

# Euphemistic Sugarcoats of Bribe in Dholuo: A Cognitive Integration Model

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## ABSTRACT

The supposition by cognitive linguists that certain language data requires analysis above conventional provisions of grammar is the take-off point in the studies exploring the relationship between cognition and language. This article examines the euphemisms of bribe in Dholuo using cognitive integration theory, a fabric dealing with human experiences and how individuals conceptualize them. The study adopted a descriptive research design in which respondents were asked to mention euphemistic and dysphemistic alternatives of bribe in Dholuo. An interview schedule was used to collect data which was transcribed, categorized, quantified and then processed using CIT to get the metaphorical mappings of the emergent structures. For a better understanding of these euphemisms, the study considered how local contexts work with mental spaces to produce a network of pragmatic inferences in the human brain. The general finding of this study is that bribe is food, bribe is fuel and bribe is utility. The article, therefore, recommends that for a better understanding of euphemisms, one should consider contexts expressed in language since such yield novel meanings. The study concludes that euphemistic expressions are common ways of conceptualizing bribe in Kenya. The study further establishes that a euphemism, when subjected to inadequacies of grammar alone, robs one of the full ability to appreciate new interpretations. On these grounds, the study invokes the lenses of a cognitive linguist.

**Key Words:** *Bribe, Corruption, Dholuo, Cognition and Language, Euphemism*

## INTRODUCTION

The creativity of language provides semantic or formal processes that help avoid offensive and obscene overtones while discussing certain emotive topics. As Jin (2013) observes, certain forbidden subjects are often discussed with relative degrees of linguistic interdiction. This means that natural languages are results of human experiences which dictate permissible words within a conversation or piece of writing. The relationship between language and culture in any society yields certain phenomena for expressing anxieties, shame, conflicts and fears (Al-Saidi & Rashid, 2016). Examples of such linguistic phenomena include taboo words and euphemisms. Wahab, et al. (2016) define the term “euphemism” as a mild and indirect expression that avoids being offensive because blunt mention of such would be quite embarrassing and obscene. This is in agreement with Anudo’s observation that a euphemism is used as a polite word to avoid “possible loss of face” in a conversation (Anudo, 2012: p. x). Dingfang and Jinyuan (1995) note that social constraints on language dictate what people should avoid mentioning directly for example death, sex, body effluvia, bribe and certain diseases. It therefore follows that such words are omitted from the lexicon of a language thus necessitating the invention of certain lexical items to fill up the linguistic gap. This is the manner in which euphemisms are created. According to Nelson and Peterson (1975), the nature of euphemisms is such that even if the society has words for certain taboos, culture influences the appropriate reference to such taboos for linguistic decorum and respectability in speech. Thus, euphemisms are not only used to grease discourses but also establish and strengthen social cohesion and stability. The investigation of euphemisms as a linguistic phenomenon is salient because any language devoid of euphemistic sugarcoats is considered a blemished code of communication.

The main reason for the influx of euphemisms in any language is verbal humanity and sentimental equilibrium (Fernández, 2010). Normally, the reluctance to mention a subject like “bribe” is due to the general discomfort associated with the term. Writing about the subtle ways of mentioning taboos such as corruption related terms, Li (2011) underscores that although there is often a reluctance to directly mention bribe, there are certain communicative situations where the term corruption or bribe cannot be dodged. This normally happens in formal print media where such issues as bribery are addressed as the writers reveal strategies used to conceal the intention of the corrupt officials. Considering that corruption in various shades of bribery ails the country Kenya, it is imperative to investigate the various euphemistic coinages used to hole this menace up.

Euphemistic sugarcoats of bribe, the thrust of this article, resides deeply in metaphoric correspondences of target and source domains. As Fernández (2006) observes, euphemistic reference is often realized through metaphorization of domains. A number of scholars (Black, 2007; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; and Ashforth & Anand, 2003) concur that the topic bribery is often handled in such illusive terms that unless a contextual inference is made, meaning automatically eludes the victims. Thus, the burden of this article will be to use contextual information surrounding every euphemism of bribe within the Kenyan locale to generate novel meanings within the postulates of the Conceptual Integration Theory proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). Accordingly, this topic is appropriate since delimited attention has hitherto been paid to the role of cognitive linguistics in unmasking meaning where provisions of grammar are not up to the scratch. This is the thought echoed by Anudo (2012) that the application of cognitive semantics in unmasking euphemisms has not elicited much emphasis from modern linguists, thus informing the present research. Further, studies on euphemisms using CIT have not attracted much scholarly ink (Anudo, 2012) hence the justification for this study as a way of building a resource within cognitive linguistics.

## Literature Review

A number of scholars have written on euphemisms of various taboo words. According to Allan and Burridge (1991), the word “euphemism” is etymologically derived from two Greek words “eu” and “pheme” which mean “good” and “speech” respectively. The two roots can therefore be combined to mean “a speech with good words”. According to Black (2007), the whole concept of euphemism involves making reference to a taboo in a very pleasant, pretty and less direct manner that avoids offense. It is worth noting that although euphemistic studies have elicited much attention, cognitive apparatus has not been fully exploited in explaining this linguistic phenomenon. For instance, Rawson (1981), in documenting the historical background of euphemisms, records euphemistic terms but does not propose an approach for studying them. This study is, therefore, useful in the categorization of euphemistic words according to certain semantic fields. As a result of human creative interaction with language, euphemisms are considered pragmatic covers in speech aimed at avoiding loss of face in any communication.

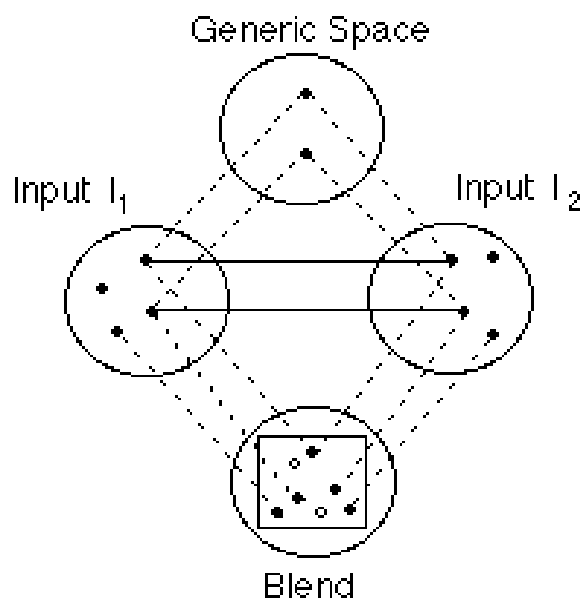
This pragmatic aspect is useful in the contextual analysis of the collected items in terms of correspondences with background information. Further, as Linfoot-Ham (2005) underscores, euphemisms are products of sociolinguistics and one word may be taboo in a community while it may not be considered such in another community. Therefore, it is very important to utilize the cognitive apparatus against the background of the euphemistic items in order to generate pragmatic sense. Euphemisms are categorized according to the degree of positivity or negativity. Rawson (1981) classifies euphemisms into two categories: positive and negative depending on whether the words are connected to taboo words or not. Rawson (1981) notes that positive euphemism refers to instances of exaggerating certain terms for example occupational titles which may be humiliating especially among occupational titles like soldier (watchman), branch manager (charcoal burner) and sanitation engineer (cleaner). However, a negative euphemism involves diminishing a situation in a defensive manner thus reducing the power of a taboo word that cannot be dealt with directly. Such negative euphemisms are considered traditional because they are directly connected with the taboo terms. In this research, bribe in Kenya is majorly wrapped in euphemistic sugarcoats for example *tea* and *pen* (cf. Findings and Discussions).

The functional aspects of language use in any community has not been given enough attention especially the use of cognitive linguistics in conceptualization of euphemisms (Anudo, 2012: 21). It is therefore the aim of this article to fill the research gap by using cognitive integration theory (within the domain of cognitive linguistics) to unmask euphemisms of “bribe” in Dholuo. Anudo (2012) adds that because certain items of language are likely to fade out due to the dynamic nature of languages, cognitive pragmatics is necessary in analyzing them within the time of conversational use. This is the very idea echoed by Croft and Cruse (2004) who observe that for purposes of diachronic studies, cognitive pragmatics is very helpful.

The use of any euphemism is motivated by fear of shame and punishment (Musfiroh, 2014). The indirect reference triggers generation of many terms that can only be appreciated within the locale. According to Duda (2011), it is salient to interrogate the motivations of these fears in order to come up with substantive meaning of the euphemisms. The above reviewed scholars reveal that the role of Cognitive Linguistics in unwrapping euphemisms has not been given proper audience. For this reason, we present the conceptualization of euphemisms using mental spaces.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by the conceptual integration theory (CIT) proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). This theory establishes the role of the mind in forming networks of cognition both within the mind and within the environment. Also called blending theory, it penetrates minds to develop connections between local understanding and the general human thought. Further developed by Coulson and Oakly (2005), CIT is an apparatus that explains the relationship between what we conceive and that which exists in the immediate context through vital relations. As Fauconnier (1997) notes, CIT retrieves information from the mind through a chain of mental spaces which are the partial cognitive structures or assemblies constructed as we think for purposes of local understanding. In the words of Coulson and Oakley (2005), the connection for local understanding consists of four webbed spaces: *input spaces*, *a generic space*, *the blended space* and *the emergent structure*. A diagrammatic representation of the mental spaces is as shown below.



*Figure. 1 Blended space (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002)*

The web of the four mental spaces contributes to novel meanings. The meaning of a blend arises due to such relationships as *identity, time, space, cause-effect, uniqueness, part/whole, representation, similarity, analogy, disanalogy, category, intentionality* and *role* which exist between the original word and the new meaning conceived by the mind. These are called vital relations and represented using solid lines in the diagrammatical analysis. The vital relations help in elaboration of new meaning. According to Coulson and Oakley (2005),

the analysis using CIT involves creating mappings in the input spaces describing which links are preserved depending on the features emerging from each space. The emergent structure will accommodate reasoning since it arises from the application of one domain to the other mental spaces. This is often described then semantic networks spread to match information in long term memory with the new meaning. Finally, as Facuconnier and Turner (2002, p.44) note, when the links among the four spaces are neatly established, novel comprehensions pop out automatically to yield new meanings.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the following methodology.

### Data collection procedure

The study adopted qualitative research design. According to Bryman (2006), qualitative research design is a type of precursory research seeking to inform readers of phenomena experienced in certain contexts. In particular, the article used a descriptive research design because it sought to decode the euphemistic sugarcoats of bribe as experienced in the Kenyan background. The article is therefore a qualitative analysis of a sample of 25 responses given to the question: "There are words Kenyans avoid mentioning directly due to shame and discomfort. Name any three polite words in Dholuo used to avoid direct reference to bribe and explain why such terms are used."

The article purposively sampled 20 native Dholuo speakers (ten males and ten females) who could read and write fluently in the language. This is what was to get a representative data beyond which only saturation and disinterest may occur (Rubin, 1987, p. 11). Further, Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003, p. 84) note that for qualitative research, a sample size should consist of items that "lie under 50" because going beyond this reveal nothing new. Gender was considered an independent variable in production of euphemisms as buoyed by Gentile (1993). Out of the sample, five items were then randomly sampled for diagrammatic representation using the mental spaces.

### Data Presentation

The collected data from the respondents was presented in two Tables. Table 1 presents all the euphemisms as given by the 20 Dholuo speakers while Table 2 will present conceptual mappings for the purposes of developing mental spaces. In total, the study collected 25 euphemisms of bribe in Dholuo as presented in Table 1 below.

*Table 1: Euphemisms of bribe in Dholuo collected from 20 respondents*

	DHOLUO	GLOSS				
			M	F	SP	CM
1	Chai	Tea	10	10	MET	FOOD
2	Lanych	Lunch	10	10	MET	FOOD
3	Kwincha	Quencher	4	1	MET	FOOD
4	Ring'o	Beef	8	2	MET	FOOD
5	A lot	Vegetable	5	1	MET	FOOD
6	Dondo	Beans	7	-	MET	FOOD
7	Soda	Soda	9	5	MET	FOOD
8	So dhogabor	Put fat in my mouth	3	-	CIR	FOOD
8	Makati	Bread	2	-	MET	FOOD
9	Petrol	Petrol	6	1	MET	FUEL

	DHOLUO	GLOSS				
			M	F	SP	CM
10	Nguvu	Energy	5	1	MET	FUEL
11	Wiro moo	Oil my palms	3	3	CIR	FUEL
13	Dho kalam	Mouth of a pen	8	3	MET	UTY
14	Tiket	Ticket	6	6	MET	UTY
15	Nyiew Bamba	Buy airtime	7	4	CIR	UTY
16	Asoya	For the pocket	9	9	MET	VT
17	Yawo wang'	For the eyes	4	1	CIR	VT
18	Wuomaber	Talk nicely	7	7	CIR	VT
19	Mosa	Greet me	3	1	CIR	VT
20	Gimoromatin	Something small	10	10	UND	VT
21	Awuodha	From the pocket	1	-	MET	VT
22	Gera	Build me	6	3	UND	VT
23	Girdhok	For the mouth	1	-	MET	VT
24	Gonya	Untie me	10	10	CIR	VT
25	Chiemkoda	Eat with me	3	1	CIR	VT
26	Goya giguok	Beat me with a dog	1	-	CIR	VT
27	Menya	Shed light on me	3	2	CIR	VT
28	Nena tenge	See me aside	1	1	CIR	VT
29	Nyiewachiel	Buy one	7	-	CIR	FOOD
30	Gwonyng'eya	Scratch my back	7	2	CIR	VT

KEY: M- Male, F-Female, SP- Semantic Process, CM – Conceptual Metaphor.

**Table 2: Conceptual Domains of bribe in Dholuo**

DOMAIN	No	Point B
FOOD	10	33.3
FUEL	3	10
UTILITY (UTY)	3	10
VAGUE THING(VT)	14	46.7
TOTAL	30	100

## DATA ANALYSIS

### Bribe is tea

Tea is the second most common drink after water in Kenya. This beverage is common to all in the whole world and has a strong aromatic and compelling attraction (Yamamoto, Juneja & Kim, 1997). In most plantations, the plant can be seen to be evergreen and attractive. Most users of tea agree that the beverage is a coolant with unparalleled flavour and highly addictive. Yamamoto, Juneja and Kim (1997) note that tea evokes tastes of sweetness, nuttiness, floral fragrance and a grassy welcome. Both tea and bribe share the quality of a compelling attraction. For instance, one with the thirst of money behaves like a hungry individual in need of food and when the money is provided, he is relieved (Ries, 2002). Secondly, both tea and bribe (money) are basic needs. On the other hand, it was noted that the thought of receiving money is just as stimulating as being given a cup of tea to drink. Additionally, both tea and money, as human needs, are insatiable and have to be sought perpetually.

In the analysis using CIT, the features of tea and those of bribe are represented using the four mental spaces. The first two spaces represent features of tea and bribe that map onto each other, that is, the source and target domains respectively. The third space is the generic space and contains matched information from the two input spaces. The matching roles and classifications are also mapped here. Lastly, the blended space draws information from the three spaces for the meaning of the euphemism. Bribe is therefore a sweet insatiable substance. Consider the diagram below:

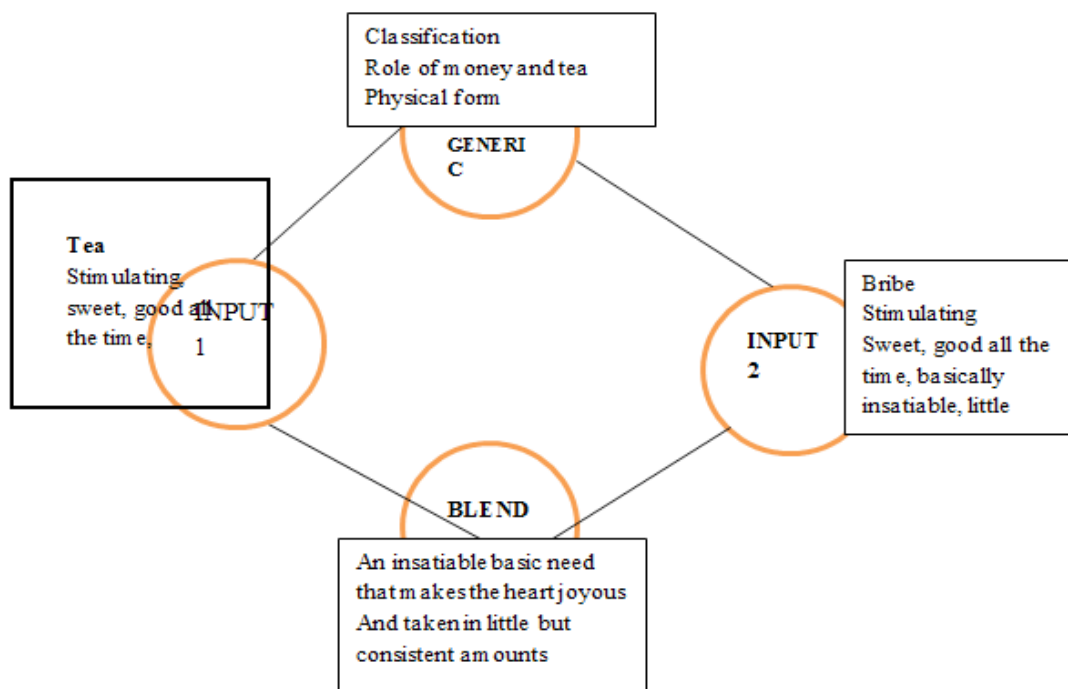


Figure 2: Mapping of the Euphemism "bribe is tea"

### Bribe is lunch

Lunch is the second meal after breakfast. In order of importance, it is the second most important meal. According to Gross et al. (2004), lunch is often taken around midday and considered a very important meal since most people often skip breakfast. Among the Luo, the second most important meal is lunch. However, lunch, depending on one's level of income, can be taken any time. Also, the amount and composition of lunch varies from home to home. It is therefore true that lunch does not have a fixed composition or form. According to Lee and Yoo (1995), lunch, unlike breakfast, is relatively thinner and may not have predetermined quantity in most cultures.

Thus, one would take whatever is available at the time. Lunch is therefore not a huge amount as compared to breakfast. Lee and Yoo (1995) add that often, one survives on lunch only, thus making the meal very basic. Bribe on the other side is often taken in small amounts just like lunch. It was noted that bribe, just like lunch, is taken any time. Also, bribe does not have a fixed form but may not only involve money but also other favours. Just like lunch that is perhaps the only meal during the day, bribe is very important, and all victims may not escape giving it however little the amount. Lastly, most digestive activities take place during the day thus making lunch the key source of energy just like bribe. A diagrammatic representation is as shown below.

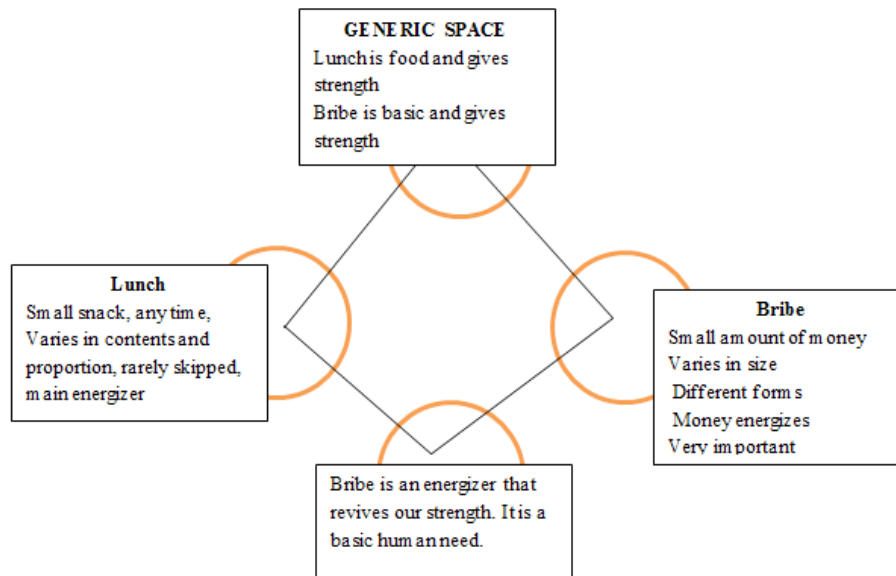


Figure 3: Mapping of the Euphemism “bribe is lunch”.

### Bribe is petrol /oil

Petrol is a liquid used as fuel, a substance that reacts to produce energy. The consumption of petrol is such that the energy is not stored but consumable. This means that a user of petrol has to constantly fill the fuel tank because the energy is non-renewable. Also, as Berglund and Petersson (1990) underscore, petrol is one of the most inflammable substances that should be handled with lots of care. Thus, it is not to be dealt with carelessly. Additionally, the energy produced by petrol can serve a number of purposes and run numerous engines. Using CIT, bribe is a consumable item that does not last forever. In fact, the thirst for money is unquenchable. Secondly, just like petrol that is handled with extra care, bribe is handled with utmost secrecy. The uses of money are diverse, just like the uses of petrol. In the generic space, we consider the use.

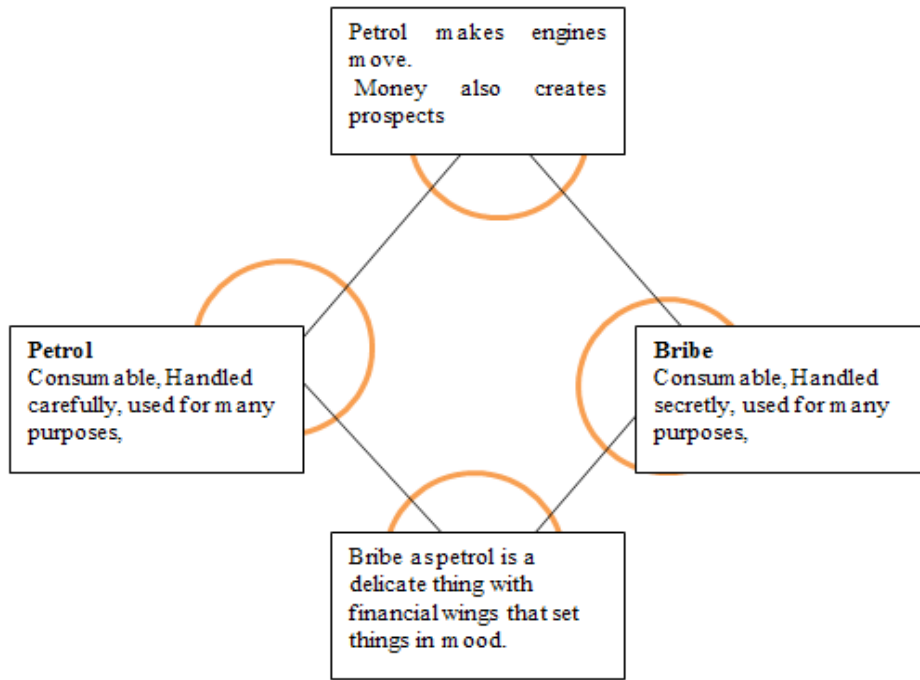


Figure 4: Mapping of the Euphemism “bribe is petrol”

### Bribe is mouth of a pen

A pen is an instrument used to write. This implement contains some ink that often has to be refilled. As a euphemistic sugarcoat of bribe especially among administrative offices, the term was noted to be used as the door opener or the literal ink that an office uses to sign certain articles and documents. Thus, the pen is very mighty as it can seal one’s destiny. A pen is often used to write various dreams down and later followed as resolutions. Ultimately, big dreams are realized through pens.

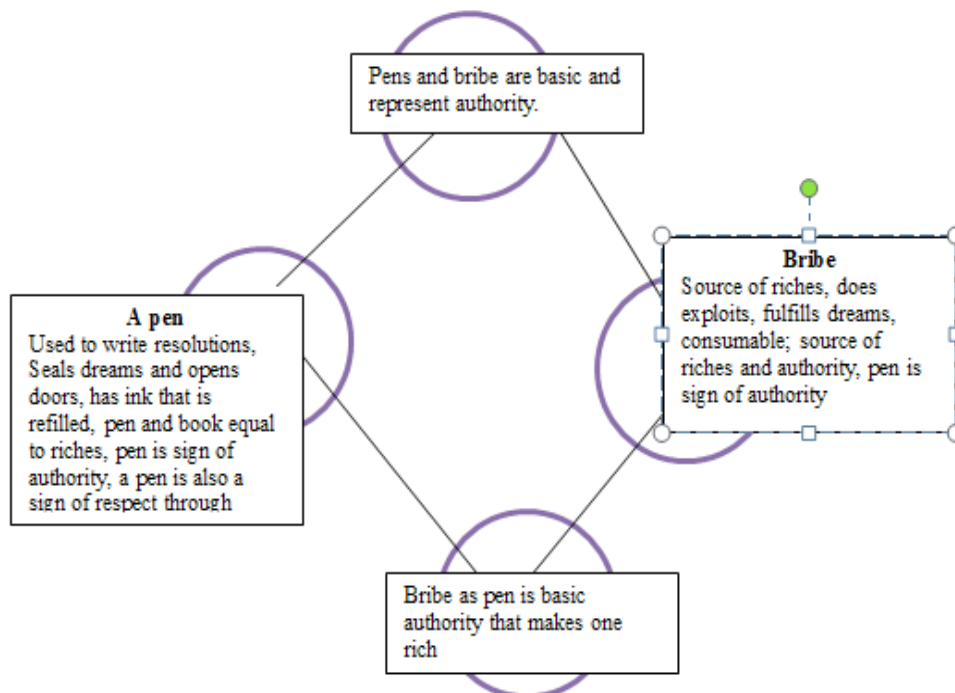


Figure 5: Mapping of the Euphemism “bribe is mouth of a pen”



### Bribe is opening eyes or shedding light on someone

The eye is the sense organ for sight. Whoever does not have eyes has no vision. In order for one to appreciate the happenings around him, he should have eyes to see the physical things in the environment. In Dholuo, one is able to plan ahead when he has sight. To this community, sight is equated with vision and future plans. This corroborates Nation's (2008) observation that when one has sight, he can "visualize" many future events. An eye is therefore an organ that opens avenues for the future endeavours. As per the interviews conducted, eyes make someone very confident and can even walk in the dark. Also, eyes are conceptualized in Dholuo as the organs used to differentiate between a stable and an unstable individual. Thus, if one has eyes, he is considered stable for he knows where he heads. On the other hand, bribe in form of money is conceived as an item used to draw future plans. In fact, with money, one can confidently plan for future projects. It was realized that money is reason for all smiles and a merry heart. This means that bribe makes someone confident and calm without any worry. Just like an eye makes one see, money to the soul brings confidence and contentment mingled with stability. To equate bribe with eyes would therefore mean to fulfil one's future dreams that require money as shown below.

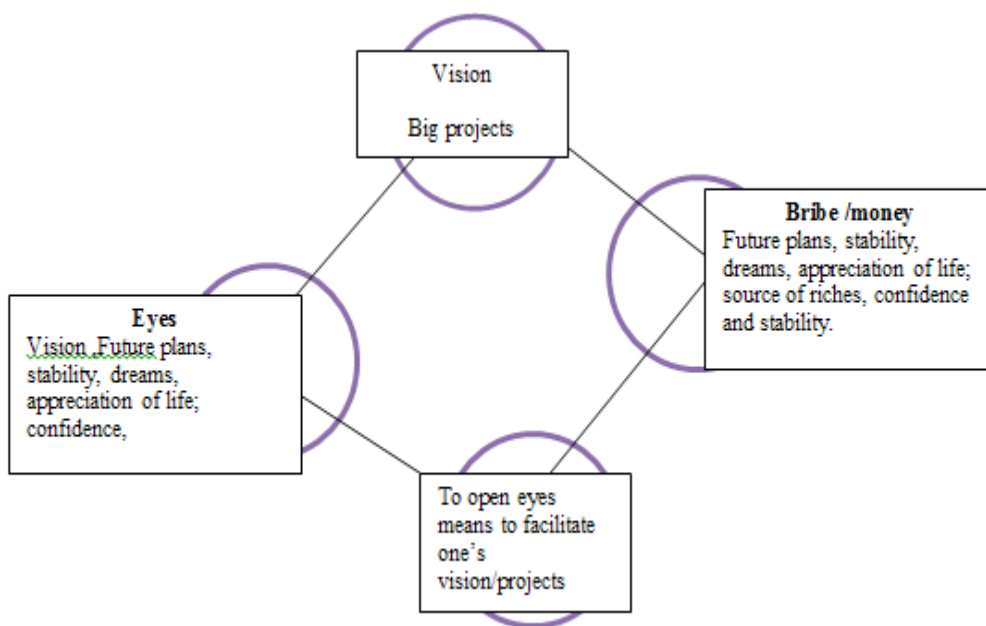


Figure 6: Mapping of the Euphemism "bribe to open eyes"

### CONCLUSION

This article sought to account for euphemisms of bribe in Dholuo using Cognitive Integration Theory. It is evident that various semantic processes such as metaphor, circumlocution and understatements are used in coining the euphemisms. The collected items were broadly categorized into the conceptual domains of food, fuel, utility and vague words. The findings reveal that most males conceptualize bribe as food, utility and fuel while most females resort to vague descriptions. We therefore conclude that the postulates of CIT are necessary in revealing the internal choreography of euphemistic sugarcoats. Further, euphemisms are elements of cultural creation thus they should be appreciated against cultural backgrounds. Finally, a cognitive pragmatic study using CIT could be very helpful in unmasking instances of bribery as a menace in the country.

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