. 84), a text ‘makes sense’ because there is continuity of senses among the knowledge activated by the expressions of the text. This research established that some expressions presented through the various cohesive ties seemed not to make sense to the reader as seen from the fact that the respondents left some blank spaces in the elicitation test. Such a situation can be avoided by considering the observation that cohesive ties are semantic markers that link ideas and guide the reader (Williams, 1983). The writer’s text world and its relation to our experience of the phenomenal world depend both on these overt markers and the ways in which situations are described and sequenced (Beaugrande and Dressler (1981). A major observation of this research is that there is need for text book writers to look more keenly into cohesion and coherence. 34 % of the respondents got a score below half which is quite significant considering that cohesion and coherence are the most obvious standards of textuality (Beaugrande and Dressler; 1981, p. 113).

Intentionality is the notion that subsumes the intention of text producers, for instance maintaining the intended topic. In the texts under study, one of the desired goals is communicating HIV and AIDS message to the reader which according to the respondents is not always maintained. For instance, in Kamau *et al.*, (2004, p. 127), the message is presented as a factor amongst many others that “affect African Economics”. Such an expression has

several presuppositions leading to a reader making various conclusions at times different from the intended one. Two percent of the respondents scored 100% while 82% got a score above half. This means that intentionality is significantly upheld in texts under study.

Acceptability in this study concerned itself with the text receiver's attitude which is realized through readers' ability to extract operating instructions from utterances in the text. 34 % of the respondents scored below half the total mark. Teachers interviewed expressed the view that the text books do not always communicate effectively since in some cases they require inference and if the reader's interpretation is different from the writer's, then the operating instructions derived will be different. Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, p. 124) advise that sentences are more readily acceptable if their expression elicit mental imagery presumably because these images assist in devising contexts. Such an interpretation is what enabled readers to respond to questions in this category appropriately.

On Informativity, questions in the elicitation test were structured in such a way that it was clear that responses to issues on the extent to which the texts message was new was poor compared to others. 4 % of the research population obtained zero scores while half the population attained only one score. The items in the elicitation test which required readers to explain for instance what they understand by "slimming disease", "the curse", "made clean by another uncle", were left blank by many respondents which means that probably the information was new to the readers or even unexpected. Communication is also endangered by overloading receiver's processing, for instance by requiring that he or she refers to the context, co-text and background knowledge for the expressions to make sense.

Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, p. 145) however notes that every text is somewhat informative no matter how predictable the form and content may be. Some texts have low informativity and need to be upgraded. This is probably what the texts under study require since they have low informativity as can be observed from reader's responses. This study recommends that textbook writers consider informativity more seriously to ensure that communication is not endangered. This can be achieved through ensuring that: -

- a) Phrases are accessible at the literal level of individual words which sentences are composed of;
- b) Patterns of background knowledge required to give phrases meaning are accessible to the reader;
- c) The receiver's processing is not overloaded to the point of endangering communication.

Situationality is the designation for factors which render a text relevant to a situation of occurrence. The accessible evidence in the situation is fed into the model along with our prior knowledge and expectations of how the real world is organized (Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, p. 9, 16). The readers responses to items based on the pictures in the texts depended heavily on the influence of where the text is presented. This agrees with the observation that the appearance of a text at a given time or in a given context will influence the readers in their interpretation (<http://web.letras.up.pt/icrowcli/textual.html>). This study observed that

while concepts based on the science texts deal more with the scientific implications of the disease such as causes, mode of transmission, medication and so forth, those based on social studies texts describe the social effects such as the role of the family in assisting the victim and the implications of HIV/AIDS on the society. The study established that 50% of the respondents scored below half the mark with 10% scoring zero. Writers therefore should guide the situations in a manner favourable to their goals. Using situation management, information should be made relevant to the society in which it occurs. For instance, the euphemism “the killer disease” taken from Ngugi and Njoki’s *Explore English* (2004, p. 171) appears misplaced considering the context of the story within which it occurs.

Intertextuality is the way in which reception or production of a given text depends upon the participants’ knowledge of other texts. The test items in this category were designed in such a way that they sought to determine how the reader’s reception of the texts depends on their knowledge of HIV and AIDS acquired from other texts. According to Beaugrande and Dressler (1981, p. 182), such knowledge can be applied by a process describable in terms of mediation. Only 2% of the respondents scored more than half of the total score. Teachers interviewed suggested that while intertextuality can be a useful method of learning, it should be noted that at times, no measures are taken to moderate the content for instance from the mass media. Text books therefore should be clear and easy to understand so that as readers apply such processes as mediation, the information presented will be made clearer instead of confusing. The performances of the standards of textuality are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Showing analysis of readers’ responses to the elicitation test

Standards of Textuality	Overall performance (%)
Cohesion and Coherence	55.6
Intentionality	67.8
Acceptability	71.7
Informativity	29.2
Situationality	45.0
Intertextuality	50.2

The analysis also quantified observations that had been put across by respondents to the oral interview for instance that some information is not clear and so not accessible to the reader (established through the analysis on cohesion and coherence). It can also be observed that none of the standards has been upheld 100 % as demonstrated (Figure 1).

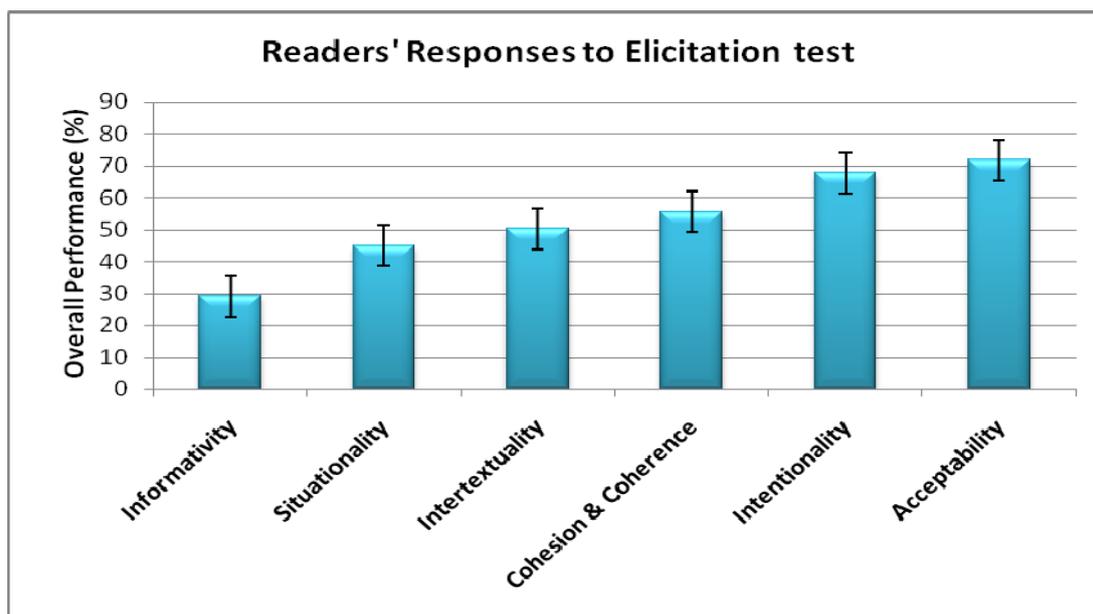


Figure 1. Readers responses to the elicitation test

The study also observes that the upholding of intentionality and acceptability is higher compared to the other standards (Figure 1). This means that in the texts under study, readers were able to extract operating instructions and that the purpose of the text which is maintaining the intended topic is achieved. The upholding of cohesion and coherence, intertextuality and situationality is relatively average which could only mean that there is need for text book writers to ensure that the texts they produce are clear enough to make sense to readers, and that the situations in which the message is presented will appeal to the reader's prior knowledge of how the world is organised hence rendering the text relevant.

Informativity is the least upheld in these texts and therefore the study recommends that the HIV/AIDS message in Primary school textbooks need to be considered more carefully so that though the information may be new or unexpected by the readers, they can still be made to appreciate it. As Abushihab (2010) suggests, the text produced should enable the text receiver do a motivation search to find out what the new occurrences signify, why they were selected and how they can be integrated back into the continuity that is the basis of communication. The analysis seems to suggest a very close relationship between the upholding of cohesion and coherence, intertextuality and situationality on one hand with intentionality and acceptability on the other, in a given text.

4. Conclusion

It is the contention of this study that the extent to which each standard of textuality is upheld correlates, to a text's appropriateness as seen through the findings of how each of the standards is upheld in the texts under study. Therefore, text book writers should consider them seriously as they design their material, bearing in mind that for such texts to be effective communicative occurrences, they must uphold standards of textuality. Upholding the standards only to an extent may mean that the impact is also only to an extent as

demonstrated through the readers responses to the elicitation test where no standard is upheld 100 per cent. It's also evident that each standard has its contribution towards achieving appropriateness in a text and so they should all be upheld. Such an innovation would contribute positively towards ensuring that our education system achieves its objectives.

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