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Negation and Gender Identity in Runyankore-Rukiga Songs among the Bakiga

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Abstract

This paper explores how negation as a linguistic device is used to construct gender identity in the Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs. It examines how the negative morpheme *ti-/ta-* supports the construction of gender identities. Negation as a linguistic device and the role it plays in the construction of gender identities has not been given much attention in the scholarship of language and gender. In this paper, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provided a theoretical framework to interrogate how negation, as a linguistic device, can be invoked to enact gender identity. On the other hand, Gender Performativity Theory (Butler, 1990) was useful in understanding the concept of gender as a social construct and how gender identities are performed. The findings reveal that the negative morpheme, when applied to the verb stem in Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs, can enact positive gender constructs. At the same time, the negative morpheme may endorse negative social constructs for both feminine and masculine gender identities depending on the singer's intention. Therefore, the use of negation is ambivalent and may depend on specific contexts. This paper notes that the use of negation as a linguistic device by the song composers and singers can address gender inequality among the Bakiga through Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs. Given the importance of traditional marriage songs in many African communities, it is imperative to examine the language used and the message portrayed in the songs to increase awareness as well as promote gender inclusivity.

Keywords: negation, gender identity, gender construction, Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs

Introduction

This study explores the role played by negation as a linguistic device towards gender construction in Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs among the Bakiga. Runyankore and Rukiga are classified as two separate languages spoken in south-western Uganda, which are linguistically considered as dialects of the same language. The two languages are referred to as Runyankore-Rukiga because of having a high degree of lexical similarity and mutual intelligibility (Asiimwe et al., 2023; Rwomushana, 2024, 2025). In other words, the two languages share a considerable number of lexical items,

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and the Banyankore and Bakiga understand each other without requiring a translator or interpreter. The Bakiga, who speak Rukiga, a dialect of the Runyankore-Rukiga language, belong to the Bantu-speaking people in south-western Uganda and largely live in the Kigezi region (Cisternino, 1987).

Among the Banyankore-Bakiga community, marriage is a uniting factor that brings together relatives, families, friends, in-laws, and village communities. Ngorogoza (1998) notes that marriage is never an individual affair but rather a community venture where different people participate. In the celebration of traditional marriages, songs are of crucial importance and are sung at the bride's natal home after her parents have accepted the bride price when she is leaving her natal home. Singing normally reaches the climax as the bride enters the groom's house and continues until morning, when the bride's relatives leave (Denoon, 1972). The singing is accompanied by high-sounding drums and energetic dancing by the singers, dancers, and the audience, where singers may be dressed in different costumes.

Songs are used as a tool to advise, instruct, and direct the prospective bride in her expectations regarding her future marriage. This observation is supported by Karwemera (1994), who notes that songs advise a woman about the problems she will face in her prospective marriage and how she should be submissive to her spouse. A significant part of the Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs entails sentence negation, which is one of the linguistic devices that is considerably applied by both male and female singers to invoke the construction of gender identity. Sentence negation in the Runyankore-Rukiga language is represented by the negative particle *ti-*, a negative copula with a corresponding affix form (allomorph) *-ta-* (Taylor, 1985). Negation here means 'NOT,' suggesting the dos and don'ts of the masculine and feminine gender in their performance of marital duties. Some of the words that contain negation invoke the construction of gender identities.

Gender identity refers to where one performs roles that are perceived to be masculine or feminine based on one's sex (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Songs performed during traditional functions play a vital role in shaping people's views and perceptions that do impact heavily on gender construction, given that they are socialising agents and so propagate gender stereotypes (Zaidi, 2016). In this paper, I examine Bakiga marriage songs as a powerful tool for perpetuating gender identities and stereotypes through the use of negation. I specifically explore how the negative morpheme *ti-/ta-* supports the construction of gender identities and stereotypes among Banyankore-Bakiga communities.

Literature Review

Definition of Gender and Gender Construction

Gender is understood as socially constructed and learned behaviour, whereby individuals acquire characteristics that are perceived as masculine or feminine (Butler, 1993). Language is one of the key aspects that plays an important part in establishing and sustaining gender constructs (Coates, 1998, 2004). Gender, therefore, refers to a set of socially-defined roles that people develop with the aid of language through a socialisation process (Dutta, 2008). Given that gender has multifaceted definitions, I adopt Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 's (2003) definition of gender as a set of practices through which people construct and claim gender identities and stereotypes. Practices

here would cover gender roles, utterances, and conversations concerning the expected dos and don'ts depending on one's gender. This definition considers the fact that gender is a social construct that is transmitted through repeated conversations and discourses in Runyankore-Rukiga songs. Discourse is understood as a social activity through which ideas are constructed, expressed, and mediated (van Dijk, 2006). Song discourse plays a role in establishing and sustaining these social constructs among the Bakiga.

It is argued that gender identity is socially constructed and not biologically inherited (Butler, 1993). In other words, gender identity is realised through gender socialisation, in which songs play a considerable part in making individuals perceive themselves as feminine or masculine. In this paper, gender socialisation is considered as a process through which male and female acquire those characteristics, attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs that are considered either as masculine or feminine in a given social and cultural context. This paper, therefore, examines how the use of negation contributes towards the socialisation process, as depicted in Bakiga traditional marriage songs.

The Role of Negation in Constructing Gender Identities and Stereotypes

In this paper, negation suggests the dos and don'ts of the masculine and feminine gender as reflected in marriage songs among the Bakiga community. In other words, the dos and don'ts in the expected roles, behaviour, attitudes, and beliefs among men and women, depicted through Runyankore-Rukiga songs, are contextual and not static. Negation in marriage songs may be depicted in many ways. In this paper, the focus is on sentence negation in Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs, which is represented by, *ti-* and *ta-* allomorphs (Asiimwe, 2007). Allomorphs are alternative morphological realisations of one (and the same) morpheme, otherwise called alternative/several variant forms of a morpheme or allomorphic variants or morpheme alternants (Crystal, 2008). Here, a morpheme refers to the smallest unit of linguistic meaning or function (Fromkin et al., 2022), which cannot be split further without distorting its meaning. The two allomorphs *ti-/ta-* in Runyankore-Rukiga may operate at the 'noun phrase' or 'verb phrase' level, depending on whether the sentence is copula or non-copula, and the negative particle is linked with the verb (Taylor, 1985).

The choice between the two negative allomorphs *ti-/ta-,* which are used to mean 'NOT,' and their positioning in Runyankore-Rukiga depends on the tense/aspect and mood of a particular verb (Taylor, 1985). The selection of an allomorph, therefore, may also depend on its phonetic or phonological environment, or its position in a word (Brown & Miller, 2013). When the sentence in Runyankore-Rukiga is in an indicative mood, the negative marker will be *ti-,* whereas a negative sentence in an imperative mood will contain *ta-* as its negative marker, preceded by the subject marker (Asiimwe, 2007). This paper analyses how the two negative allomorphs *(ti- and ta-)* are used in some Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs to perpetuate the construction of gender identities and stereotypes.

Language and Construction of Gender Identities and Stereotypes

Over the years, several scholars have studied language and gender (Atanga et al., 2012; Coates, 2004; Kendall & Tannen, 2015; Lakoff, 2003). Significant studies in

gender and gender theorisation started in 1949 with the publication of "The Second Sex" by Simone de Beauvoir (McCall, 1979). Early scholars argue that man has always considered himself as the Subject (first sex) and the woman as the Other (Object) relative to him (Beauvoir, 1949). This relegates the woman to the status of the second sex, and that woman has always been subordinate to man, where man is considered the essential while a woman the inessential other (Mangus, 1953). The above observations appear to be reflected in songs in general because they seem to constitute undercurrents that support the view that men are superior and stronger while women are depicted as submissive, inferior, and weak (Noor & Missal, 2024). Therefore, songs accord power and authority to a man in gender relationships and relegate the feminine gender to an inferior position (Okot, 2007; Rwomushana, 2024, 2025). This view is further supported by Bukaayi (2009) who reveals that songs portray women as subordinate, inferior, and weaker, highlighting the gender inequalities present in the traditional social structure of the Basoga in Uganda. It was important to understand how negation manifests in the construction of gender identities and stereotypes in Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs.

Similarly, Wanjiru and Kaburi (2015) focus on gender power relations within the Gikuyu community by analysing songs in Kenya. Their study reveals that songs often convey men's superiority while demeaning women because the patriarchal behaviour depicted in the lyrics portrays women as inferior. Additionally, the work of Ezeifeka and Ogbazi (2016) explores gender constructions in selected traditional Igbo songs in Nigeria and notes that women's songs talk back to patriarchy, whereas men's songs aim to maintain and legitimise women's subordination. These studies, too, like other related studies, seem to implicate songs in the construction of gender identities and stereotypes. Although there is a consensus among the different scholars on the role played by songs in the construction of gender identities and stereotypes, there is limited understanding on how negation works in marriage songs among the Bakiga to perpetuate the construction of gender identity. I argue that the available studies have not paid considerable attention to the linguistic features of discourse, such as negation.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is informed by two theoretical perspectives: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (van Dijk, 2009) and Gender Performativity Theory (Butler, 1990). CDA was used as a theoretical and analytical framework to analyse how negation, as a linguistic device, is used to construct gender identity in Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs. As a theoretical framework, CDA focuses on three theoretical tenets: power, ideology, and critique (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, 2016). Power involves control, where a powerful group controls the freedom of action of others and influences their minds through text and talk (van Dijk, 2009). Ideology, on the other hand, is a set of beliefs or values that have remained coherent and relatively stable over time (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, 2016). Critique involves the interpretation of data while taking into consideration the relevant context knowledge and making transparent the object under analysis and the analyst's position (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). As an analytical framework, CDA involves different analytical and methodological approaches (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, 2016). Within the CDA theoretical framework, I specifically draw from the Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA) (van Dijk, 2009). I invoke the SCA because it focuses on

"mental representations and the processes of language users when they produce and comprehend discourse and participate in verbal interaction, as well as in the knowledge, ideologies, and other beliefs shared by social groups" (van Dijk, 2009, p. 82).

According to van Dijk (2009), the socio-cognitive approach involves social cognition with particular emphasis on the shared beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, and ideologies by a given group of people, which play a role in the construction of personal models. The above models are relevant in analysing gender construction in Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs because it is argued that listeners differently conceive the messages embedded in the songs in their minds. Given that SCA is concerned with cognitive linguistics, which starts with the individual mind, it was relevant to study how negation in the extracts that were analysed was functioning as far as gender construction is concerned. Hence, it was crucial to apply critical discourse analysis as a methodological and analytical framework that uncovers hidden dimensions of power and ideologies, which can be applied to analyse discourse (van Dijk, 2015).

Given that this study has a gender component, it was important for me to invoke a gender theory to explore and understand gender. Therefore, I used the Performativity Theory of Gender (Butler, 1990). In Gender Trouble, Butler (1990, p. 33) contends that "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (p. 33). She maintains that gender is performative, where a person repeatedly performs acts that constitute masculinity and femininity with punitive consequences if one does not adhere to gender coherence. Butler's theorisation of gender is relevant to the study of Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs because it emphasises the power of discourse (in this case, song discourse) to produce the phenomenon it names and regulates. Moreover, with the theory emphasising reiteration/repetition, I argue that the repeated singing of marriage songs can affect the construction of gender identity among the Bakiga. Butler maintains that stylisation of the body includes bodily gestures, movements, and styles of different kinds, which are all highlighted in the studied song discourse.

Methodology

This paper is part of a larger qualitative, interpretivist study (Rwomushana, 2025) that examines how linguistic aspects in Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs propagate gender identities and stereotypes. Given that marriage (give-away) celebrations among the Banyankore and Bakiga communities in Uganda involve huge celebrations characterised by song performances accompanied by energetic dances, gender performativity (Butler, 1990) and critical discourse analytical frameworks (van Dijk, 2009, 2015; Fairclough, 1989) were considered most suitable. The frameworks provided for in-depth exploration of the cultural contexts in which performances of marriage songs take place. The frameworks also facilitated critical engagement with songs as texts or discourses, along with the paralinguistic features that accompany the song performances.

Raw data were collected through field research whereby I visited several locations in south-western Uganda including Kabale and Rubanda districts, in which I observed and recorded data of marriage song performances. Often, the bride's natal homes or

village courtyards served as the venue for these community events. The participants included the bride's family members, in-laws, friends, and the village members who are residents in the local communities. Thus, a total of 15 out of 56 Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs collected were translated, transcribed, analysed, and categorised based on how they construe gender identities and stereotypes, with the focus on negation.

The CDA provided the three levels of analysis of the collected songs: (i) 'Song as text,' in which the marriage songs were subjected to a detailed selection and analysis process to identify only those that have 'negation' as a linguistic device for gender portrayal and stereotypes; (ii) 'Song as discourse,' through which excerpts that contained gendered negative sentences were subjected to the process of 're-contextualisation' (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016) for purposes of analysing traces of gender identity construction in the respective songs. 'Re-contextualisation' is a process of transferring given elements (texts) to a new context without taking them out of text (de-contextualisation) (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016). Lastly, (iii) 'Song as explanation' whereby attention was put on how negation in the selected excerpts illuminated gender identities and stereotypes. This phase involved examining both negative and positive portrayals, leading to the evolvement of themes as presented in the next section.

Results and Discussion

I present songs associated with the construction of the feminine gender first because most of the gendered content in the Runyankore-Rukiga songs is about women. The last part is about the construction of the masculine gender. Results are analysed and discussed under different themes that emerged during critical discourse analysis, which cut across different songs. I will start by discussing the themes related to the construction of the feminine gender as identified in the songs, highlighting the key role of negation as a linguistic device.

Expected Feminine Gender Roles

Negation has been applied to construct feminine gender roles in several Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs. The negative morpheme *ti-/ta-* is used in some Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs to portray a woman as a failure in her expected gender roles. For instance, the lexical items used in the song *Nyowe Nkore Ki?* associate femininity with failure. Each stanza of the song begins with a negative sentence that presents a woman as a failure in her marital obligations. The negative sentences used in the song include *Omukazi **ta**hinga* (the woman does not cultivate), *Omukazi **ta**teeka* (the woman does not cook), *Omukazi **ta**yonsya* (the woman does not breastfeed), and *Omukazi **ta**yara kitanda* (the woman does not make the bed). It should be noted that negation describes what is not the case in reality compared to what the case is, and it can be manipulative or ideological (Fairclough, 1989). In the above case, I argue that the extracts from the song present negative connotations that form ideological constructs about the feminine gender as a failure in her marital obligations without comparatively mentioning whether the husband fulfilled his expected gender roles. The song also does not explain why the woman is assigned these roles or why it is a problem if she does not do them.

A dependent morpheme, *ta-*, which implies negative attributes, is used in the

sentences I have mentioned above. Through the prefixation of the affix *ta-* in particular to the verb stem in the above sentences, a woman in the song is negatively represented as a failure who is unable to meet her expected marital gender roles. The lexical choices in the negative sentences mentioned above reflect patriarchal inclinations by manipulating and negating the verbs. It should be noted that "negative assertions evoke and reject corresponding positive assertions in the intertextual context" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 188). Therefore, the lexical choice in the negative sentences presents patriarchal notions through manipulation and negation of the verbs, hence constructing a woman as a failure in her presumed marital obligations. Moreover, all five stanzas in the song, apart from the refrain, portray negative connotations by not mentioning any single positive attribute about a woman in that song. One wonders whether there was nothing positive that could have been hinted at about a woman. This finding resonates with Koskei (2018) who argues that Kipsigis secular songs negatively portray women in society as rumour mongers and associated with witchcraft. When such acts are repeated over time, they produce a natural sort of being (Butler, 1990), which, in the case of the above song, negatively constructs a woman as a marital failure among the Bakiga as a community.

Apart from presenting a woman as a failure in her gender roles, some singers integrate negation with irony and sarcasm to construct 'cultivation and firewood gathering' as the key feminine gender roles in marriage, as illustrated in Expert 1 below.

Excerpt 1 (Song: *Eizooba rya Musorooza)*

*Waija obu**ta**hinga*	You have come to where there is no cultivation.
Yaarira	She is crying.
*Waija obu**ta**sheenya*	You have come to where there is no fetching firewood.
Yaarira	She is crying.

In the song excerpt above, the bride is ironically informed that she has come to a place where there is no cultivation and gathering of firewood. Through the application of the negative morpheme *ta-,* the sentences assume an opposite meaning: sarcastically informing the bride what is expected of her regarding her gender roles in her future marriage. The repetition of the refrain, which asserts that the bride is crying, also enhances the fact that the bride feels deprived without these roles. When such songs are repeatedly and perpetually sung, the content of such songs, over time, enacts habits which are ingrained in the listeners' minds and constitute their psyche (Rwomushana, 2024, 2025). The emphasis here is on the negation whereby, through the derivational process, a noun is derived from a verb to construct an opposite meaning. Similarly, in Excerpt 2 below, the bride's brother uses negation to sarcastically imply an opposite meaning and consequently constructs feminine gender roles.

Excerpt 2 *(*Song: *Nyamunyonyi)*

Yehumurire maawe	Feel at home, my dear.
*Waaza ahi ba**ta**hinga,*	You have gone where (new home) they do not cultivate.
*Ahi ba**ta**shenya,*	Where (new home) they do not gather firewood.
*Ahi ba**ta**taha maizi,*	Where (new home) they do not fetch water.

Like in Excerpt 1, in Excerpt 2 above, wherever the negation has been applied, the implication of the meaning of the sentences is the exact opposite of the surface meaning. Whereas the bride is informed in the excerpts' surface structure that the roles being mentioned are nonexistent in the family she has joined, the deep structure of the sentences implies that these are the actual roles she has to fulfil. In these two songs, gender roles have been sarcastically constructed through the application of negation.

Another feminine gender role constructed through the application of negation is cooking. A woman is constructed in the excerpt below as someone who is supposed to cook and feed her hungry husband.

Excerpt 3 (Song: Ija Ndeebe Murungi)

Yaiwe otwo twizi ninaaba oturikwosya	That water, which I bathe, is always warm.
Tinkitwa njara	I no longer feel hungry.
Egyo njara y'akasheeshe	That hunger of the morning.
Buri kwimuka reeba ninjuma omukumbi	Whenever I wake up, I eat food.

The husband in Excerpt 3 praises his wife for feeding him every morning. He no longer suffers from the morning hunger, as was the case before their marriage. This point is illustrated in the negative sentence *Tinkitwa njara* (I no longer suffer from hunger). The song above serves as a reminder to young girls and women to ensure that they feed their husbands every morning.

This is found in the idiomatic expression *ninjuma omukumbi* (I eat food). If such gender constructs are enacted in a highly rigid regulatory frame as espoused by Butler (1990), they endorse a set of meanings already socially constructed. Hence, such meanings become mundane, natural, and legitimised in the community. The above song, therefore, ritualises and legitimises cooking and feeding a husband as a wife's gender role, as portrayed in the praise given by her husband, which also presents her as having power over food in a home.

In the same way, Excerpt 4 below constructs cooking and feeding her husband as the key roles of a woman.

Excerpt 4 *(*Song: *Omusoomo)*

Ogyende noomanya omwiru ***ku ni*** *Nyamurya*	As you leave your natal home, be aware that a man is Nyamurya (someone who must eat).
Ku ariba atariire aryakuriira omu nju	If he does not eat, he will eat you from that house.

The emphasis in Excerpt 4 is on the negative conditional clause: ku ariba *atariire* (if he does not eat), which is a dependent clause. The negated verb in an embedded conditional clause emphasises that there will be punitive consequences if a woman fails to feed her husband. The punishment for failing to feed her husband is that he will, in that case, eat her. This does not imply that the husband is a cannibal, and hence, he will

eat his wife if she fails to feed him, but it signifies the magnitude of the repercussions resulting from her failure to provide food. This is further supported by the 'coined personal' name *Nyamurya* (meaning someone who must eat), derived through the nominalisation process from the verb *kurya* (to eat).

The singers in the above excerpts apply negation as a linguistic device to construct feminine gender roles in marriage, which include cooking, firewood gathering, cultivating, and feeding a husband. The above findings correspond with Carver (2003), who argues that gender core identities are conceptually constructed and then mapped back onto the bodies through repeated performances, which are thoroughly learned through the citation and repetition processes, to the extent that they seem natural to those (subjects) who perform them. Therefore, I argue that the negated verbs form social constructs that are mapped onto the bodies of women, prescribing the feminine gender role expectation of the community.

Women as a Symbol of Beauty

Still using negation, a woman is constructed in Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs as someone who is supposed to be beautiful, as shown in Excerpt 5 below.

Excerpt 5 *(*Song: *Emire)*

Mbwenu eizooba rimwe Boaz akaba ari aho.	One day, Boaz was seated somewhere.
Emire yaija yaarabaho yaahingura	Emily passed by.
Boaz amureeba	Boaz looked at her as she passed by.
Amureeba oburungi	He looked at her beauty.
*Agaruka amureeba kwonka **ti**yaamuhaaga*	He looked at her again and was not getting satisfied.
Ati, "Yaiwe muhara we"	He said, "Hello girl!"
*"Nyowe nkwineho rukundo ei n**ta**ine aha bandi"*	"The way I love you is not the same way I love others".
Kusha rukundo yo neebuza obusingye	(But) love can make one lose peace.
*Boaz akarwara endwara e**ta**kyengirwe*	Boaz (then) suffered from a disease that could not be diagnosed.
Yaaremwa kurya, ngu obwo naayenda Emire	He failed to eat because of (love for) Emily.

Excerpt 5 contains three negative sentences used by the singer to emphasise the beauty of the bride (Emily). This is demonstrated in the first negative sentence, where the suitor keeps looking at the bride without getting satisfied, as expressed in the negated hyperbole: *Agaruka amureeba; kwonka **ti**yaamuhaaga* (he looked at her again and was not getting satisfied). This negative sentence reveals an exaggerated beauty and shows how good-looking Emily is. The singer again stresses in another negative sentence that the love that the suitor has for Emily is not the same love he has for other girls*: nkwineho*

*rukundo ei n**ta**ine aha bandi* (there is a way I love you, which is not the way I love others). In the next negated verb, the singer mentions that the suitor suffered from a strange illness that could not be diagnosed, and this was because of his love for Emily, illustrated in the sentence*: Boaz akarwara endwara e**ta**kyengirwe* (Boaz then suffered from a strange disease which could not be diagnosed). All three negative sentences stressing how good and beautiful the bride (Emily) is act as discursive means of rendering the concept of beauty as a key social construct expected of a woman's body among the Bakiga.

The above finding, where a woman is constructed as someone who is expected to be beautiful, is in line with Zaidi (2016) who notes that a bride's beauty could be elevated by the singers of the Pakistani-Urdu wedding songs through over-praising the bride in the songs. What distinguishes this study from Zaidi's study is the view that in the Runyankore-Rukiga song, there is use of negation to highlight a woman's beauty and its effect on her admirer.

Similarly, the lead singer in another song negates the verb in one sentence to stress the bride's perfection, as shown in Excerpt 6.

Excerpt 6 *(*Song: *Mwije Tuhingire)*

Ogu mwana ka mbagambire	Let me tell you about this child.
Aine emicwe mirungi	She has good manners.
Kandi ayegire kurungi	She is well educated.
Nimureeba taine nshonga	When you look at her, she does not have any blemish.

In Excerpt 6, the bride is portrayed by the singer as someone who has no blemish. One would not expect that there could be a human being who is as perfect as the above bride is constructed. The negation in the sentence: *Nimureeba **ta**ine nshonga* (When you look at her, she does not have any blemish) *assumes* a perfect girl/bride. The word *nimureeba* (when you look at her) emphasises the male gaze and the physical body of the bride. Given that "gender is the social significance that sex assumes within a given culture" (Butler, 1993, p. 5), I argue that through the application of negation, the singers of the Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs construct women as beautiful human beings whose acceptance in marriage depends on their beauty.

Taken together, all the excerpts above demonstrate how negation is used to construct a woman as someone beautiful, which portrays what van Dijk (2009) describes as shared beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, and ideologies by a given group of people. The linguistic device of negation constructs a woman in the marital space as conventionally beautiful, whose social acceptance depends on whether the community considers her as beautiful or not. In the above excerpts, the application of negation in Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs leads to the cultural construction of the sexed body, as posited by Butler (1990), which implies that a woman's body is expected to be beautiful.

A Woman as an Object of Marriage

Song composers do apply negation (*ti-*) to construct marriage as an ultimate end for any girl, a choice over which she has no control. This is illustrated in the Excerpt 7 below.

Excerpt 7 *(*Song: *Tumuhingire Agyende)*

*Nyowe **ti**nkiine bigambo*	(Me) I no longer even have the words.
Iwe muhara we irooko ogyende!	(You) girl (you) go away!
Waayanga nintoora guuha?	In case you refuse to go for marriage, where do I run to?
Iwe muhara we irooko ogyende!	(You) girl (you) go away!

In Excerpt 7, the singer negates the verb to indicate that the girl's father is in danger should his daughter refuse to go for marriage since he has already 'eaten things' (bride price). The use of negation in the extract: *Nyowe **ti**nkiine bigambo* (I no longer even have the words), indirectly preconditions the bride to go for marriage, given the fact that it is her father in the song who is asking the rhetorical question, forcing her to leave her natal home for marriage. Under such circumstances, the daughter cannot object because, in terms of relational modality, her father has power over her. As noted by Fairclough (1989), relational modality points to the speaker having authority over the listener. Therefore, in the above case, it is most unlikely that the daughter would refuse to get married and still stay under the same roof with her father, who has authority over her. Through the repeated singing of the above song, a mental picture (as backed by the Socio-Cognitive Approach) is ideologically created in the minds of young girls that getting married is obligatory, as long as their parents and the community want them to marry. The above finding resonates with Zaidi (2016) who argues that through wedding songs, marriage as a fulfilment of the girls' existence in life is fed into their minds right from their early childhood. The only exception with the current study from Zaid's is paying a bride price as a precondition before a bride is given away.

Similarly, in Excerpt 8 below, the singer negates the verb to make marriage appear as the overall purpose for a girl's very existence.

Excerpt 8 *(*Song: *Emire)*

*Kikaaba ki naaba n**ta**shwirwe nk'abandi?*	What would happen if I am not married like others?
Reka ngyede n'ogu obundi kikozirwe Ruhanga.	Let me go with this one. Maybe it is God's will.

In Excerpt 8, the bride applies negation and asks herself a rhetorical negative question as to what would happen to her if she were not married just like other girls. She resigns herself to fate by referring to divine intervention, specifically mentioning God's will. In this way, negation is used to construct marriage as the ultimate goal of a girl's existence; hence, a girl is considered a marriage object. The rhetorical figure used here

demonstrates that a bride is deciding to be married against her will. Rhetorical figures are one of the formal structures suggested by van Dijk (2009) that critical discourse analysts should pay attention to, as they are usually less consciously controlled by the speaker. Based on the application of negation combined with a rhetorical question, I argue that the bride in the song chooses to be married against her will because she would rather not appear a disgrace to her family and the community if she remains unmarried. Through singing such marriage songs, the social structure of the Bakiga, which stresses that a girl must be married, is re-emphasised and engrained in the society as a shared belief (norm) among the Bakiga as a social group. This is in line with the Socio-Cognitive Approach (van Dijk 2009). This finding echoes what Sisana (2007) observes: that among the Swazi community, marriage is a stage that each Swazi girl looks forward to as she grows up.

Again, the singer in another song below constructs a woman as someone whose choice regarding getting married is not an option: she has to, whether she likes it or not. Excerpt 9 illustrates this.

Excerpt 9 (Song: *Okwate Omugongo)*

***Ti**ndikuzayo, ow'abandi n'obugoora X 2*	I will not go there. Other people's home is *bugoora* (a place of suffering).
Taata waakunda ente we	My father, you have liked/ loved the cows.
***Ti**ndikuzayo*	I will not go there.
Maama waakunda ente we	My mother, you have liked/ loved the cows.
***Ti**ndikuzayo*	I will not go there.
Nyowe nkiri muto wee	Oh! (Me) I am still young.
***Ti**ndikuzayo*	I will not go there.

Negation is applied many times by the singer in Excerpt 9 above, demonstrating the unwillingness of the bride to be married because she considers herself young and does not want to be exchanged for cows. The song suggests that the parents prefer cows to their daughter. It should be noted that linguistic choices used in song lyrics contribute to the objectification of women and girls (Mlamli, 2025). Given that things are not always inherently connected unless we use language to enact or mitigate such connections (Gee, 2014), I argue that the vehement negative expression demonstrating the bride's refusal to go for marriage connects the existence of a Mukiga girl to marriage as her ultimate goal, whether or not it is against her wishes and free will.

Through the use of negation, girls are constructed as 'exchange commodities' in Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs, exchanged against their will as illustrated in Excerpt 10 below.

Excerpt 10 ***(Song: Mwije Tuhingire)***

Abantu baingi baizire aha kwonka tibampa ebi ndikwenda.	Many people have frequented here but they did not give me what I wanted.
Obu mwampaire ebintu byangye, omwishiki mumutware agyende	Now that you have given me my things, you take away the girl and she goes.

Excerpt 10 above illustrates how a negative verb commodifies the bride/woman. Through the use of negation, the girl's father is portrayed refusing to give away his daughter to the previous suitors because they did not give him the things he wanted. The emphasis here is on the condition that the girl's father sets using the negative expression ***ti****bampa* (they didn't give me*) ebi ndikwenda* (what I want). The song constructs the father as the authority who decides who will marry his daughter. Given the fact that gender is not a stable identity as it is constituted through time (Butler, 1993), the above song sung over time portrays a girl as a commodity who is given away as long as the suitor can pay the price. The above finding concurs with Zoon et al. (2019) who observe that the Item Songs in India objectify females as purchasable commodities. The findings from these two studies reaffirm the extent to which songs commodify women as marriage objects exchanged for cows. In the case of the current study, the song depicts the bride's father as greedy because he chooses to commodify his daughter by exchanging her for "things" that are not even specifically named.

A Woman as an Outsider in Her Marital Home

The negative morpheme *ti-/ta-* has also been used in the Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs to portray a woman as an outsider in her marital home as illustrated in Excerpt 11 below.

Excerpt 11 ***(Song: Mwije Tuhingire)***

Omwishiki yaagyenda	The girl has gone.
*Aa yaarengyera owaabo ei a**ta**razairwe*	She has gone to their home to which she was not born.

In Excerpt 11 above, the negated verb stresses that the bride is going to another home/family where she will be considered an outsider. The relative negated clause *ei a**ta**razairwe* (where she was not born) reiterates and regulates a practice that stresses how a woman is considered a foreigner in her marital home, possibly without equal rights and authority accorded her like other members of the family. Given that Runyankore-Rukiga songs are performative and constitute a deliberate act by the performers (Rwomushana, 2025), I concur with the observation about the "reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler, 1993, p. 2). The clause *yaarengyera owaabo* (she has gone to their home) is an emphatic statement because she is told in the same sentence that she was not born to that home/family through the use of

negation. It should be noted that the Bakiga belong to a patriarchal community where children belong to the father's clan (Karwemera, 1994; Ngorogoza, 1998). Through negation, therefore, a woman is constructed as the only member in a family who does not belong to that clan, hence an outsider and stranger.

Men Portrayed as Courageous, Daring, and Brave

Through the application of negation, in some Runyankore-Rukiga songs, masculinity is constructed and accorded positive attributes. While using the negation morpheme *ta-* in the Excerpt from the *Ngabo Yangye* song, the lead singer derives personal names (proper nouns) for her suitor. These names are Ru**ta**hungangamba (one who does not retreat during battles), Mu**te**eganda (one who is undaunted), and Ru**ta**tiina (one who does not fear). Names among the Banyankore-Bakiga might contain a negative marker to mean 'one who does not' and were given to children by their parents to express negative feelings towards certain members of the community (Asiimwe, 2022). In the above case, however, the negative form portrays positive connotations attributed to the male name holder. Such names, in this case, portray only positive attributes ascribed to the suitor, which elevates him to a higher social status. Gender attribution of male or female is made public and lasting through the linguistic naming event because the early linguistic acts of naming children after birth set up a baby for life, which begins a process of learning how to be a boy or a girl, a man or a woman (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet , 2003). Through the act of naming, therefore, the name holder is expected to behave as a man in a manner that is in line with the associated name traits given to him.

Thus, the same positive masculine attributes are constructed in yet another song, *Abantu ba Kare,* as illustrated in the two names used: *Ru**ta**tiina* (he who does not fear) and *Ru**ta**hunga* (he who does not retreat in battle or when facing danger). Ordinarily, the application of negation would reflect/imply negative attributes to the subject, as has been discussed before, where a woman was negatively presented. In this case, however, through the application of negation, proper nouns (nicknames or epithets) are derived from infinitive verbs that have negative connotations to portray positive attributes ascribed to the masculine gender. Whereas the morpheme *ti-/ta-* is applied in songs to negatively represent the feminine gender, the same morpheme is applied to positively portray the masculine gender. When such songs are repeatedly performed, they are ritualised, and hence they do achieve the naturalised effect in the context of the body (Butler, 1999), where the masculine body is presented as brave and fearless, contrary to the feminine body construction. Consequently, the masculine names (proper nouns) are constructed embedded with positive traits for the suitor, something that does not happen for the bride. Among the Bakiga, some of the personal names may represent feminine or masculine traits that the community expects to be exhibited by the name holder (Asiimwe, 2022). Therefore, I argue that through the use of negation, the negated personal names presented in the above extracts provide one of the avenues that positively constructs the masculine gender, which demonstrates the gender power asymmetry among the Bakiga.

Men Portrayed as Fierce and Dangerous

Men, through the application of the negative morpheme *ti-/ta-*, are

indirectly constructed as fierce animals in the Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs, to whom the bride should be married with caution. The application of negation is demonstrated in Excerpt 12 below.

Excerpt 12 *(*Song: *Reeba Enyangi Nizinteera)*

*Omushaija **ti** kicuncu*	A man is not a lion
*N'okuba engwe **ti** ngwe*	He is not even a leopard
*O**ta**mutima*	Do not fear him.

By telling the bride in Excerpt 12 that a man is neither a lion nor a leopard, the bride is indirectly reminded of the true reality of a man in her future marital relationships. Through the application of negation, a man is constructed as someone a woman should fear in the same way lions and leopards are feared animals. The repeated protestation that the man is neither a lion nor a leopard implies that he could behave like one. Since gender is constructed through a sustained set of acts (Butler, 1999), when such gender constructions are sustained in the Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs, which are performed at marriage functions, they will produce certain bodily acts through gendered stylisation of the body as observed by Butler (1990). The gendered constructed behaviour will then be demonstrated in the act of women fearing men in the marital space.

The bride is encouraged not to fear a man because he is neither a lion nor a leopard, again, through negation. Given the context in which the two images in the above songs are used, they present a man as a lion or leopard. Why would the bride be told that a man is not a lion or leopard if there is no ground for fearing that he could behave like those animals? It is important to note that the use of these images helps us to see, hear, feel, taste, and smell the situation by providing us with concrete images to imagine the situation portrayed more vividly (Glencoe, 1987). A negative sentence in which an image has been used has more effect on gender construction because different metaphors have different ideological effects (Fairclough, 1989). The singer seems to apply negation to indirectly remind the bride, through song, that a man/husband could behave in a ferocious, animal-like manner.

Men as Women Tormentors

In several marriage songs, a man is constructed as a woman batterer through the use of negation, presuming that he will beat his wife in their future marriage, as illustrated in Excerpt 13 below.

Excerpt 13 *(*Song: *Aha Irembo)*

*Omukazi w'okushwera, **ti** ngoma y'okuteera*	A woman, given in marriage is not a drum for striking.
*Twamukuha naasheka, tu**ta**rishanga naarira*	We have given her to you when she is laughing, we should not find her crying in future.

*Twamukuha a**ta**ine nkojo*	We have given her to you without any scar on her body.
Nyabura omurinde gye	Please take good care of her.

In Excerpt 13, the singer applies negation three times to warn the suitor that a woman given in marriage is not "a drum for striking." This is found in the idiomatic expression: *Omukazi w'okushwera, **ti** ngoma y'okuteera.* (A woman who is given in marriage is not a drum for striking). The suitor is accordingly cautioned before taking the bride against beating her, which presumes that domestic violence is common. The female singer goes ahead to inform the suitor that the bride he is yet to take should neither be found crying nor with a scar on her body in their future marriage. Excerpt 13 presupposes that a man will most certainly beat or mistreat his wife, hence the warning. The morpheme *ti-/ta-*, in this case, is used to warn the suitor. By warning the suitor that a woman is not a "drum for striking" while using an image of a drum, he is constructed as a "wife beater" who would treat a woman like an inanimate object. The image of a drum being hit is very vivid and amplifies the violence that the man could use on the woman. This kind of gender identity construction forms ideologies by a given group of people, which play a role in the construction of personal models (van Dijk, 2009).

A man is again portrayed as a woman beater by using a negative morpheme *ta-* as shown in the Excerpt 14 below.

Excerpt 14 ***(*Song: *Eizooba ry' Okuhingira)***

Ogu mwana twaza kumukuheereza	We are going to give you this child.
Waakireeba?	Do you know what that means? (Cautioning the bridegroom).
Omureebe oyereebe	Look at her and look at yourself (Cautioning the bridegroom).
Amureebe ayereebe mwana wangye	Look at her and look at yourself, my child (Cautioning the bridegroom).
Omuhindure omureebe	Turn her around and look at her *(warning).*
*Noomureeba **ta**ine nkojo*	(You see) she does not have any scar.
*Twamukuheereza a**ta**ine nkojo*	We are giving her to you, without any scar.
Ogume omureebe kandi ogume oyereebe	(You) keep looking at her, and you look at yourself (Cautioning the bridegroom).

The suitor in Excerpt 14 is warned that the bride has no scar on her body. The repeated negated verb points to an assumption that the prospective husband will beat and injure their daughter to the extent of damaging her body. Given that gender revolves

around how the anticipation of a gendered construct produces that very phenomenon it anticipates (Butler, 1999), I argue that the assumption that a man will beat his wife, too, portrays men as women batterers in their marital relationships. The same gender construct is echoed in yet another song in Excerpt 15 below.

Excerpt 15 *(*Song: *Oturindire Omwana)*

Iwe Mr Savio	(You) Mr Savio.
Oturindire gye omwana X 2	Protect well our child X 2.
*A**ta**raija naarira X2*	She should not come here crying.
Amaguru ga Maaga nigashusha nk'emitumba	Maaga's legs look like a banana stem.
*Ku arigaruka a**ta**gaine, niiwe turigabuuza*	If she comes back without them, it is you, we shall ask (you) about them.
Kandi araagashashura	(And) you will pay for them.

Like the previous extract, Excerpt 15, too, presents a man as a woman batterer and tormentor. The singer uses a negative imperative sentence and modality in the future form to command and warn the suitor that the bride should not come back to her natal home crying: *Ataraija naarira (She should not come here crying).* The suitor is further cautioned using the simile likening her legs to a banana stem that their daughter's beautiful legs should never go missing, and if they do, the man will have to answer for it. Imagery adopts a language that appeals to our sensory memories because the images used create a picture of what is being imagined (Glencoe, 1987). The negated verb, which forms part of the imagery in the songs, constructs wife battering as a masculine gender trait. Such cautioning portrays the suitor as a potential woman tormentor, who is likely to inflict bodily harm on his wife.

Conclusion

Overall, the negative morpheme *ti-/ta-* can positively or negatively construct both the masculine and feminine genders when invoked in the Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs. The feminine gender has been mainly represented by negative and functional constructs such as being marriage failures, cooks, cultivators, exchange commodities, caregivers, marriage objects, outsiders in their marital homes, and beauties. On the other hand, the masculine gender has been positively constructed, to a great extent, as courageous, brave, and daring and negatively constructed as wife batterers, cruel, and "dangerous animals." On the whole, the portrayal of men is more ambivalent. The use of negation in the Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs largely focuses on the construction of feminine gender, portraying normative gender constructions ingrained in the Bakiga's patriarchal system. The two allomorphs (*ti-/ta-*), therefore, have the potential to enact and redefine the existing gender relations among the Bakiga. The singing of the Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs over time is a gendered performance within the social and cultural context of the Bakiga. This paper recommends the use of negation in Runyankore-Rukiga marriage songs as a linguistic device by the song composers and singers to address gender inequality among the Bakiga by focusing on the positive gender attributes for both male and female.

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