

**FEATURES OF INDIRECTNESS THAT CHARACTERIZE PARENTS' LANGUAGE  
IN COMMUNICATION OF SEXUALITY ISSUES TO THEIR ADOLESCENT  
CHILDREN. A CASE STUDY OF NAKURU TOWN, KENYA.**

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A Thesis submitted to the Graduate School in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Linguistics of Egerton University.

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## DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATION

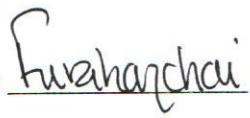
### DECLARATION

This is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

MARY KARURI Signature  Date 17/10/08

### RECOMMENDATION

This MA Thesis has been submitted for examination with our recommendation as supervisors appointed by Egerton University

1. DR.FURAHA CHAI Signature  Date 21-10-08

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## **DEDICATION**

To my mother, Helen Watetu a truly great woman of all times, whose amazing wisdom is a great source of inspiration.

## ABSTRACT

Speaking about sex to children is important in aiding them to make informed choices about their sexuality in future. For many parents however, sex is a taboo topic that they don't find easy to discuss with their children. When they attempt to do so, they mainly use indirect language. This study was undertaken on the premise that indirect language could interfere with the message of responsible sexual behaviour intended by the parents. It therefore sought to examine the features of indirectness in parents' language to determine whether they hindered or enhanced communication. The study identified and described the various features of style in the language used by parents. It also looked into the responses of teenagers to this language to determine whether parents communicated or not. The study was guided by various theories of pragmatics such as Brown and Levinson's Politeness theory, Austin's Speech Act theory and the theory of Cooperative Principle by Grice. The study sample consisted of parents of teenage children and teenage children themselves (not necessarily parents and their own children). Data comprised utterances made by parents to their children on sexuality and teenagers' responses to the utterances. The data was collected through interviews and analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The results showed that parents mainly used indirect features of style such as circumlocution, litotes, metaphors, innuendos and hyperbole in talking to their children about sexuality. Direct utterances were only used occasionally. While some of the utterances were positively received by the teenagers, others evoked negative responses. The two kinds of responses determined whether the parents' intended message of responsible sexual behaviour was communicated. The positive responses were interpreted to mean the message was well communicated and the reverse was true for the negative responses. The findings of the study would give linguists some insight into some styles of language that people use in ordinary conversation to meet their communication needs when faced with sensitive topics such as those to do with sexuality.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, several issues, which are introductory to the study, are tackled. These are: background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, hypothesis, significance, scope and limitations of the study.

### 1.2 Background to the Study

Dryfoos (1990) says that as adolescents become adults, they consider sexual relations, marriage and parenthood as signs of maturity. They seek information and clues about sexual life from peers, books, magazines and mass media. A good deal of that information is incorrect, incomplete or misleading. Many adolescents are therefore misinformed about their own reproductive capabilities. Studies have shown that as many as two thirds of adolescent girls believe they are too young to get pregnant (UNESCO, 1999). An equal number of adolescents appear to get so anxious about their sexual activities that they are not able to deal with the associated issues in any practical way. The present study sought to establish whether parents discussed sexual issues with their children in order to correct some of the damaging information they receive and to allay fears related to sexuality.

In many African societies, people outside the child's immediate family such as aunts, uncles or grandparents were charged with the task of speaking matters of sexuality to children as they matured (Wanjama et al, 2006). Often at a certain age, children would be dispatched to an appropriate relative and would receive the information that was deemed fit for their stage in life and many times this teaching coincided with other rituals that marked rites of passage such as circumcision (ibid). For this reason, young men and women would receive teaching as individuals from relatives as well as in groups by some respected members of the community. Today, the traditional systems are no longer in place and parents find themselves in the difficult situation of trying to articulate matters of sexuality to their own children. This is quite discomfiting for many parents and most of them either avoid the topic altogether or choose to be quite indirect in their talk.

Jackson (2002) observes that adolescents are not likely to talk to their parents about sexual concerns once they have decided to become sexually active. They are likely to talk to their parents when their attitudes towards sexuality are not well formed. Hence, once adolescents

become sexually active, they are less likely to get the information they need from their parents. They are only guided by their peers who are blatantly misinformed. A study conducted by Behavioural Surveillance Survey (BSS) in 2005 found that two thirds of Kenyan youth reported they have ever had sex with more of them being male youth than female.

Nancy (2001) claims that sexual behaviour is closely tied to moral issues, which are not likely to be openly examined and discussed. In some homes, sexual matters are cloaked in secrecy and discussions of sexual concerns are infrequent or absent entirely. She adds that well meaning parents and other adults eager to protect their children may believe that education about sexuality and reproductive health will encourage young people to become sexually active. On the contrary, 'those who do talk with their parents are not as likely to begin their sexual experiences early or engage in high risk behavior once they have begun' (Nancy 2001:27). Parents must realize that there's more danger in not talking about sexuality than in talking about it.

Jackson (2002:134) quotes a young person from Ghana, who, after attending a seminar on sexuality and youth says, 'I'm really touched by the issues you are bringing to us especially about sex. I often ask myself why parents are scared to talk to their children about sex.' This observation could be the unspoken message among many young people who expect their parents to guide them on matters regarding sex.

The connection between HIV and AIDS and sex makes a strong case for the need for parents to take a more proactive role concerning their children's sexuality. After losing his son to AIDS, a parent in Atlanta had this to say: 'My son died of AIDS. He was 21 years old. We must be totally open, honest, and sincere with our children. It could save their lives' (Macher, 1998:26). These sentiments were the focus of this study which explored the language that parents use in trying to articulate matters related to sex to their children while recognizing that it is not always an easy task.

The language we use in discussing certain things will depend on many factors such as the topic, the persons involved, and the social situation, among others. Discussing sex is not easy especially between parents and their children. Yet this should be done if young people are expected to make responsible decisions on their sexuality especially in this era of HIV and AIDS.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

When parents talk to their children to educate them on sex and sexuality, they use indirect language due to inhibitions caused by their cultural backgrounds. This indirectness could hinder the intended message of responsible sexual behaviour. This study sought to examine the language used by parents in their attempts to communicate issues of sex and sexuality to their children.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

1. To establish and describe the stylistic features of language used by parents when they discuss sex and sexuality issues with their adolescent children.
2. To categorize the responses of adolescents to the common utterances by parents and determine whether parents communicate the intended message of responsible sexual behaviour

### **1.5 Hypotheses of the Study**

1. Certain stylistic features of indirectness characterize the language that parents use in discussing sex and issues with their children.
2. These stylistic features of indirectness hinder the message that parents intend to give to their children about sex.

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Jackson (2002) says that despite societal resistance, the sexual and reproductive health needs of the youth must be met. This study was quite appropriate since it focused on communication between parents and children on sex issues. In the field of pragmatics, the study gives the form of indirectness that communication of sexuality issues between parents and their children takes.

### **1.7 Scope of the Study**

This study was carried out in an urban centre (Nakuru) and did not extend to the rural area. It was thought that an urban population would be more heterogeneous than a rural one and would therefore provide a variety of language styles. In terms of respondents, the study limited itself to parents with teenage children and teenagers of either sex.

## **1.8 Limitations of the Study**

In an ideal situation, one would collect live conversations between parents and their children as they discussed issues of sexuality. This was not possible, however, and I had to rely on 'reported' discourse. This must be borne in mind especially in the analysis of data where some pragmatic theories have been used. These theories would ideally be used for analysis of naturally occurring conversation. However, it was still possible to make inferences and conclusions from the data using the theories.

## **DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL TERMS**

**Adolescent:** a young person who in the transition period between childhood and adulthood (about 13- 20 yrs), a period which is marked by profound physical, emotional, mental and social changes.

**Face:** every individual's feeling of self-worth or self-image

**Implicatures:** hints used by people in conversations instead of saying something directly

**Indirectness:** This refers to ways of speaking that do not directly communicate the intention of the speaker.

**Politeness:** a strategy or a series of strategies employed by speaker to achieve a number of communicative goals.

**Pragmatics:** this is an area of study in discourse analysis where meaning is seen as deriving from such factors as intention of speaker, and other factors apart from the actual abstract meaning of words. Pragmatics is about making meaning in an interactive situation.

**Sexuality:** A complex involvement of personality factors and social relationships, having their origin in the reproductive drive.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews some literature on earlier works done on sexuality and communication. The chapter is divided into three major parts. The first and the second parts review literature under the topics: Parents' role in communicating sexuality issues and the power of language respectively. The third part discusses the theoretical framework that guided this study.

#### **2.2 Parents' Role in Communicating Sexuality Issues**

Parents have a big role to play in ensuring that their children are well informed about their sexuality so that they can make responsible choices about their sexual behaviour. This would be a preventive measure against sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies and even HIV and AIDS infection. Jackson (2002) says that at every stage of a child's development, the parent is there to answer questions, give information, advice, and discuss any concerns that the child may have. This observation informs this study centrally as the researcher's concern was the communication that takes place between parents and their children in matters of sexuality. The idea was to see whether parents did take their roles seriously as their children's central advisers.

In 1999, a study was carried out in Thailand by UNESCO to establish whether parents imparted information on sexual and reproductive issues to their children. It was found that parents avoided discussing sex issues and children sought such information outside the family (UNESCO, 1999). The present study sought to investigate the kind of difficulties parents in Kenya experience as they try to articulate issues to do with sexuality to their children. Some parents may have the wrong notion that sex education will encourage sexual activity. On the contrary, Adams (1976) says that learning about sex and getting answers to questions about sexual behaviour do not necessarily lead to preoccupation with sex. Jackson (2002) echoes this claim, saying that sex education makes existing sexual activity safer and tends to lead to a delay in sexual debut.

Speaking to children about sex and sexuality is an important step towards helping them to make responsible decisions regarding their sexual behaviour to avoid risky tendencies that

could expose them to many problems associated with irresponsible sexual behaviour (Wanjama et al, 2006).

Parents are the primary sex educators and the role of arming young people with facts about sexuality and reproductive health falls squarely on them. What parents tell or fail to tell their children on sex impacts either positively or negatively on them (Jackson 2002). It is therefore important that right from the time the children are young, parents become centrally involved in their sexual development by discussing the milestone changes that occur at various stages of their lives and their consequential implications. She further asserts that parents should create an atmosphere that encourages communication. The current study delved deep into issues that made parents opt to either talk to their children or remain quiet on sexual matters.

Welbourne (1995) says it is not enough to speak to children about sex. It should also be done in a language that they clearly understand. This study was undertaken on the premise that since discussing sex between parents and children may be difficult, parents may opt to use indirect language such as euphemistic terms, metaphors, similes and other implicatures. While these language styles may be useful in certain circumstances, they may hinder communication in others. This means that they should be used appropriately and sometimes parents need to use direct and open language. In this study, I explored the usage of these linguistic styles to show their appropriateness or lack of it.

Jackson (2002) cautions that it would be wrong for parents to suppose that the education children get in school is enough. She claims that in schools, there may be no meaningful discussion between the teacher and student and sex education may be taught just like any other subject. Sex education must be highly participatory, reflexive, relevant and challenging, leading to increased self-esteem and self-efficacy, increased motivation and to actual skills development regarding sex and relationships (Nancy, 2001). While discussions at home may not meet such targets, the home still provides the best environment for the child to develop the right attitudes towards sex and relationships.

A recommendation by UNAIDS (1997) says that to achieve the best sexual health outcome, sex education should begin with young adolescents of 10 – 15 years. This is part of the group that the study covered.

### **2.2.1 Adolescence and Sexuality**

Adams (1976) refers to sexuality as a complex involvement of personality factors and social relationships, having their origin in the reproductive drive. He differentiates between sex and sexuality in that while sex is innate in human beings, sexuality must be learned.

In 1999, a pilot study titled “meeting the needs of marginalized adolescents: a new focus on their sexual and reproductive health” was carried out by UNESCO on adolescent boys and girls aged 12 – 16 in Chiapas, Mexico. While the mentioned study did not have a linguistic approach like this one, some of the issues that emerged are important in this study. Using the methodological tools of story, drama and group, the researchers investigated the image and concept, which boys and girls have of love, gender, eroticism, engagement and negotiation in decision – making, among other things. They found a clear tendency to react according to rigid and pre-conceived parameters that respond to models offered by the society and also to a large extent from television especially from soap operas. For instance, as regards the image and representation of love, the adolescents’ responses did not go beyond the repetition of romantic ideas and images typical of the soap opera.

As regards the gender system, it is built on competitive relationships, separations, verbal violence, blackmail and polarization. The male and female adolescent is thus trapped to the point of being prevented from forming equitable harmonious and friendly relationships. What emerges from the said study is that adolescents need adults to guide them and make things clear for them in as far their sexuality is concerned. Whatever information they exchange among themselves may be incorrect, and could confuse and mislead them.

The earliest social influences on the individual are those of the family, and the parents are the first adults to whom a child relates and therefore provide the role models for subsequent sexual development (UNESCO, 1999). This assertion is important in the current study as it recognizes the very central role that a parent plays in influencing his child’s sexual behaviour. If the fight against AIDS is to be won, we must see the condition of today’s adolescent boys and girls and their sexuality as a social question and not just a biological one (Jackson, 2002).

As Dryfoos (1990) observes, saying no to sex can be difficult for many young people. There may be pressure from partners who may argue that sex is the best way to prove love and affection or from older friends who may argue that sex is the best way to prove one’s

maturity. It is therefore important that parents engage their children in constant debates to find out their fears, concerns and attitudes about sex in order to help them out. In this study, I sought to find out the kind of language parents used to keep abreast with their children's fears, concerns and attitudes about sex. The idea is to help the young people make responsible decisions. They must be made to realize that having sex is a very personal decision but which has physical and emotional consequences (ibid).

Nancy (2001) states that while it is normal and natural to be loved and to have sexual feelings, the youth should be told that they might choose to act on the sexual feelings or wait. They must be told that sex is not the only way to express love and there are many good reasons why they should wait. They may want to avoid pregnancy, an STI or simply may not be ready to have sex right now. Young people should realize that movies, television, radio or magazines do not always give a very realistic portrayal of sex. While they may emphasize that sex is fun, they do not always explain the consequences of sexual activities (ibid).

A decision made in a split second can mean the difference between health and sickness from a sexuality transmitted disease or even death from AIDS (Dryfoos,1990). Wise decisions made by teenagers come from years of openness, counsel, guidance and love from parents. Youth and their parents must establish a relationship that makes young men and women talk about friends and relationships to the opposite sex rather than a relationship that makes young people hide these things from their parents. Parents need to know that when children come to them with questions related to sexuality, not responding itself is a response. Non- response communicates its own message; a negative message. Despite the difficulties and discomfort many parents experience they can be effective sexuality educators and they do not need to be experts to do this. Jackson (2002) advises that parents can initiate conversations by using 'teachable moments' from everyday life situations. This study was concerned with finding out how parents go about overcoming the discomfort that goes with speaking about sex and how they make use of their immediate environment to engage their children in sex talk.

In providing the adolescent with basic knowledge, with freedom to think and act, and with encouragement to question, reflect and evaluate, we give him the opportunity to develop a system of values We enable him to plan a way of life where he can use his vast potential both to shape his own life and to build the future of mankind (Dryfoos,1990). He further asserts

that provided with adequate information, young people are capable of making decisions about their sexual behaviour and accepting responsibility for their actions.

### **2.3 Power of Language**

The importance of language as a vehicle of socialization cannot be underestimated. When human beings communicate, they influence each other and the impact of what they say can last for a very long time in their lives.

Holt (1980) says that whenever two or more people meet, the output (messages) of one individual becomes the input of the other and this exchange of output can result in behaviour or attitude change. He goes on to assert that no one is free of the influence of others or free of responsibility of influencing others. Every member of society is involved in attitude formation both as a communicator and as an audience. The centrality of language in shaping other peoples opinions and attitudes forms a strong basis for this study since the main issue here is to show how language is important in imparting values to people. Parents can exploit the power of language to teach their children about responsible sexual behaviour.

According to Widdicomber and Wouflitt (1995), language is the primary medium for mutual adjustment and social communication and hence for the emergence of the self and subjective attitude. This observation was made after a study was carried out on the language used by youth groupings in some suburbs of America with the objective of finding out what kept the gangs together. Language acts as a cohesive force that keeps members of these gangs together and is the most developed form of symbolic interchange (ibid). Of the youth groupings or gangs, they say, "it is through language that individuals can converse and orient their activities in a more complex fashion and through language that the attitudes of the whole group can be communicated." (Ibid: 46). This view serves in reiterating that language is indeed very central in human life. Although the said study was a social rather than linguistic undertaking, it does have some relevance in our study where the power of language is emphasized.

#### **2.3.1 Indirectness in Communication**

Indirectness is one of the linguistic strategies that people will use in communication. This study set to establish whether parents use indirectness pervasively with their children and the various forms the indirectness can take. Individuals and cultures vary widely in how, when and why they use an indirect speech act in preference to a direct one; however the axes

governing indirectness are universal in that they capture the types of consideration likely to govern pragmatic choices in any language.

(Thomas 1995) says that the pragmatic choices applied vary considerably from culture to culture. The main factors that determine how indirect people will be are power of speaker over the hearer, social distance between the two, size of imposition, rights and obligations between the speaker and hearer.

In this study, the most significant of these factors is the size of the imposition. The size of imposition refers to how great the request one is making. In talking about sex, the taboo nature of the topic makes it difficult for many parents to speak freely to their children. In this regard, the size of the imposition is quite big. Wanjama et al (2006) assert that in the African context, there is a culture of silence surrounding sex and sexuality and the subject is regarded as a taboo. Many parents therefore opt to be quite indirect when they attempt to talk to their children on matters concerning sexuality. This indirectness may not be effective in communicating and yet it is critical to give the youth accurate information on sex and sexuality especially in the era of HIV and AIDS (ibid). This may sometimes mean breaking free of cultural constraints and speaking more openly about sex and sexuality to the youth.

Thomas (1995) quotes Dascal (1983) as saying that indirectness is costly and risky; costly in the sense that an utterance takes longer for the speaker to produce and the hearer to process. It is risky because the hearer may not understand what the speaker is getting at. An illustration is given of a person B who has been living with A in the latter's house and has a passion for a certain song which he has played twice. Tired of it, but not wanting to hurt his friend, A suggests indirectly that B plays something else

A: Would you like to listen to something else now?

B: No

(Thomas 1995:120)

B interprets A's utterance as a genuine question and prepares to play the record for the third time! So our intention is not always communicated to our listeners and as Thomas (1995:22) says, 'making meaning is a dynamic process involving the negotiation of meaning between

speaker and hearer, the context of utterance (Physical, Social and Linguistic) and the meaning potential of an utterance’.

All communicators must make a decision about how much of what they want to communicate they are going to communicate explicitly and how much they are going to leave implicit. This decision depends on the speaker’s estimation of the hearer’s contextual resources.

A speaker aiming at optimal relevance must assume that the contextual assumptions required for the interpretation of the utterance are immediately accessible to the hearer (Blakemore, 1992). In this study, we looked into the considerations that parents make in deciding how explicit or implicit they should be in communicating sex issues to their teenage children.

### **2.3.2 Meaning in Parents’ Language**

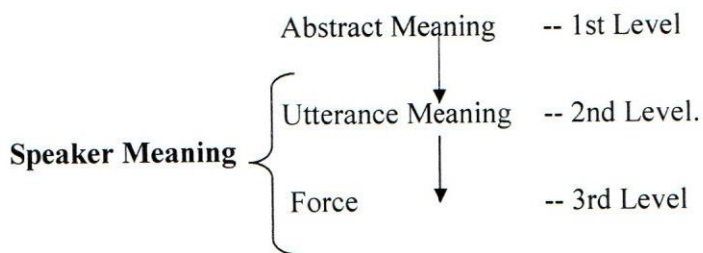
Thomas (1995) explores three levels of meaning. The first level is the abstract meaning, which is concerned with what a word phrase or sentence, could mean. This is the meaning that semantics is concerned with. Leech (1983) says that meaning in semantics is defined purely as a property of expression in a given language in abstraction from particular situations, speakers and bearers.

The second level of meaning is the contextual or utterance meaning. Here we look at what speaker actually means by using a particular word on a particular occasion. At this level, we look at meaning from the speaker’s point of view in which case we are already looking at meaning pragmatically. Leech (1983) says that in pragmatics, meaning is defined relative to the speaker. Thomas (1995) refers to this second level of meaning as the first component of speaker meaning.

The third level of meaning, and which is also vested in the speaker is force. This refers to the speaker’s communicative intentions. This is the second component of speaker meaning.

In analyzing parents’ utterances, I used the second and third levels of meaning or speaker meaning.

These two levels are inter-related because force is usually derived from utterance meaning. This was because my interest was to find out whether adolescents got the intention or pragmatic force behind their parents’ utterances.



**Figure 1: The three levels of meaning** (Thomas 1995:16-22)

The actual meanings of the individual words in the utterances do not feature significantly in this study. Thomas (1995:18) quotes Miller (1974) a psychologist saying,

Most of the misunderstandings of other people are not due to the inability to hear them or parse their sentences or understand their words.... A far more important source of difficulty in communication is that we often fail to understand a speaker's intention.

Ritzer (1992) reinforces this view by asserting that meaning does not stem from mental processes but from the process of interaction. He further says that in the process of social interaction, people symbolically communicate meaning to the others involved. The others interpret those symbols and orient their responding action on the basis of their interaction. That is, in a social interaction, actors engage in a process of mutual influence.

However, this does not mean that we can completely ignore abstract meaning. As Leech (1983) says, to have a satisfactory explanation, we have to approach meaning from both a pragmatic and a semantic point of view. He calls it complementalism. Akmajian et al, (2001) say speaker meaning can differ from linguistic meaning depending on whether the speaker is speaking literally or non-literally. The non-literal styles include indirect references such as metaphors, similes, irony, and sarcasm among others. This study explored how these features of style appeared in parent –child talk on sexuality. As Akmajian et al, (2001) say, ‘speakers can mean what they say, not mean what they say or mean more than what they say.’ In this study, we explored this phenomenon and its implications in communication.

For a speaker to mean something by an utterance, at least in the sense of meaning to communicate something, the speaker must intend by that utterance to produce some effect in the audience, for instance, a belief or action (Akmajian et al, 2001).



The same notion is echoed by Grice (1979) when he says that to communicate something; the intention must be intended to be recognized by the audience. In this study, I sought to establish whether adolescent children always recognize the intention of the parents when the latter use certain utterances to communicate issues of sexuality.

### **2.3.3 Contextualization in Sex Talk**

Communication of sex issues, as in all other communication, happens in context. Among other concerns, it was important in this study to explore the various contexts in which utterances were made in order to gauge how communication took place.

Akmajian et al (2001) say that context could refer to shared background knowledge among the participants, the social circumstances of the utterance, or the linguistic environment of the utterance. If communication is to take place, the context must be clear to both the speaker and the hearer. It was important in this study to determine how the various contexts either enhanced or interfered with communication between parents and their adolescent children. Context in the present study was derived from the content of utterances as reported by parents. For this reason, the various contexts reflect shared background knowledge between parents and their children.

For instance, in an utterance where a parent picks on education to communicate on sexuality as in "*I tell X to remember that education is the most important thing right now*", it can be said that both the parent and child share some background knowledge on education and education is therefore the context in this case.

Related to context is presupposition, which refers to a speaker's assumption about a speech context. Lakoff (1973) says that the pragmatic presupposition of a sentence is the set of conditions that have to be satisfied in order for the intended speech act to be appropriate in the circumstances or to be felicitous. He further says natural language is used in context, and every time a speaker uses a sentence of his language, he is making assumptions about the context.

Fillmore (1971) looks at the presuppositional aspects of a speech situation as the conditions which must be satisfied in order for a particular illocutionary act to be effectively performed in saying particular sentences. (Fillmore 1971:49) sums up presupposition by pointing out:

Many sentences require that certain culturally defined conditions or contexts be satisfied in order for an utterance of a sentence to be understood. These conditions are naturally called the context of the sentence. An utterance of a sentence pragmatically presupposes that the context is appropriate.

In the present study, it was not possible to establish whether parents fulfilled contextual conditions in order to communicate effectively with their children since parents' utterances were not recorded in their contexts. But as is in all communication, it was assumed that parents either fulfilled or failed to fulfill the conditions for communication and this partly contributed to the way teenagers reacted to the utterances from parents (see chapter five).

## **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

The study was guided by a combination of three theoretical frameworks namely: Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory (SAT), Brown and Levinson's (1978) Politeness Theory and the theory of Cooperative Principle by Grice (1979). These theories explain the pragmatics of language. Broadly speaking, pragmatics looks into how our knowledge of the world helps us to derive meaning from utterances. This study therefore used these theories to help explain the factors that come to play when parents and their children engage in talk on sex.

### **2.4.1 Speech Act Theory (SAT)**

This theory was borne out of Austin's (1962) observation that utterances have a performative aspect. In this study we were looking at peoples intentions when they utter certain words and the effect of these words on the hearers. This is captured in the Speech Act Theory where Austin observes that utterances not only have sense but they also have force. Austin (1962:169) made a three-fold distinction of utterances:

Locution - the actual words uttered

Illocution - the force or intention behind the words

Perlocution - the effect of the illocution on the hearer.

In this study, these aspects of the SAT were important in that it explored how parents' utterances (locution) and their intention (illocution) affected their adolescent children.

The responses the teenagers gave to the utterances were the perlocutionary acts and they pointed to the way the parents' messages were communicated to the children. The force and effect of utterances in Austin's theory derive from factors such as particular location, the

persons involved, and intention of the speaker among others. According to Austin, the meaning we derive from people's utterances depends on the illocutionary force or the intention behind the words.

Thomas (1995) says that while it is true that most competent adult speakers of a language can predict or interpret intended illocutionary forces accurately most times, this is not always the case. For instance if a mother tells her daughter "*You are a big girl now*" to caution her to be careful about her relationship with boys, the daughter may fail to see the illocutionary force behind the words; that is, the mother's intention in uttering the words. This theory guided the analysis of parents' utterances to show their illocution and subsequent perlocution. This was to determine whether children always understand the force or intention behind their parents' utterances.

#### **2.4.2 Politeness Theory**

Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1978) treat politeness as a pragmatic phenomenon. Politeness is interpreted as a strategy (or a series of strategies) employed by a speaker to achieve a variety of goals, such as promoting or maintaining harmonious relations.

The concept of 'face' by Goffman (1967) was central to Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness. Face refers to reputation or good name. According to the 'face' theory, an individual's face may be damaged, maintained or enhanced through interaction with others. People try as much as possible to save their face and may adopt various strategies to do so. A common practice people use as a politeness strategy is indirectness. Thomas (1995) says that people may employ indirectness to avoid a taboo word or topic. This aspect of politeness was used in this study to explain the language behaviour of parents as they engaged their children in discussions on sexuality.

#### **2.4.3 Grice's Theory of Cooperative Principle**

Grice's (1967) theory was an attempt at explaining how a hearer gets from what is said to what is meant, from the level of expressed meaning to the level of implied meaning.

In this theory, speaker meaning is interpreted beyond the conventional meaning of an utterance or proposition.

According to Grice, when people talk, they engage in cooperative efforts in order to communicate. This effort is what is entailed in his idea of cooperative principle which requires participants in a communication process to make their conversational contribution

such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose of the talk exchange in which one is engaged (Thomas 1995: 62).

This general principle operates in four maxims of quantity, quality relation, and manner. (Thomas 1995:63) illustrates the four maxims:

**Quantity**-Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purpose of the exchange. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

**Quality**- Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

**Relation**-Be relevant

**Manner**- Avoid obscurity of expression.

- Avoid ambiguity
- Be brief
- Be orderly

The imperative mood in the cooperative principle and subsequent maxims would seem to mean that Grice was telling speakers how they should behave. However, what he was suggesting was that in a conversational interaction, people work on the assumption that a certain set of rules is in operation unless there are indications to the contrary (Thomas 1995).

People manipulate the maxims to generate implicatures. Implicatures are hints that people use in conversations instead of saying something directly. Implicatures are generated intentionally by the speaker and may or may not be understood by the hearer. The implicature may take the form of flouting a maxim because the speaker wishes to prompt the hearer to look for a meaning which is different from, or in addition to the expressed meaning (Thomas, 1995). For instance, in an earlier example, the mother who tells her daughter "*You are a big girl now*" to caution her against possible bad behavior has flouted the maxim of quantity (has given less information than is required) and the girl may not necessarily get the implied meaning. She may think the mother is just making a comment on her size!

In this study, the maxims were used to show how parents flouted them when communicating with their children and the effect this had on teenagers' reactions. One weakness in Grice's pragmatics lies in the fact that it may be difficult sometimes to know when a speaker is deliberately failing to observe a maxim and hence creating an implicature. Blakemore (1992) observes that Implicatures can be strong or weak.

The strength of the implicature depends on the responsibility of the hearer in interpreting the utterance. If the hearer has a great deal of responsibility in the interpretation, then the implicature is weak and consequently, the communication is also weak. If on the other hand, the speaker is able to constrain the hearer's interpretation, then the implicature is strong and so is the communication. This observation was useful in determining whether parents communicated depending on how strong or weak their utterances were.

From the observations brought out in this chapter, it is clear that the role played by communication in shaping peoples' attitudes is quite big. More important is the fact that human beings are able to manipulate language to suit their communication needs. These observations were important in this study whose aim was to explore how parents' language affected teenagers' views about their sexuality.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the procedures and the methodology employed in this study. These include the research design, location of study, population, sampling procedures, and data collection and analysis techniques. In this study, data collection was done in two stages: The first stage involved collecting data from parents. After processing this data, the language varieties elicited were used to formulate an interview schedule (Appendix 11) to collect data from teenagers.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

This was a field study. Both qualitative and quantitative research techniques were used in the study. In order to capture a holistic picture of the language used by parents and their children, it was important to use the descriptive statistics of quantitative research as well as describe the varieties qualitatively in order to give explanations to the emerging patterns of language varieties.

#### **3.3 Location of Study**

The study was carried out in selected residential areas of Nakuru urban centre in Nakuru District in Rift Valley Province of Kenya. This location was found suitable because of its population is ethnically heterogeneous. As such, it was possible to get a wide range of language styles.

#### **3.4 Population, Sample and Sampling Procedures**

The target population of this study were all the urban dwellers of Nakuru. These were to be representative of the urban population in Kenya. The research sample comprised 50 teenagers and 50 parents of teenagers (not necessarily parents and their children) from five selected residential areas of Nakuru. These are: Bondeni, Mwariki, Pangani, Freehold and Section 58.

The residential areas used in the study were selected randomly to come up with a representative sample of Nakuru town dwellers. Nakuru has about fifteen estates (UNCHS and Belgium Development Cooperation for Sustainable Urban Development of Nakuru Town and its Environs, 1999), so five areas were representative enough.

Because the method of data collection was interview and too involving, it was not possible to interview a bigger number of respondents hence the sample size of 50 parents and 50 adolescents.

Parents were selected through purposive sampling to come with those whose children have reached teen age. This was done through social net works where the researcher established a chain of respondents beginning with those already known to her (snowballing). Likewise, the young people were selected purposively to get those who were in their teen age. As in the case of parents, this was also done through social networks.

### **3.5 Collection of Data from Parents**

During the sampling period, the researcher was able to meet some of the respondents who would give appointments depending on their commitments. At this point, the purpose of the visit would also be spelt out so that during the actual visit, the interview would begin straight away. In other cases where it was not possible to actually see the respondents in advance, and these accounted for majority of the respondents, the researcher would first establish rapport so as to win their confidence before delving into the topic. Once the topic was introduced and the respondent got talking, the researcher allowed a bit of digressing to take place while making sure that the questions she set out to ask were answered. This could prove quite tricky at times but subtlety and patience paid dividends. Using an open-ended interview schedule, the researcher elicited as much variety of language as possible. The raw data comprising various utterances was audio taped.

#### **3.5.1 Transcription and Organization of Data from Parents**

The utterances were written on paper. Most of the utterances were in Kiswahili. A certain amount of the utterances was in Kikuyu the language spoken in Central Kenya and the first language of the researcher) A little amount was in English. After the utterances were written down, they were examined and the ones containing analyzable language varieties were retained while the others were discarded. This meant the texts were now shorter and manageable. The texts were then numbered for ease of analysis. The sample transcript in table 1 demonstrates this.

**Table 1**

**A Sample Transcript: Interview with a Parent**

Kiswahili	English
<p><b>Wewe waona kama ni jambo la maana kwa wazazi kuongea na watoto wao juu ya mambo ya mapenzi na ingine ya aina hio?</b> Ee, sababu wakipotea, si watakulaumu?</p>	<p><b>Do you think it is important for parents to speak to their children about sex and such things?</b> Yes, because if they get lost, won't they blame you?</p>
<p><b>Unawaambia nini?</b> 1. Mimi nawaambia mtu achunge maisha yake. Akitembea vizuri, maisha yake mazuri na akitembea vibaya vile vile maisha yake mabaya</p>	<p><b>What do you tell them?</b> 1. I tell them to take care of their lives. If one walks well he will be well, and if one walks badly his life will be bad.</p>
<p><b>Wanaelewa?</b> Wanaelewa</p>	<p><b>Do they understand?</b> Yes they understand</p>
<p><b>Unajuaje wanaelewa?</b> 2. Huwezi kosa kujua watoto wako....vile tunakaa nawao najua wanaelewa</p>	<p><b>How do you know they understand?</b> 2. You cannot fail to know your children, the way I relate with them I know they understand.</p>
<p><b>Na sasa juu ni wakubwa, mnaongea kuhusu kubadilika kwa miili yao na mambo kama hayo?</b> 3. Apana hio mambo nafikiri wanajua, si wanafunzwa shule...</p>	<p><b>And now since they are big, do you talk to them about the changes their bodies go through?</b> 3. No I think they know these things, they are taught in school.</p>

**3.5.2 Coding of Utterances from Parents**

Certain categories emerged in accordance with the content of the utterances. The categories, spelt out in table 2, formed identifiable patterns. These categories formed part of the contextual provision for sex talk by parents. The categorization of the utterances was done on the basis of the issues that parents mentioned in their talk on sex and sexuality to their children. The issues were: behaviour, education, modernity, life, men, peers, dressing, age and HIV and AIDS.



A category was labeled 'education' because many parents referred to education while warning their children about irresponsible sexual behaviour which could jeopardize their education and hence their future. Education provided the contextual opportunity for an utterance since both the parent and the child shared some background knowledge on education. The utterances that made reference to children's conduct to warn children that they had to behave responsibly in relationships and avoid irresponsible sexual behaviour were labeled 'behaviour'. 'Modernity' was the category given to utterances that warned children about modern influences that might mislead them. Parents also told their children to be careful lest they destroyed their lives through irresponsible sex. Such utterances were categorized as 'life'. Some parents saw men as threats to their daughters and warned them against them. The label given to these utterances was 'men'. Utterances that made reference to peers as possible bad influences were labeled 'peers'.

Some parents spoke to their children about dressing decently to avoid being easy prey for sexual harassment. The utterances on dressing were labeled 'dressing'. There were also parents who mentioned their children's (advancing) age to make them realize they needed to be careful in their relationships with the opposite sex. The final category was 'HIV and AIDS', derived from utterances that referred to HIV and AIDS in cautioning children about engaging in irresponsible sexual behaviour that could lead to their contracting the disease.

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**Table 2**

**Coding of Parents' Utterances**

	<b>Code</b>	<b>No. of Utterances</b>
Behaviour	B	19
Education	E	18
Men	Mn	16
Life	L	12
Modernity	Md	12
HIV/AIDS	H/A	8
Peers	P	7
Age	A	6
Dressing	D	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>102</b>

After coding the utterances, it was then easy to number, count, and assign them linguistic styles. For instance in the above transcript, in utterance number 1, reference is made to life. This was coded under life (L) and the stylistic device in the utterance is metaphorical language. All the utterances that made reference to life were coded L but the linguistic style could be different.

**3.5.3 Sampling of Utterances from Parents**

Sampling of utterances was done according to the various categories that were identified and coded. From each category, utterances were selected, based on their pervasiveness.

They were rephrased to reflect the general idea in each of the categories and to make them clear for the teenagers. For each category, two or three utterances were taken. For instance in the 'men' category, the three utterances were:

1. *Men are not good*

2. *Men are bad*

3. *Men are animals*

These utterances were used to formulate an open-ended interview schedule for teenagers. The purpose was to get their responses to the commonly used utterances.

### **3.6 Collection of data from Teenagers**

Data collection from teenagers was to be done in groups. The group discussion was found to be the ideal way of conducting this research because as Robson (1989) says, group discussions are an excellent means of revealing people's ways of thinking. He adds that they (groups) are an opportunity to observe the exchange of ideas in a dynamic way and to construct hypothetical models of the way people think.

#### **3.6.1 Organization of the Groups**

During the sampling period, I met with some teenagers introduced to me through social networks. I asked the teenagers I met initially to get their teenage friends to make five of them. We would then agree on the actual date of discussions so that they would be ready by then. Five was chosen as the ideal number for discussions, because as Robson (1989) argues, groups of five or six are suitable in the following situations: when interviewing children or early teens, when interviewing on sensitive subjects, or when there is need to explore the individual behaviour at a more detailed level but still in the context of a group discussion. In this study, all these factors apply since, first, sexuality is a sensitive subject, secondly, my respondents were teenagers, and finally, it was important to explore the individual responses in a group context.

In order to have a relaxed atmosphere, I did not mix the sexes in the groups. In the presence of an adult, adolescents of both sexes may not feel free to discuss issues to do with sex. Hence in the ten groups of five I came up with, five groups comprised girls and the other five were boys.

### 3.6.2 The Group Interviewing Process

I began interviewing process by introducing myself and establishing rapport with the teenagers to break any tension and establish a free atmosphere. I then explained the purpose of our meeting and what I expected of them. I was able to get their reactions to the common utterances from parents on sexuality through a discussion that lasted about one hour. Robson (1989) says the ideal time that a group discussion should take is one to one and a half hours. The verbal reactions were recorded on tape and observational notes were also made for the non-verbal reactions.

### 3.6.3 Organization of Data from Teenagers

The data from teenagers comprised the responses to the common utterances collected from parents. The responses revealed the teenagers' attitude towards the utterances presented to them. The reactions were derived from the discourse that was evoked when the utterances were presented to the teenagers. The responses were classified into five categories that revealed the teenagers' feelings towards parents' utterances. These were: indignation, approval, confusion and non-response. Below is a part of a transcript that portrays the responses of the teenagers.

#### Sample Transcript: Interview with Teenagers

*What if your parent told you that men are not good at all, that you must avoid them?*

B. {Frowning} why?

A. I don't think its good coz (...) what about dad?

D. eeh and our brothers!

B. Surely you can't say that.

E. pengine (*perhaps*) they want to say that (...) we shouldn't joke around

*What if they actually told you that men are animals?*

{Simultaneously exasperated}

D. What?

B. Please

E. kwa nini? Apana hio ni baya (...) avadhali hata aseme (...)

Why? *No that is bad (...) It's better to say (...)*

B. yes aseme, mtu atake care lakini asiseme wao ni wanyama.

*Yes its better to say one should take care but not to call them animals*

C. {looking at interviewer} can they really say that?

**In the interpretation of the transcripts, the following convention was used:**

{ } - the non-verbal reactions observed

(...) - a pause

From the transcripts, I was able to get and label the verbal and non-verbal reactions. For instance from the transcript, the utterance *men are bad* and *men are animals* aroused some reactions in the group. These reactions were in form of spoken words such as, “*why?*” and “*surely you can't say that*” by respondent B, who also reacted non-verbally by *frowning* and visibly portraying exasperation. The combination of these reactions amounted to *confusion* and *indignation* portrayed by the verbal and non-verbal reactions. This kind of labeling was done for all the responses obtained from the various utterances from parents. For instance in the above transcript, from the utterance classified as men, three out of the five adolescents i.e. B, D and E were indignant when the negative comments about men were presented to them. Similarly, B and D portray *confusion*. Different utterances brought different responses.

The number of adolescents who brought out the various responses was counted. The figures obtained formed the basis for the analysis of the reactions of the adolescents to the parents' utterances as spelt out in chapter five.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

The utterances obtained from parents and the responses from the teenagers formed what was inherently qualitative data i.e. data in text form. This data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

#### **3.7.1 Quantitative Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics of frequency distribution was used to analyze data. After coding and categorizing of parents' utterances, the number of utterances in each category and the subsequent percentages and frequencies were computed and put in a table.

The different language styles obtained were also counted and their frequencies and percentages calculated. After the different responses obtained from teenagers were classified, their frequencies and subsequent percentages were obtained and computed.

### **3.7.2 Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative analysis was done through interpreting the utterances on the basis of the frequencies and percentages obtained. At this stage of analysis, explanations were given as to why, for instance, the highest percentage of utterances should be about behaviour. On the styles, explanations were given on why for example, circumlocution was the most pervasively used style. Thus, through qualitative and quantitative analysis, the utterances from parents were given an exhaustive interpretation.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **PARENTS' LANGUAGE IN SEX TALK**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter analyzes the language that parents use in communicating issues regarding sexuality and its relationship with HIV and AIDS to their children. It is divided into four sections. The first section is an overview of parents' utterances. The second section briefly looks into various issues that came up in parents' utterances. The third part analyzes the features of style derived from the utterances. The styles are examined vis-à-vis theories of pragmatics such as Speech Act Theory (SAT), Grice's theory of Cooperative Principle and Politeness theories. Part four is a conclusion of the chapter. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data both quantitatively and qualitatively.

#### **4.2 An Overview of Parents' Utterances**

A total of 102 utterances were used for analysis. Some of the utterances were direct but most were indirect. Directness here means that some parents used open and straightforward language in addressing matters of sexuality to their children. Indirectness means that some parents, in fact, the majority only insinuated what they meant and it was up to their children to get the message. For instance, an utterance like 'If you sleep with a man you will get pregnant' is a direct one since the meaning in the utterance is obvious. On the other hand, parents who say 'the world is not good' are quite indirect about what they mean.

#### **4.3 Issues Derived from Parents' Utterances**

Parents' utterances were divided into nine categories of issues which were derived from what the parents mentioned when they were asked what they told their children about sexuality. The issues were: behaviour, education, modernity, life, men, peers, dressing, age and HIV and AIDS. The apparent connection between them and sexuality is explained. Table 3 spells out the issues and indicates whether the utterances connected to particular issues were direct or indirect.

**Table 3****Various issues derived from parents' utterances on sex and sexuality**

Issue	Indirect Utterances		Direct utterances		Total	
	f	%	F	%	f	%
Behaviour	19	18.6	-	-	19	18.6
Education	18	17.6	-	-	18	17.6
Men	10	9.8	6	5.9	16	15.7
Life	12	11.8	-	-	12	11.8
Modernity	12	11.8	-	-	12	11.8
Peers	8	7.8	-	-	8	7.8
HIV and AIDS	4	3.9	3	2.9	7	6.9
Age	3	2.9	3	2.9	6	5.9
Dressing	4	3.9	-	-	4	3.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>88.1</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100</b>

**4.3.1 Behaviour**

Adams (1990) says that an individual's behavioural reaction is a function of his perception and personal interpretation of a given situation while Dryfoos (1990) defines behaviour as specific ways responding to interpersonal situations. In this study, behaviour was quite important because the way young people responded to situations that required them to make certain decisions about sex and sexuality was central to the study. Behaviour rated highest with 18.6 percent of the utterances about sexuality being on children's behaviour. By alluding to behaviour, parents wanted to positively influence the way their children interpreted and responded to situations so as to be able to make right decisions in matters of sex. Some of the utterances on behaviour include:

**Example 1**

63. I usually say I won't tell one what to do but they must not play around because it is very dangerous



## **Example 2**

21. I tell them that when one walks in the right way, they will be okay and if they walk badly their lives will be bad....

In the two examples, the parents insinuate that good behaviour is paramount if one has to avoid trouble. In example 1, the parent says 'play around' and since the question was about sex, it can be assumed that 'play around' refers to irresponsible sexual behaviour. The respondent further gives the reason why the child in question should not play around, saying that 'it is dangerous'. Danger in this context could refer to the presence of HIV and AIDS. Hence by referring to bad behaviour and its outcome, the parent makes an indirect commentary on sex and its relationship with HIV and AIDS.

In example 2, the parent talks of 'walking in the right way' to refer to good behaviour, which they go ahead to say will lead to 'good life', as opposed to 'walking waywardly' which will lead to a bad life. The allusion to sex here is obvious. As in example 1, the parent makes use of conduct or behaviour as point of departure to communicate about sex and by extension, HIV and AIDS. All the utterances on behaviour are indirect as can be seen in Table 1. This shows just how parents are uncomfortable in talking about sex and would rather go round the issue. When asked whether they thought their children understood, they said they just hoped they did.

### **4.3.2 Education**

Adams (1976) says that many people relate education to vocational success; i.e. the more education a person has, the more likely he is to be successful particularly in the world of work. Education is also closely related to many other job characteristics such as high status, attractive working conditions and opportunities for personal development. Utterances on education come second to behaviour with 17.6 percent. This means that education provides a good platform for parents to talk about sexuality to their children. Parents hoped to appeal to the children by showing them that they risked ruining their lives if they engaged in irresponsible sex while they were still in school. Sexual relationships could lead to disruption of education because of unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and even HIV and AIDS. Even if one was lucky to escape these things, one still risked poor performance at school because of poor concentration.

This is actually what the parents wanted their children to understand. The illustrations below show some of the utterances in which parents referred to education to communicate on sex.

### **Example 3**

13. What can you tell them? I say that one must know why they are in school and I don't expect other things...

### **Example 4**

70. I usually tell X to be careful, concentrate on her studies and God will help her to go up to University...

In the two examples, the respondents opt to indirectly make a comment on sexuality by bringing in an issue they consider of paramount importance to their children's lives: education. In example 3, the respondent says that 'they must know why they are in school' and they do not expect 'other things'. This means that the child should not engage in irresponsible sexual behaviour at the expense of their education. The utterance in example 4 reinforces the same thing, where the parent goes ahead to speak about university education to show the child that there is so much at stake in the child's education but which could be lost if the child is not careful about her sexual behaviour.

Just like the utterances on behaviour, all the utterances on education are indirect on sexuality. Once again it goes to show that it is not easy for parents to talk about sex to their children. Actually, that is why, in the first place, they bring up education when they mean to talk matters of sex to their children.

### **4.3.3 Men**

15.7 percent of the utterances were centered men. These utterances were made by parents of teenage girls. These parents saw men as a threat to their children. The idea here was to intervene and prevent premarital sex to prevent the negative consequences that came with it. Welbourn (1995) observes that once girls get pregnant, men are seen as the perpetrators of the outcome. Girls are seen as the victims. This is the kind of stance taken by parents who warn their daughters about men. It is not therefore surprising that in this category, some of the utterances were quite direct. For instance, in example 5, the parent decides to go quite straight to the point.

### **Example 5**

71. I tell x that men are only interested in her when they want to sleep with her, so she should be very careful.

### **Example 6**

59. I usually tell her that she should not allow a man to cheat her because all they want is sex and all men are the same.

In examples 5 and 6, the parents are quite direct about warning their daughters on the dangers of trusting men. They seem to have no problem in saying 'want to sleep with her' and 'all they want is sex'. This direct way of communicating could make the parent's message clearer than one that is indirect in the example 7 and 8 below.

### **Example 7**

26. I found X talking to a boy and asked her 'what would your father say if he found you speaking with that boy?'

### **Example 8**

49....and that she should not trust men .... they are animals who are just out to destroy her...

In example 7, by asking her daughter what the father would make of the boy's presence, the mother is portraying her disapproval of the seemingly developing relationship between her daughter and the particular boy. In example 8, the respondent goes quite far and refers to men as animals to discourage a possible relationship.

## **4.3.4 Modernity**

In this study, modernity is used to refer to general increase in permissiveness in modern society. This permissiveness means that people, youth included, are generally freer to express themselves in many spheres of life, including their sexuality. In this regard, parents referred to modernity negatively. In fact, some parents regarded HIV and AIDS as a 'modern' ailment brought by permissiveness. This state of affairs is aggravated by free flow of information from television, internet, and other modern gadgets that make it easy for children to access all kinds of information. Adams (1976) says that long-established rules and mores of church and society are diminishing in power, and the security that they provided has not been replaced by modern inventions.

He further says that modern culture presents sex as a stolen sweet, commercial asset, fun, weapon, status symbol, cure for loneliness, and as the crowning expression of romantic love. At the same time, culture still labels sex outside marriage as sin. In this kind of situation, children may get confused by the contradictions if they lack proper guidance. In the modernity category, which took up 11.6 percent of the utterances, there were utterances such as:

**Example 9** (kikuyu)

*Ningi ndimwiraga emenyere muno tondu thi ni yathukire na kwina maundu maingi moru muno*

(83. I also tell X that the world has really changed and there are lots of bad things, they must be very careful)

**Example 10** (kiswahili)

*Mimi huwa namwambia siku hizi kuna magojwa mengi na lazima achunge sana..*

(77. I tell X that nowadays there are many diseases and they must be very careful...)

In the two examples, the underlying issue is that the modern world will not give a chance to those who choose to be irresponsible sexually. There's subtle reference to HIV and AIDS through mention of 'many diseases' in examples 10. In example, 9 the respondent talks of 'lots of bad things'. Since the parent was asked what he/she told his /her children about sex, then it can be deduced that by saying 'lots of bad things', the parent could be referring to contracting of HIV and AIDS as a consequence of engaging in sex. In example 9, the respondent also says the 'world has changed' and once again, it can only mean that the parent views the modern world negatively and is quite concerned that if their child is not careful, they would become negatively influenced into bad behaviour and possibly get infected with HIV and AIDS. When parents make reference to modernity, they assume that their children will understand the bigger message of not engaging in careless sexual behaviour. In this category, there are no direct utterances on sexuality. This shows that parents would rather speak indirectly about sexuality.

#### **4.3.5 Life**

In this study, the connection between life and sexuality is that decisions made about our sexuality can determine how we live and they can even bring about life-threatening situations. Adams (1976) says that many young women lose their lives through abortions of unwanted pregnancies.

According to NASCOP (2005), HIV and AIDS has reduced life expectancy in Kenya from 62 years in 1990 to 47 years in 2001. 11.8 percent of the utterances were about life as shown in examples 11 and 12.

**Example 11** (kiswahili)

*Mimi huwa namwambia achunge maisha yake , kamwe asicheze na maisha*

(35. I tell X that they must take care of their lives; they must not joke with life...)

**Example 12**

84. I tell X that life is too precious and she cannot waste it with useless things....

The utterances on life imply that many parents were worried that if their children did not behave well sexually, they would put their lives in jeopardy. For this reason, they told their children that irresponsible sexual behaviour poses danger to life.

#### 4.3.6 HIV and AIDS

Only 6.9 percent of the utterances refer to HIV and AIDS by its actual terms. In other utterances, HIV and AIDS was only implied. It would seem that for many parents, it is difficult to mention HIV and AIDS, perhaps because of its close association with sex. For those who did, they hoped that by drawing their children's attention to HIV and AIDS, they would effectively communicate the message of responsible sexual behaviour. In this category, 3.9 percent of the utterances were quite direct on sex while 2.9 percent were indirect. Example 13 is an indirect utterance while example 14 is a direct utterance.

**Example 13**

92. I tell X that AIDS is real and they must take great care.... one can only pray they listen...

**Example 14**

*Mimi huwa nasema kitu moja ukilala na mwanamme, hutakosa kitu moja, Mtoto ama ukimwi, unaficha mtoto nini?*

29. I usually tell them this: if someone decides to sleep with a man, you will not miss one thing, either pregnancy or AIDS, why hide the truth from a child?

### 4.3.7 Peers

Peer influence plays a big role in the way teenagers behave. Dryfoos (1990) says that in order to fit in a group, teenagers will even go against what they believe to be right. Adams (1990) states that in educating adolescents to adhere to desired patterns of sexual behaviour, among other things, we must have in mind the 'the invisible but terrific force of peer group opinion and behaviour'. 7.8 percent of the utterances were about peer influence. The low percentage would imply that many parents did not think their children's friends could negatively influence their children's sexual behaviour. Some, however did seem to associate 'bad' friends with potential irresponsible sexual behaviour and as such were on alert if they thought their children's friends were a bad influence. They communicated their fears to their children as the following illustrations show.

#### Example 15

55... friends too, if I'm not comfortable with them, I usually ask where they are from because some are not good

#### Example 16

4. Friends, whether boys or girls should be brought home; I don't want those who won't come home- what else can one say?

In the above examples, the phrases 'don't want those who won't come home' and 'I'm not comfortable with them' bring out the parents' disapproval of undesired friends, who could mislead their children into irresponsible sexual behaviour. Utterances on peers are all indirect on sexuality.

### 4.3.8 Age

Only 12 percent of the parents refer to their children's age and size. This implies that few parents talk to their children about changes in their bodies as they grow and the consequences of the changes. Parents of teenage girls, for instance claimed that they didn't think they could tell their daughters anything they already did not know about menses. This claim betrayed their discomfort at trying to talk to their children. This discomfort is manifested in the many words that have been coined in many African societies to talk about a topic considered to be taboo. For instance, terms as 'raining', 'mooning', 'monthly call' among others refer to monthly periods.

However, some parents claimed to have no problem in making open and direct comments to their children. Out of the 5.9 percent of the utterances on age 2.9 percent are direct and a similar percentage is indirect.

**Example 17**

88. You know I was worried that she wouldn't tell me so I just asked whether she had started her periods....I told her that now she was a grown woman.

**Example 18**

*Ndimuragia "niwikite uguo, niukinyite hau?"*

76. I ask X, "have you done that, have you reached there?"

In example 18, the parent points to the daughter's menarche directly when she asked her daughter whether she had started her periods and later she switches to indirect language-'you are now a grown woman'. This means that the mother wants the daughter to know that certain things are expected of 'a grown woman'. The indirectness implies that while the mother has no problem talking about menses, telling her daughter that she was now old enough to get pregnant was not easy. In example 18, the parent is quite indirect and the daughter would have to draw largely from the context to understand what the mother means when she asks whether she had 'done that' or 'reached there'. What the mother means to ask her is simply whether she has started her menses. Another utterance on age went like this:

**Example 19**

*Mimi huwa nasema mtu akifika umri wake lazima achunge sana asijiingize kwa Tabu*

39. I usually tell X that when one reaches that age, one must be very careful .....

Here, the parent refers to the child's age to warn him that he/she must be careful the way they behave. The relationship between age and sexuality is that at teenage, children start asserting their independence and parents get worried that they might mess themselves up with careless sex.

**4.3.9 Dressing**

Dressing did not seem to be a very important issue and only 8 percent of the parents referred to it. Perhaps for most parents, the connection between dressing and sexual behaviour is a bit

remote. However, a few parents did actually comment on their children's attire when they were asked about what they told their children concerning sexuality as shown in example 20 and 21.

#### **Example 20**

58. The other day I had to tell her to remove a top I thought quite bad... you know the kind they wear.....

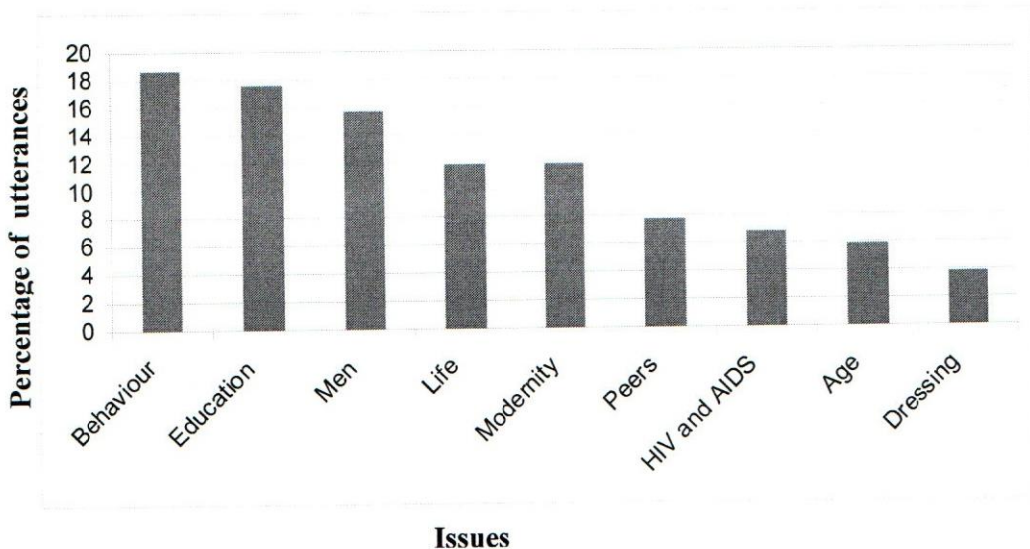
#### **Example 21**

47. (a parent told of a situation when the daughter wore an attire that she thought was indecent and she asked her), "are you going out like that?"

In examples 20 and 21, there's a presupposition on the parent's part that there's an agreed code of dressing which should not be violated. In example 21, when the mother asks the daughter whether 'she was going out like that' she expected the daughter to understand the question to mean that the mother doesn't like what she is adorning. By referring to dressing, the parent is actually making a bigger statement on sexuality: that the daughter, through indecent attire, may lead her to undesirable sexual behaviour or make her an easy target for sexual harassment.

The various issues discussed in this section are the means through which parents attempt to discuss sex issues with their children. Mostly, parents talk to their children indirectly. Only 11.7 percent of the utterances are direct. The direct issues are in the men, HIV and AIDS and age category. It would seem that the context created by these three issues for speaking about sex makes it relatively easy for parents to be direct. It may also mean that parents who refer to men, HIV and AIDS and age are the kind that has little inhibitions in speaking to their children on sexuality. Such parents are in the minority as shown by the low percentage of direct utterances. For most parents, broaching the subject of sex is indeed a difficult task, which they are unable to tackle directly. The issues discussed therefore provide a sort of contextual background to help parents to talk about sexuality. Figure 2 summarizes the issues just discussed and the extent of their pervasiveness in parents' utterances. In section 4.2, we look at the stylistic features that were derived from the utterances.





**Figure 2: Amount of utterances in the issues derived from parents' language**

#### 4.4 Stylistic Features in Parents' Language

This section discusses the stylistic features obtained from parents' utterances. The features are circumlocution, litotes, innuendos, metaphor and hyperbole. Table 2 shows the features and their distribution in the various categories of utterances.

**Table 4**

**Features of style derived from parents' utterances on sex and sexuality**

	Circumlocution		Litotes		Innuendos		Hyperbole		Metaphor		TOTAL	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Behaviour	9	8.8	10	9.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	18.6
Education	10	9.8	8	7.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	17.6
Life	5	4.9	6	5.9	0	0	1	0.9	0	0	12	11.8
Modernity	6	5.9	4	3.9	0	0	2	2	0	0	12	11.8
Peers	3	2.9	5	4.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	7.8
Age	2	2	4	3.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	5.9
Men	6	5.9	6	5.9	1	0.9	1	0.9	2	2	16	15.7
HIV and AIDS	3	2.9	3	2.9	0	0	1	0.9	0	0	7	6.9
Dressing	2	2	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	4	3.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>45.1</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100</b>

**4.4.1 Circumlocution**

Leech (1991) says circumlocution is the use of unnecessarily large number of words in a speech situation where a fewer words would suffice. 45.1 percent of the utterances are circumlocutory. It would seem that many parents do not find it easy to speak about sex and rely quite heavily on circumlocution. The transcript in table 5 demonstrates circumlocution.

**Table 5**  
**Sample Transcript: An illustration of circumlocution**

<b>Kiswahili</b>	<b>English</b>
<p><b>Q. wewe huwa unaona kama ni vizuri kwa wazazi kuzungumza na watoto wao juu ya mambo ya mapenzi na mambo ingine kama hayo?</b></p> <p>Ni vizuri ,ingawa ni ngumu</p>	<p><b>Q. Do you think it is important for parents to speak to their children about sexuality and other issues related to relationships?</b></p> <p>It is good although it is difficult</p>
<p><b>Q.Wewe unaongea na watoto wako?</b></p> <p>Kidogo kidogo, ndiyo</p>	<p><b>Q .Do you talk to your children</b></p> <p>Once in a while, yes</p>
<p><b>Q. Unawaambia nini?</b></p> <p>Nawaambia lazima wafikirie masomo kwanza na wasahau hii mambo ingine yenye haiwasaidii hata kidogo</p>	<p><b>Q. What do you tell them?</b></p> <p>19. I tell them they must think about their education first and forget about these other things that do not help them at all. ....</p>
<p><b>Q.Kumaanisha?</b></p> <p>Waeza uliza, si unajua vijana na vile wanaweza fanya...watajiingiza kwa mambo mingi sana</p>	<p><b>Q. Meaning?</b></p> <p>Why do you ask, you know young people and what they are capable of doing... They will get involved in very many things .....</p>

In table 5 above, the respondent goes round the issue of sex -‘I tell them they should think about their education first and not get involved in these other things’. They bring in the issue of education in a situation where it apparently should not feature because the question put across was on sexuality. By so doing the parent evades speaking about sex directly.

#### 4.4.1.1 Circumlocution and Pragmatic Force

When a parent says: *I tell them they must think about their education first and forget about these other things that do not help them at all ...*, he/she could be warning the daughter not to allow herself to be distracted from education by relationships especially with members of the opposite sex. For communication to take place, the child has to understand the intention of the utterance. Thomas (1995) says that sometimes our listeners may understand the meaning of our words but fail to understand the force or intention of the utterance. In the utterance, *I tell them they must think about their education first and forget about other things*, the child may not have a problem understanding that the parent wants them to take their education seriously, but they may fail to understand the parent's bigger intention of warning them not to engage in irresponsible sexual behaviour.

Thomas (1995) also says that sometimes, listeners may fail to understand both the utterance meaning and the force of the utterance. In the 'education' statement, the parent talks of '*these other things*'. This indirect reference to sex may result in the child failing to understand neither the meaning of the words nor the force behind the words. In this case, the parent will have failed to communicate. From the 'behaviour' category, there are circumlocutory utterances such as:

#### Example 22

21. I tell them that if they walk in the right way, their lives will be okay  
and if they walk badly, their lives will, be bad

The parent's intention in uttering the above statement is to warn their child about the consequences of bad behaviour, which he calls 'walking badly.' If the hearer of the utterance is to understand the intention behind the utterance, the context must be clear so that he/she is able to make out what 'walking' refers to.

#### 4.4.1.2 Circumlocution and Flouting of Conversational Maxims

Through circumlocution, a speaker flouts the conversational maxims of quantity and relevance (Grice 1975). The quantity maxim has been flouted through the use of more words than is necessary. Thomas (1995) says that when a maxim is flouted, it means the speaker wants to imply something other than what the words mean. In table 5, for instance, by

talking of *'these other things'* the parent actually brings into the picture the possibility that the daughter can get distracted in her education by indulging in sex. Yet, *'these other things'* is quite vague and could refer to so many things. It is up to the daughter to recognize the implicature in her mother's utterance and deduce what her mother means. In example 22, the quantity maxim is flouted in that instead of telling the child to have responsible sexual behaviour, he/she goes round the issue and says, *'If they walk in the right way'*. By flouting the conversational maxim of quantity, the parent creates an implicature, i.e. he/she does not have the literal *'walking'* in mind when making this utterance. If the child gets the implicature and understands that *'walking'* refers to behaviour, then he/she would get the message. If the child fails to get the implicature, then the message is lost.

In example 22 and table 5, the respondents also flout the conversational maxim of relation, which says that we should be relevant (Grice 1975). By referring to education which has no apparent relevance to sexuality, the respondent flouts the maxim of relation. Once again, the flouting of the maxim is meant to make the child see the implicature created and hopefully get the message. In example 22, the relation maxim is broken in that there is no apparent relationship between *'walking'* and behaviour. By flouting the relevance maxim, the respondent creates an implicature. The implicature is that the child should behave responsibly in the sexual sense that his/her life will be alright.

#### **4.4.1.3 Circumlocution and Politeness**

The politeness principle by Leech (1980) states: *'minimize (all things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs: maximize the expression of polite beliefs'* (Thomas 1995:159). When a parent takes education as a point of departure to make a statement on sexuality, she is being polite, pragmatically speaking. By not mentioning sex directly, she minimizes expression of impolite beliefs because as Dryfoos (1990), says, talking about sex to children is not the norm for many parents. The *'impolite beliefs'* here would refer to talking about sex.

In the politeness principle, the tact maxim states, *'minimize expression of beliefs which will imply cost to the other; maximize the expression of beliefs which imply benefit to the other.'*(Thomas, 1995:160). In the *'education'* utterance, in example 22, the respondent applies the tact maxim by not stating directly that she is discouraging a potential sexual relationship. Since she has no evidence that the daughter is involved in *'these other things'*, she plays it safe by being indirect and only insinuates. In so doing, she is minimizing the

expression of beliefs which imply cost to her daughter. This simply means she does her best to avoid hurting her daughter's feelings as she passes her message across.

Related to politeness is the face saving tact by Goffman (1967). People will go to any length to save their faces. In order to avoid damaging one's self worth, parents will avoid mentioning sex directly especially to their children. So by circumlocution, parents protect their face as well as pass their message across.

According to Thomas (1995), the social distance that exists between a parent and their children due to age difference may also account for indirectness. That is, the age difference between between parents and their children limits their freedom to talk freely to each other about sex. Circumlocution spreads across all the categories of utterances. The transcript below from 'dressing' category sums up the analysis on circumlocution.

### **Example 23**

47. The other day she (her daughter) wore something that I didn't really think was good and I asked her, "X are you going out like that?" I insisted that she removes it though she couldn't see anything wrong with it.....

In example 23, instead of telling her daughter directly that her dressing was not decent, the mother opts to ask a question, 'X, are you going out like that?' By asking this question the mother's illocutionary force or intention is to ask the daughter to remove the dress, and not merely to want to know whether the daughter is adorning that particular attire. The perlocution that follows the question (removal of the dress) comes only after the mother insists. This means that the daughter does not understand the intention behind the mother's question, 'are you going out like that?' This proves that sometimes parents do not always communicate their intended messages to their children.

Viewed from Gricean pragmatics, the parent who utters the words 'are you going out like that?' can be said to have broken the maxim of relation. This is because on the surface, there is really no relationship between what the mother asks and her disapproval of the daughter's dress.

By flouting the maxim of relation, the mother wishes to communicate more than the words suggest, thereby forming an implicature. It is up to the daughter to get the implied meaning:

that she removes the dress, as it is indecent. In this case the daughter fails to get the implicature, therefore failing to get the message.

Politeness can also be used to explain the mother’s behaviour. Instead of telling her daughter directly to remove the particular piece of clothing, which might hurt her daughter’s feelings, she opts to ask a question, ‘are you going out like that?’ By so doing she minimizes the expression of beliefs which imply cost to the daughter. This means that though she gets the daughter to change her clothing, she does so without making the daughter feel so bad as opposed to if she had told her, ‘Change that dress at once!’ By being indirect, the mother also protects her own face from the discomfort she would have felt if she was more direct about sexuality, which is actually the underlying issue here.

**4.4.2 Litotes**

Leech (1991) defines litotes as the figure of understatement. In contrast to circumlocution, parents will sometimes use few words to pass their messages. It is also a popular style of speaking, accounting for 45.1 percent of all the utterances. This implies that many parents would rather utter a few words than sit in lengthy discussions about sex with their children. This again proves that it is not easy for parents to discuss sex with their children. The following sample transcript demonstrates litotes.

**Table 6**  
**Sample Transcript: An illustration of litotes**

<b>Kikuyu</b>	<b>English</b>
<p>.....  <b>Q. We niwaragiria ciana ciaku uhoro wa sex na maundu manngi ta macio</b></p>	<p>.....  <b>Q do you talk to your children about sex and other related matters</b></p>
<p>Riu ungimera atia? Nii njiraga muiritu wakwa “wi mugima riu wimenyerere muno.....”</p>	<p>11. Now what can one tell them? I tell X, “you are now a grown up and you must take care of yourself” .....</p>

#### 4.4.2.1 Litotes and Pragmatic Force

The locution, 'you are now a grown up and you must take care of yourself' in table 6 is an understatement. Parents who tell their children they are 'now big' or 'grown up' are unlikely to be intending to inform their children about their obvious increase in physical size and age. Since the question asked was what the parent said to her daughter about sexuality, then we must assume that there is a connection that the respondent makes between being 'grown up' and sexuality. We can assume that the parent's illocutionary force is a warning to the child not to engage in irresponsible sexual behaviour as this could lead to consequences such as an unwanted pregnancy or HIV and AIDS. .

#### 4.4.2.2 Litotes and Flouting of Conversational Maxims

According to Grice (1975) Litotes can be said to give less information than is required thereby generating an implicature by flouting the conversation maxim of quantity. For instance from the 'education' category, an utterance goes:

##### **Example 24**

65. I tell X that they went to school to study.

This is an understatement and from the surface, it does not seem to communicate much. It would seem obvious that the child in question knows why s/he went to school. By saying 'you went to school to study' in example 24, the parent wants the child to understand that there is little room for wasting time in school, not least by thinking or engaging in irresponsible sexual behaviour. By flouting the maxim of quantity, the parent wants the child to understand more than the statement means at the surface level. This underlying meaning in understatements meaning is captured by Leech (1991:170)) when he describes litotes:

Litotes express an overt lack of commitment, and so implies a desire to suppress or conceal one's attitude; but paradoxically this may, like hyperbole be a mode of intensification, suggesting that the speaker's feelings are too deep for plain expression.

In litotes, therefore, lies a powerful form of communication. By telling the child that they are now grown up, the parent could be telling the child that he/she should be careful about his/her sexual behaviour now that they are old enough to understand sex.

From the men category, an utterance goes:

**Example 25 (*kikuyu*)**

*Nii ndimwiraga arume ni arume...*

98. (I usually tell X that men are men...)

In telling her daughter that ‘men are men’ the parent is making a powerful statement using very few words. By flouting the maxim of quantity, she creates an implicature. When the parent makes the utterance, the assumption is that the child will get the implied meaning in the utterance that men are bad and all of them are the same and the daughter should be aware of this so that they don’t cheat her. Thomas (1995) says that sometimes it is possible for a hearer to get the force of the utterance without necessarily understanding the utterance meaning. In this case it is possible that the girl may make little meaning of the statement (because of the redundancy of the utterance) but still get the pragmatic force or the intention of the utterance. It is also possible that she may fail to get both the utterance meaning and the force and might therefore fail to get the message. From the ‘HIV and AIDS’ category, the following is an example of litotes.

**Example 26**

15...they must know that this disease is real....

In making the utterance ‘this disease is real’, the parent makes the assumption that the child already knows what ‘this disease’ refers to and that they will get the message behind the brief words: that careless sexual behaviour will eventually lead to contracting HIV and AIDS.

**4.4.3 Innuendos**

When we want to speak something that we deem unpleasant to our hearers, we may employ innuendos, which will help us insinuate and save our face as well as pass the message. Leech (1991) defines innuendo as an allusive remark concerning a person or thing, especially of a depreciatory kind. In this study, innuendos take only about 2.9%, meaning the style is not prevalent. This low occurrence could be due to the fact that innuendos are best observed in natural conversation. In reported speech, it may be hard for an innuendo to come out. That is why innuendos could only be derived from the parents who had had recent experiences and they were able to re-live them. In this case, they were able to give the experience in direct speech.



Innuendos are ambivalent, i.e. they have more than one pragmatic force. In being ambivalent, we are able to convey messages that a hearer may find disagreeable without causing much offence. When the force of the utterance is negotiable, then the speaker reduces the risk of being embarrassed (Thomas, 1995). A parent who asks their children, 'are you going out like that?' as example 23, wants the daughter to understand that he does not like the dress at all. The utterance carries two pragmatic forces in that:

- It is a question and the father wants to know whether the daughter would go out adorning that particular attire
- The father does not like the daughter wearing that dress because he considers it indecent.

When the parent utters the words, though aware of the two possible pragmatic forces, he hopes that the daughter will get the second force (b). In being ambivalent, Leech (1988) says we try to be polite even in situations where this may be a bit difficult. The idea is to pass our message without offending. Parents want to keep good relationships with their children as much as possible but they must also put their foot down when need be and the delicate balance has to be maintained.

#### 4.4.4 Metaphors

Parents make use of insinuations that are metaphorical to avoid talking about sex directly. Metaphors are subtle comparisons of familiar things to ideas or messages that we may not want to be so direct about (Leech, 1991). Metaphorical language takes only 2 percent of the utterances hence it was not a very popular mode of speaking for parents. It could imply that much as parents may prefer speaking indirectly to their children, they are still careful about saying something that children may not understand altogether. The style was however striking because of the interesting figures of speech that came up. For instance,

##### **Example 27**

81. I tell X, "Take great care of yourself. Men are nothing but animals. They use you and then dump you..."

Here the parent equates men to animals and warns the daughter against any association with them. By comparing men with animals, the parent creates an image of ruthlessness and destruction. He/she wants the daughter to be fearful of men and consequently, avoid them completely.

#### **4.4.4.1 Metaphor and Flouting of Conversational Maxims**

In example 27, by telling his/her daughter, 'Men are nothing but animals. They use you and then dump you', the speaker flouts the conversational maxim of quality, which states: 'do not say that which you believe to be false' according to Grice (1975). She is saying something that is untrue and in so doing, generates an implicature. Since the parent who says this does not do so in order to deceive the daughter, then she must be meaning to communicate something beyond the literal meaning of the utterance. Using a deductive process, we can arrive at the intended meaning of the utterance. The deductive process according to Thomas (1985) might go like this:

- It is false that men are animals. ('animal' as used here is not in the biological sense)
- The parent does not appear to be trying to make the daughter believe that men are animals
- Unless the parent's utterance is completely pointless, He/she must be trying to put across some other proposition.
- This must be some obviously related proposition
- The most obviously related proposition is that like animals, men are dangerous

This deductive process helps in understanding why a parent would choose this kind of imagery. It helps her pass her message across and in a forceful way too. When the parent equates men to animals, he/she intends to warn the daughter about the dangers of associating with men intimately. The parent in such a case has no room for being polite. If the daughter gets the implicature created by the flouting of the quality maxim, then she will get the intended message. The daughter could also fail to get the message and instead get exasperated by the mother's blatant comment.

#### **4.4.5 Hyperbole**

Hyperbole is a figure of overstatement or exaggeration. According to Leech (1991), hyperbole is concerned with personal values and sentiments where a speaker makes subjective claims which are not easy to verify. The hearer has to rely entirely on the general standards of society and his knowledge of the speaker to judge the truth of such claims. Only 4.9 percent of the utterances are hyperbolic, spread in the utterances on men, modernity, life and HIV and AIDS. It would seem that this mode of speaking is not very popular.

The utterance 'men are animals' is both a metaphor and an exaggeration. Example 28 also demonstrates hyperbole. The exaggeration here is more overt than in 'men are men' and lies in the unsubstantiated claim made by the speaker that there are 'many' bad diseases and things.

**Example 28 (Kikuyu)**

*Mundu angiuga atia tiga amerire thi niyathukire biu na ina mirimu miingi na maundu maingi moru....*

94.(What can one say apart from telling that the world has become very bad with many bad diseases and many bad things....)

**4.4.5.1 Hyperbole and Pragmatic Force**

In example 28, the respondent employs hyperbole when she refers to the world as 'very bad' and a place 'with many diseases and many bad things.' The repetition and intensification in the utterance give it an element of exaggeration. In making this statement to her child the mother hopes to communicate a strong message: that the child should be careful in their sexual behaviour so that the many diseases and bad things do not get them. In using such an utterance, such a parent hopes to achieve her pragmatic goal of warning the daughter about the dangers of getting sexually involved with men.

**4.4.5.2 Hyperbole and Flouting of Conversational Maxims**

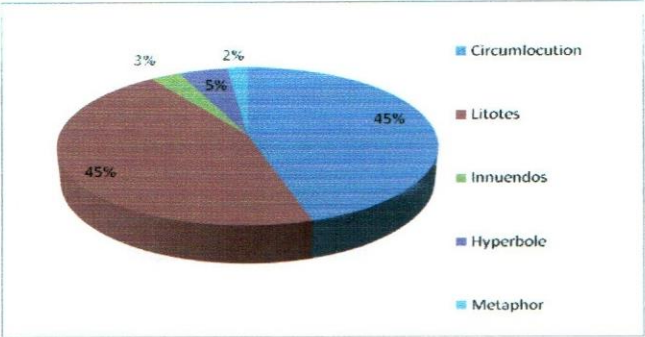
By saying the world is a very bad place with many very many diseases, a parent flouts the conversational maxim of manner which requires a speaker to avoid obscurity of expression according to Grice (1979). The statement may be said to be obscure because the relationship between many bad diseases and sexuality may not immediately be apparent to the child. He/she could also be said to flout the conversational maxim of relevance for the same reason. By flouting the two maxims, a parent creates an implicature and hopes the child understands his /her intention which is a warning against engaging in risky sexual behaviour.

**4.5 Conclusions on Features of Style**

Circumlocution and litotes were the most common styles in parents' utterances. The other styles of metaphor, innuendos and hyperbole featured less significantly. In circumlocution the parents, tried to avoid the discomfort of speaking about sex by going round the issue. Litotes involved using fewer words than necessary to communicate a message.

While these styles helped parents to keep face, we have seen that they could also interfere with communication. In circumlocution and litotes, the conversational maxims of quantity and relevance are flouted and this could hinder the parent’s intended message. This would happen if the child fails to get the implicature created by the flouting of the maxims. Parents to a less extent also used metaphors, innuendos and hyperbole.

In all these styles, there was a clear attempt by parents to be indirect as they could when it came to talking about matters of sexuality to their children. In this study, parents’ language was seen as possible hindrance to their children’s grasping of sexual matters. In chapter five, the responses of teenagers to parents’ language are analyzed to verify whether parents succeeded in communicating to their children. Figure 3 summarizes the features of style discussed.



**Figure 3: Features of style in parents’ utterances**

## CHAPTER 5

### TEENAGERS' RESPONSES TO COMMON UTTERANCES BY PARENTS

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the analysis of the data on the responses of the teenagers to the common utterances by parents is given. The chapter is divided into four sections. Section one gives an overview of the teenagers' responses. Section two deals with analysis of the responses against the nine categories of parents' utterances i.e. behaviour, education, men, life, modernity, HIV and AIDS, peers, age and dressing. Section three deals the issue of gender in the teenagers' responses and the last section is a conclusion of the responses. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze data quantitatively. The descriptive approach of qualitative data analysis was used in explaining the responses.

#### 5.2 An Overview of Teenagers Responses to Parents' Utterances

Thomas (1995) says that in interpretation of discourse, we use context and our knowledge of the world or background knowledge. Brown and Yule (1983:235) reinforce this by stating 'that once we start processing a discourse fragment, we do not treat it as the first piece of discourse we have ever encountered. We have experience of having processed other, perhaps very similarly titled, discourse fragments before'. In the analysis of the responses this factor has played a big role in explaining the teenagers' responses.

The sampled utterances from parents (see appendix) were presented to the teenagers who were asked to react to the utterances and their relationship to sexuality. The responses from teenagers were divided into five categories namely, approval, indignation, confusion, indifference and non-response. These categories were derived from both verbal and non-verbal responses from teenagers when the parents' utterances were presented to them. Analyzing the different ways in which teenagers responded to the parents' utterances helped to determine whether parents succeeded in communicating responsible sexual behaviour to their children to enable them make informed choices in their lives.

##### 5.2.1 Approval

Approval here means that the teenagers agreed with propositions in the utterances. They did this by positively reinforcing the utterances, giving their own similar experiences and asserting that the utterances were appropriate.

When a hearer approves of a proposition, it means the speaker has fulfilled the contextual conditions required in order for communication to take place (Akmajian et al, 2001). In the present study, this response was important as it was a pointer to successful communication between parents and their children. According to Thomas (1995), when a hearer agrees with a proposition, it means that the speaker has achieved their illocutionary goal and communication has taken place.

### **5.2.2 Indignation**

Indignation is an expression because of something wrong or unjust. In this study, responses were labeled 'indignation' when teenagers, through negative comments and frowns, showed that they took offence at some of the utterances. Indignation indicates that though communication has taken place, the hearer does not agree with the proposition. This implies that if a parent's utterance draws indignation from a child, the parent has not achieved the parent has not achieved their pragmatic goal of communicating responsible sexual behaviour.

### **5.2.3 Indifference**

The response of indifference means that the teenagers did not want to commit themselves by responding or didn't quite understand the utterances, (A shrug of shoulders and facing downward to avoid talking portrayed indifference). When a listener is indifferent to utterance, it implies that the assumption made by the speakers about the context is not appropriate. This means that both the speaker and the listener do not reach the level of inter-subjectivity as Akmajian et al (2001) say. In other words, the conditions that have to be fulfilled in order for an intended speech act to be appropriate according to Lakoff (1970) would be lacking. According to Thomas (1995), a reaction of indifference could mean that the hearer did not get the force of the utterance.

### **5.2.4 Confusion**

Confusion means that the teenagers showed openly that they didn't quite get what certain utterances meant. This was manifested when teenagers asked questions to seek clarification and also through meta-linguistic acts such as intonation of voice and facial expressions that portray confusion. Confusion may be explained this way: That the listeners may fail to understand both the utterance meaning and the pragmatic force of the utterance (1995). It could also mean that nothing in the listener's prior experience has prepared them for the utterance. For instance, an utterance like *men are men* elicited confusion.

To the teenagers, it was a strange way of putting things, so to speak. It implies that in communication of responsible sexual behaviour, the pragmatic presupposition in the utterance is not appropriate. Ultimately, it means that the parent who uses such an utterance ends up not communicating their intended message of responsible sexual behaviour.

### **5.2.5 Non –Response**

This response meant that there was nothing to indicate what the teenagers actually thought of certain utterances. The teenagers looked at each other without saying anything and generally portrayed a blank look on their faces. When a hearer does not respond to a proposition, it is difficult to determine whether or not they agree with the proposition. Consequently, it is hard to determine if the speaker has communicated. In this study, this response meant that it was difficult to know what the teenagers thought of certain utterances and therefore difficult to tell if the parents who uttered them succeeded in communicating to their children.

### **5.3 Distribution of the Responses to the Issues Derived from Parents' Utterances**

The different responses discussed in the previous section varied according to the different issues that arose from parents' utterances. The following sections discuss the responses and their relationship to the utterances. Table 7 shows the distribution of the different responses to the utterances in the categories of behaviour, education and men. The three categories were put together because they carried the highest number of utterances as shown in table 2 in chapter 4. This means that the issues of behaviour, education and men were the most pervasive in parents' utterances. Table 8 presents the responses on life, modernity and peers categories. The three were grouped together they had relatively average utterances as shown in table 2 chapter 4. This means they were not as pervasively used by the parents as those in the first group. Table 9 presents the responses to the utterances on HIV and AIDS, age and dressing. The three were put together because they had the least utterances i.e. parents used them minimally as shown in table 2 Chapter 4.

**Table 7**

**Teenagers' Responses to Parents' Utterances on Behaviour, Education and Men**

	Behaviour				Education				Men			
	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	Girls
	F	f	%	%	f	f	%	%	f	f	%	%
Approval	5	13	10	26	12	20	24	40	3	6	6	12
Indignation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	7	20	14
Confusion	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	6	8	12
Indifference	12	7	24	14	4	2	8	4	4	3	8	6
Nonresponse	8	5	16	10	9	3	18	6	4	3	8	6
	25	25	50	50	25	25	50	50	25	25	50	50
	<b>50</b>		<b>100</b>		<b>50</b>		<b>100</b>		<b>50</b>		<b>100</b>	

**Table 8**

**Teenagers' Responses to Parents' Utterances on Life, Modernity and Peers**

	Life				Modernity				Peers			
	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	Girls
	f	F	%	%	f	f	%	%	F	f	%	%
Approval	5	5	10	10	3	7	6	14	5	5	10	10
Indignation	0	0	0	0	2	3	4	6	9	5	18	10
Confusion	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Indifference	15	15	30	30	10	5	20	10	7	11	14	22
Nonresponse	5	5	10	10	10	10	20	20	4	4	8	8
	25	25	50	50	25	25	50	50	25	25	50	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>		<b>100</b>		<b>50</b>		<b>100</b>		<b>50</b>		<b>100</b>	

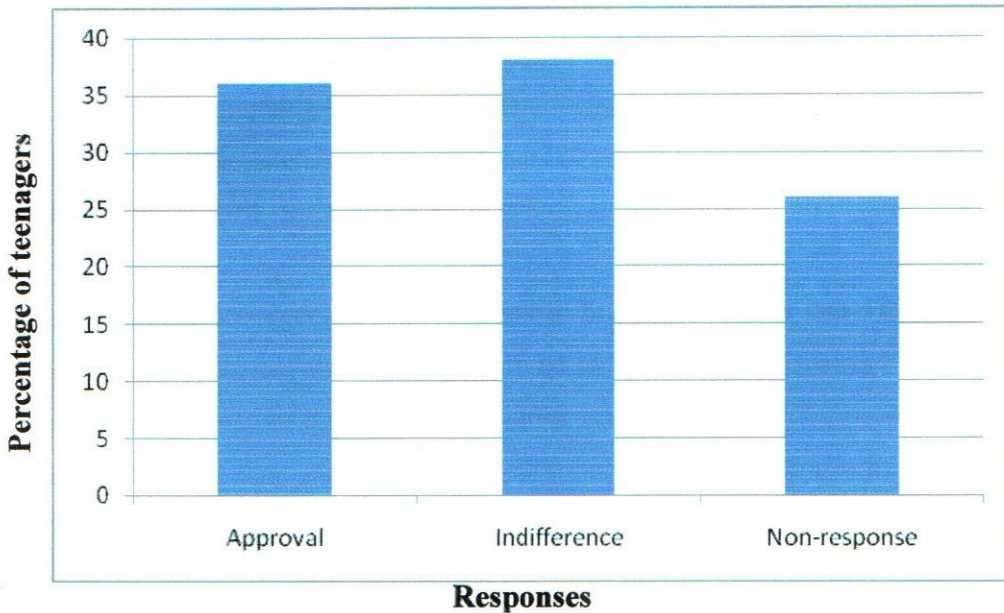


**Table 9**

**Teenagers' responses to parents' utterances on HIV and AIDS, Age and Dressing**

	HIV/AIDS				Age				Dressing			
	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	girls	boys	girls	Boys	girls	boys	girls
	f	F	%	%	f	f	%	%	F	f	%	%
Approval	18	22	36	44	3	7	6	14	1	4	2	8
Indignation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	12	12	24
Confusion	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Indifference	0	0	0	0	15	15	30	30	3	3	6	6
Nonresponse	7	3	14	6	7	3	14	6	15	6	30	12
<b>Total</b>	25	25	50	50	25	25	50	50	25	25	50	50
	<b>50</b>		<b>100</b>		<b>50</b>		<b>100</b>		<b>50</b>		<b>100</b>	

**5.3.1 Teenagers' Responses to Parents' Utterances on Behaviour**



**Figure 4: Responses to utterances on behaviour**

Figure 4 presents the responses by teenagers to the utterances on behaviour. In this category, the response that rated highest was indifference with 38 percent. Perhaps to many teenagers, the utterances on behaviour sounded a bit too judgmental and they seemed to have heard many times before that they should behave in a certain manner and it did not impress them.

This means that prior experience of such kind of discourse served in making them detest the message instead of appreciating it. The implication of the indifference here is that parents who point out at behaviour to their children and think the latter will understand the underlying message of sexuality succeed only to a limited extent.

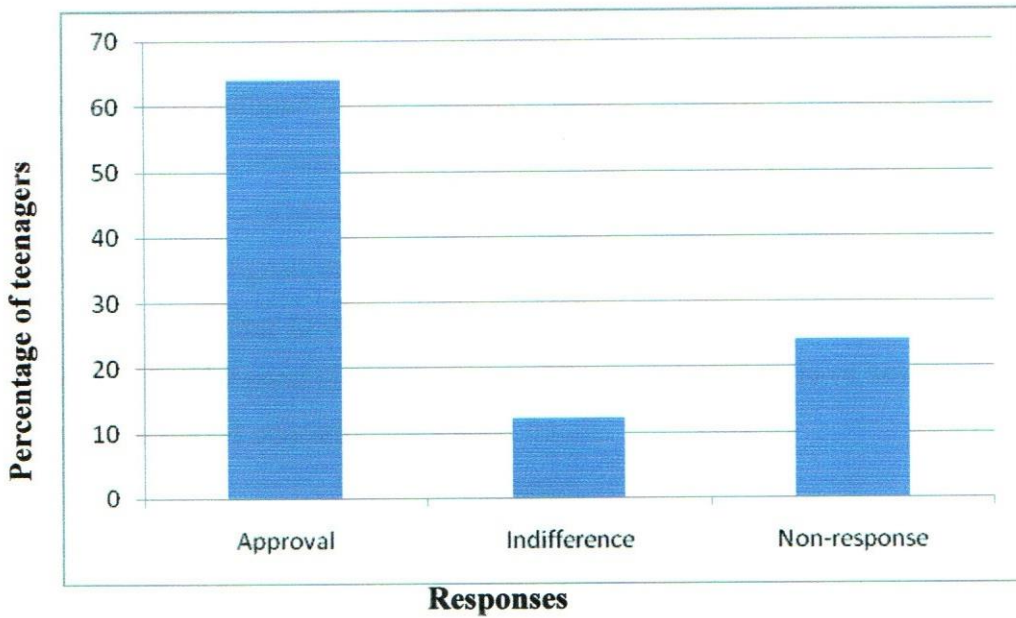
Majority of the teenagers who portrayed indifference to the utterances on behaviour were boys (24 percent) while girls were 14 percent. This means that girls are more positive than boys in their response to the utterances. It could also mean that parents are biased towards girls when it comes to talking about good behaviour and sexuality. That is why fewer girls than boys were indifferent since girls were more familiar with the utterances than boys.

36 percent of the teenagers approved of the utterances on behaviour. This response was almost the same as the response of indifference. It means that a number of teenagers did see the connection between behaviour and sexuality. However, this rate was still low considering that the highest percentage of utterances from parents was on behaviour as seen in chapter 4. This means there was a disparity between the issue (behaviour), which many parents referred to in talking about sexuality and teenagers' response to it.

The disparity reinforces the fact that pointing out at behaviour does not seem like a good idea in as far as communicating responsible sexual behaviour is concerned. Out of the 36 percent who approved of the utterances on behaviour, 26 percent of these are girls. This could imply that parents target girls more than boys in talking about behaviour and sexuality.

26 percent of the teenagers did not respond to the utterances on behaviour. It seemed that they deliberately did not want to get involved in this kind of discussion. This could mean either they were bored or they had heard similar utterances from their parents and they didn't like it. In the behaviour category, indignation and confusion were both at 0 percent. This means that teenagers have no problem in seeing the connection between behaviour and sexuality and neither do they find it offensive when parents talked about behaviour.

### 5.3.2 Teenagers' Responses to Parents' Utterances on Education



**Figure 5: Responses to utterances on education**

Figure 5 presents the responses by teenagers to the utterances on education. 64 percent of the teenagers approved of the utterances on education. Many teenagers were able to see the connection between their education and irresponsible sexual behaviour and shared their parents' sentiments that they should not jeopardize their education by irresponsible relationships. The background knowledge of education played a big role in interpreting the utterances since many of the teenagers were still in school or had just completed their secondary school education. Although all utterances on education were indirect on sexuality, many teenagers did not have a problem in as far as getting the underlying message of responsible sexual behaviour was concerned. Welbourn (1995) says that parents can use teachable moments of everyday life to talk about sexuality. It seems that children's schooling does provide a suitable teachable moment.

26 percent of the teenagers were non-responsive to utterances on education and it not easy to tell what they thought. Sometimes when parents speak and teenagers fail to react, it may call for a change of tact of approach in order to communicate with them.

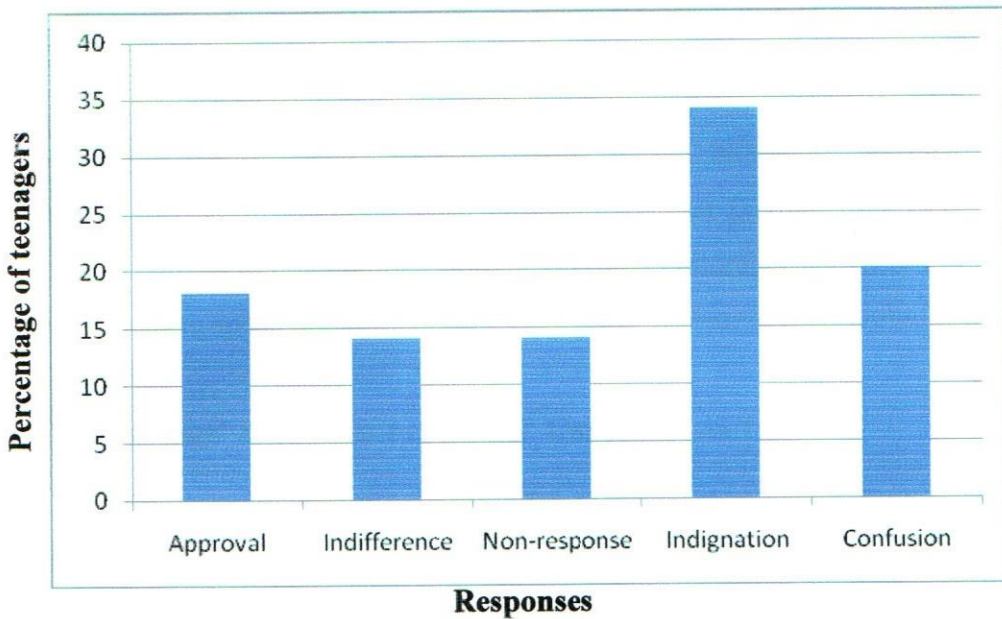
12 percent of the teenagers were indifferent to utterances on education. This may have been because some were no longer in school and hence the utterances no longer had any meaning to them. For those in school, it means they did not agree with utterances.

Ultimately, indifference implies that some parents did not succeed in communicating responsible sexual behavior by talking about education to their children.

The responses of indignation and confusion were at 0 percent in education utterances.

This means that the teenagers did not have a problem understanding the relationship between education and responsible or irresponsible sexual behavior. There was hence no confusion. The absence of indignation means that the teenagers did not feel offended by their parents' reference to education to comment on sexuality. This means that education may be a good beginning point for parents to show their children the need to have healthy sexual behaviour so as to have a good education for a good future.

### 5.3.3 Teenagers' Responses to Parents' Utterances on Men



**Figure 6: Responses to utterances on men**

Figure 6 presents the responses by teenagers to the utterances on men. In this category, the general idea was that men were bad creatures who should not be trusted. This did not augur well with most teenagers, girls included. Some asked what they were to make of their brothers and fathers. Thus the response of indignation was highest in this category at 34 percent. This means that the teenagers did not like the negative generalizations on men. For instance, when they were told men are animals and cannot be trusted, they reacted sharply, some openly declaring it was not proper to say such a thing.

They said that the parents were sometimes overly suspicious even when there was really nothing to worry about. A case in point was given by a girl who said that her mother found her talking to a boy and she asked, rather cruelly, who the man was.

20 percent of the teenagers seemed confused by utterances on men. They seemed to neither get the meaning nor the force of the utterances. It could be that that such comments as ‘men are men’ or ‘men are animals’ didn’t make much sense to them. This means that parents must be clear on what they want to say to their children. Making a negative comment about men without substantiating may not produce the desired effect.

18 percent of the teenagers approved of the utterances on men. Out of these, 12 percent were girls who concurred with the utterances saying that the parents intended them to be careful about their sexual behaviour. 6 percent of the boys also approved and said that indeed some men were bad and girls needed to be careful.

14 percent of the teenagers were indifferent to the utterances on men while a similar percentage was non-responsive. This reinforces the fact that negative utterances about men do not help parents in making their point about their children’s sexuality to a certain extent. If parents choose to speak about men, they must make it clear to their children what they mean.

#### 5.3.4 Teenagers’ Responses to Parents’ Utterances on Life

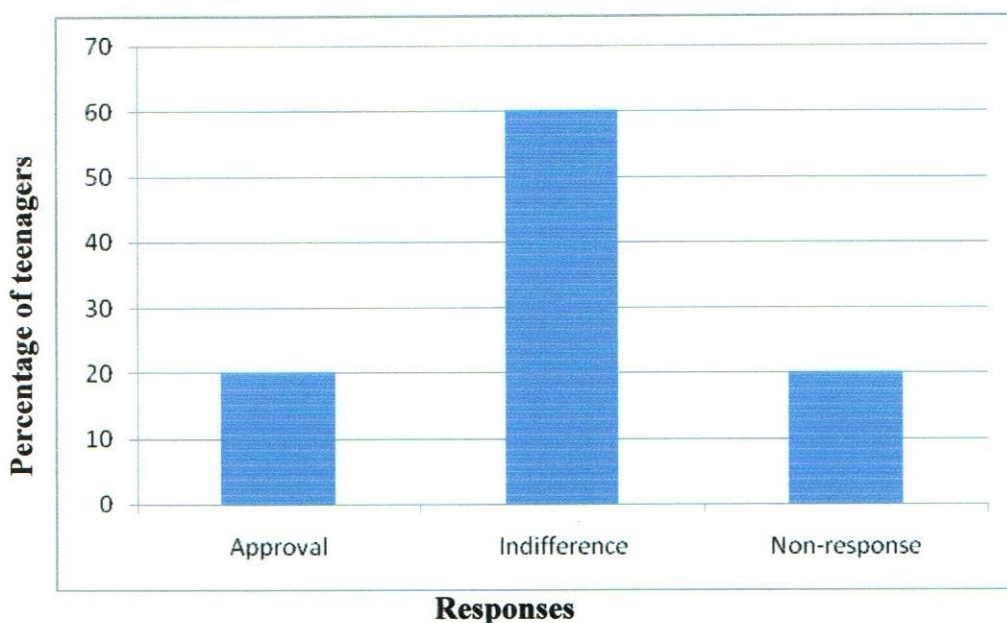


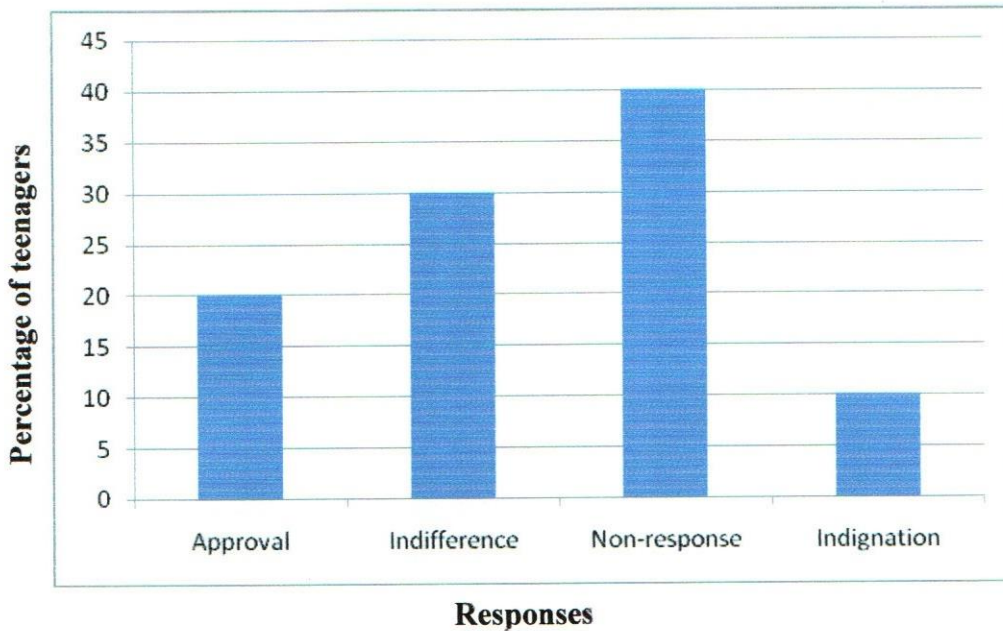
Figure 7: Responses to utterances on life

Figure 7 presents the responses by teenagers to the utterances on life. 60 percent. Boys and girls were indifferent to responses on life on equal basis. The high rate of indifference may have been due to the abstractness of the utterances. A statement such as 'life is not good' is so general that teenagers may fail to understand the parent's intention in making the utterance. Blakemore (1992) says that when a hearer has a great deal to do in interpreting the message, then there is danger that the speaker has not succeeded in communicating. This seems to be the case in this category of utterances.

20 percent of the teenagers however, did relate life to sexuality and portrayed approval. They stated that irresponsible sexual behaviour posed danger to life and there was need to take care. They hence asserted that the utterances were appropriate. Both boys and girls approved on an equal basis. This percentage of approval suggests that when parents approach issues of sexuality by talking about life, they succeed only to a small extent and they may call for a change of tact or some clarification.

20 percent of the teenagers were non-responsive in this category and it was not possible to tell whether they got the message or not. This could be a pointer that making generalizations about life may not be a good idea if parents want to communicate responsible sexual behaviour to their children. No confusion or indignation was recorded in this category. This means at the level of utterance meaning, the words used by parents were not difficult to understand. Absence of indignation indicates that the teenagers didn't feel offended by the utterances in this category. This implies that if parents choose to refer to life to make a point, they would need to be more explicit and explain clearly what they mean. Only then would they succeed in communicating their intention to their children.

### 5.3.5 Teenagers' Responses to Parents' Utterances on Modernity



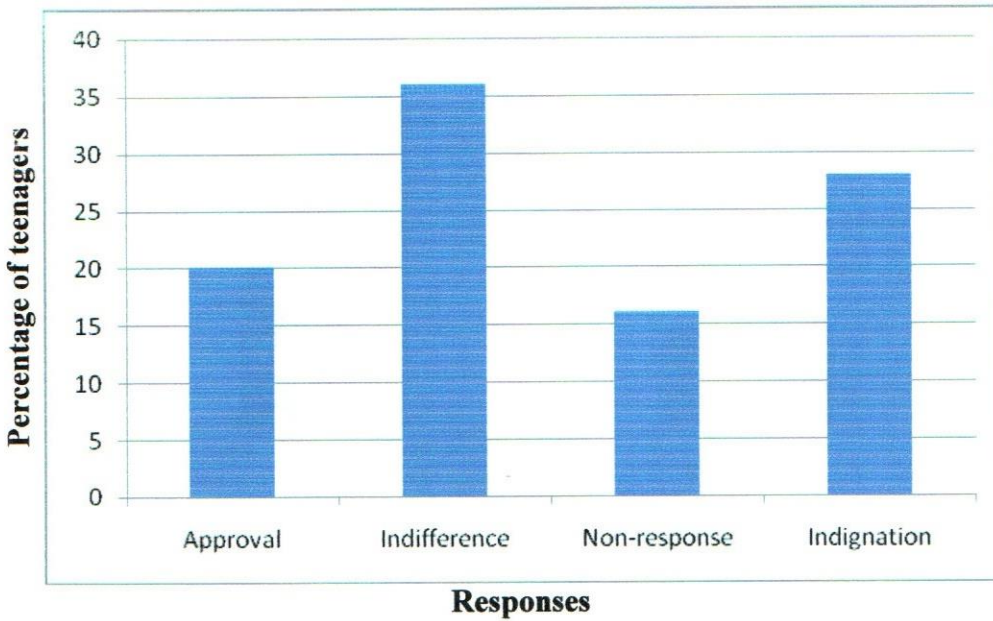
**Figure 8: Responses to utterances on modernity**

Figure 8 presents the responses by teenagers to the utterances on modernity. 40 percent of the teenagers were non-responsive to the utterances in this category while 30 percent were indifferent. This may be due to the fact that the utterances tended to view the modern world negatively. This may disagreeable with the teenagers because for them, the only world they knew could not possibly be so bad. In this case the background knowledge they have of the world served in only making them disagree with the proposition that the modern world is bad. It would seem that by drawing from modernity, a parent would fail to create the right context to communicate his message. This means that the parents who talk ill of the modern world with the hope of communicating responsible behaviour do not make much impact on their children.

20 percent of the teenagers approved of the utterances saying it was true that the modern world had certain negative influences such as the media and general permissiveness in the society. They hence agreed that the parents were right in making the utterances.

10 percent of the teenagers were indignant to the utterances in the modern category. They felt that parents had no business terming the modern world as bad since the parents had had 'their time' and they should let the young people to have 'theirs'. They said that it was not possible for the young people and parents to see things the same way.

### 5.3.6 Teenagers' Responses to Parents' Utterances on Peers

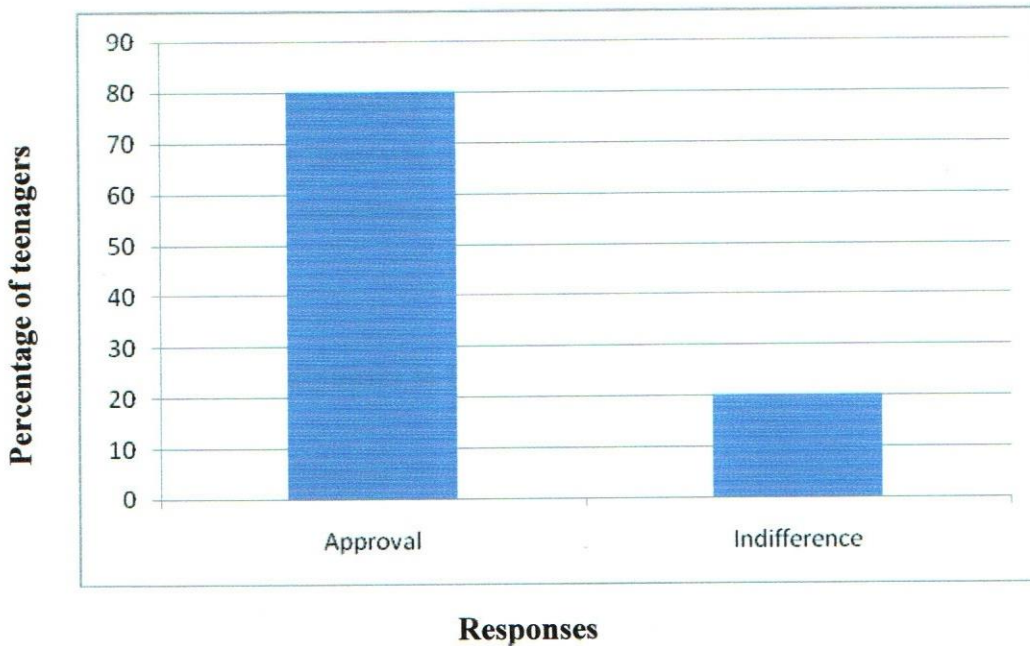


**Figure 9: Responses to utterances on peers**

Figure 9 presents the responses by teenagers to the utterances on peers. 36 percent of the teenagers were indifferent to the utterances on peers while 28 percent were indignant. Teenagers complained that parents were too fussy and did not seem to trust them. A girl told of a case where she told her mother she was going to see another girl and the mother retorted, 'that could mean X, Y or Z (the letters represent boys' names) and the girl had felt quite offended. However, 20 percent of the teenagers approved and said they agreed with parents that it was possible for friends to pressurize and influence others to engage in irresponsible sexual behaviour. 16 percent were non-responsive and it was possible to tell what the utterances meant to them. There was no confusion in this category meaning that the teenagers understood what the parents meant.



### 5.3.7 Teenagers' Responses to Parents' Utterances on HIV and AIDS



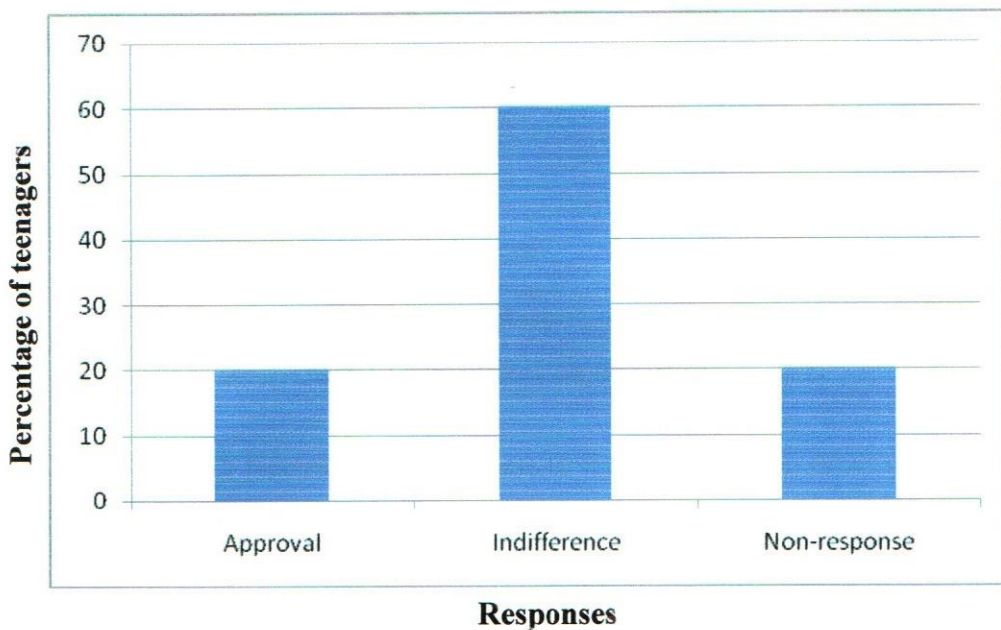
**Figure 10: Responses to utterances on HIV and AIDS**

Figure 10 presents the responses by teenagers to the utterances on HIV and AIDS. 80 percent of teenagers approved of the utterances in this category (this was the highest rate of approval recorded in all the utterances). The high rate was occasioned by the teenagers' prior knowledge of HIV and AIDS, which they were very eager to share. However, as Jackson (2002) observes, knowledge does not always translate to avoidance of risky behaviour. She advises that in order for children to develop skills to deal with sex and relationships, they must be engaged in sex education that is highly participatory, reflexive, relevant and challenging. Only 6.9 percent of parents mentioned HIV and AIDS in their utterances, which shows that majority of parents avoid discussions on HIV and AIDS. Indeed, many parents said that children already knew about HIV and AIDS but didn't seem keen to discover what the young people 'knew'. They didn't take advantage of the teenagers' knowledge about HIV and AIDS to engage them in discussions, which might give them a chance to give advice and to answer any queries that a child may have on sexuality in general and HIV and AIDS in particular. By failing to do so, it would seem that parents squander a good opportunity to teach their children responsible sexual behaviour, which would ultimately help them to make informed decisions on their sexuality and minimize their chances of contracting HIV and AIDS.

20 percent of the teenagers were non-responsive in this category and it was not possible to tell what they felt about the utterances on HIV and AIDS. There were no reactions of Indifference, indignation and confusion recorded 0 percent. This implies that the teenagers knew too well about the implications that go with contracting HIV and AIDS to be indifferent or indignant and hence there was nothing to confuse them or make them indignant.

The language used in the utterances on HIV and AIDS was also not difficult to understand, hence no confusion.

### 5.3.8 Teenagers' Responses to Parents' Utterances on Age

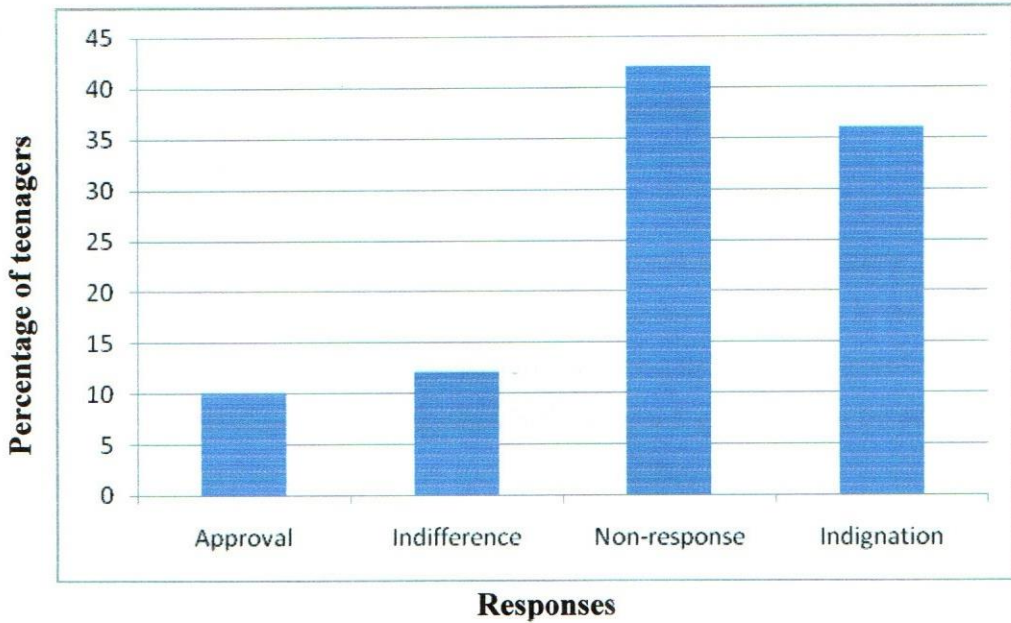


**Figure 11: Responses to utterances on age**

Figure 11 presents the responses by teenagers to the utterances on age. 60 percent of the teenagers were indifferent to utterances on age while 20 percent were non-responsive. This implies that referring to age in trying to communicate matters of sexuality may not make much impact on the teenagers. According to Adams (1976), adolescents are usually sensitive about how the world views them and get alarmed when such things as their size, looks and other attributes are brought to their attention. They may refuse to open up because of this sensitivity and may explain why they opted to be indifferent or not respond at all. However, 20 percent did approve saying that it was important to take care to avoid unwanted pregnancies and diseases. Confusion in this category was at 0 percent, meaning that the teenagers understand what the parents mean when they make reference to their age in as far

sexuality is concerned. There was no indignation in this category meaning that though teenagers were indifferent, they did not exactly feel offended by the utterances.

### 5.3.9 Teenagers' Responses to Parents' Utterances on Dressing



**Figure 12: Responses to utterances on dressing**

Figure 12 presents the responses by teenagers to the utterances on dressing. 42 percent of the teenagers were non-responsive and it was difficult to determine what they thought of the utterances. 36 percent were indignant while 12 percent were indifferent. The two responses indicate that the teenagers may have felt that parents should not interfere with their dressing at all. Some narrated unhappy incidences when they had been forced to take off some attire by their parents and though they had complied, they had been left wondering what was wrong with their choice of clothes. Only 10 percent of the teenagers approved of the utterances on dressing. Those who approved said that some of clothes worn by teenagers were quite indecent and parents had every reason to worry. Confusion in this category was at 0 percent, meaning that although most of the teenagers disagreed with the parents, they had no problem understanding what the parents intended to tell them.

### 5.4 The Issue of Gender in Teenagers' Responses

It would appear that boys and girls do not respond quite the same way. In almost all the categories of utterances as shown in tables 4, 5 and 6, girls formed a higher percentage in the response of approval. For instance, in the behaviour category, 26 percent of the girls

approved compared to 10 percent of the boys. In the education category, rate of the girls who approved was at 40 percent compared 4 percent of the boys.

In modernity category, 14 percent of the girls approved compared to 6 percent of the. In life category, both boys and girls were at par at 10 percent. In men category, the rate of approval was 12 percent for girls and 6 percent for boys. In age category approval rate for girls was 14 percent while the boys were 6 percent. In HIV and AIDS category, 36 percent of the boys compared to 44 percent of the girls approved. In the dressing category, 8 percent of the girls approved compared to 2 percent of the boys.

This scenario would imply that when parents speak about sex, they mainly speak to girls. This explains why more girls approved of the utterances than boys. It would seem that parents still hold the traditional belief that girls are sexually more vulnerable sexually than boys. Even in this HIV and AIDS era when both boys and girls need to be advised equally, the indication was very strong that were spoken to more than boys.

Further indication that parents seemed to concentrate more on girls than boys when they spoke about sexuality was indicated by the higher percentages of responses of indignation and indifference in boys. For instance, 14 percent of the girls were indifferent to the utterances on behaviour compared to 24 percent of the boys. In modernity category, 20 percent of the boys and 10 percent were indifferent. In men category, 20 percent of the boys were indignant compared to 14 percent of the girls. This of course may have been due to the fact that utterances on men portrayed them negatively. However, some boys agreed that some men were bad because of cheating girls and then abandoning them. Generally, the trend was that majority of boys were either indifferent or worse still, did not react at all. Some declared openly that they were big enough and did not think it would be appropriate for parents to talk to them about 'obvious things'. Some girls were also adamant that they didn't think parents would tell them anything new but they were fewer than boys.

### **5.5 Conclusion on Responses**

Utterances on HIV and AIDS category registered the highest rate of approval followed by the education category. This scenario points to the fact that teenagers are positively receptive to utterances that touch on issues that are of immediate relevance to them. The high

percentage of approval implies that parents would succeed to a large extent if they approached sex education by basing their talks on HIV and AIDS and/or education.

The low percentage of approval in the utterances on men, life, modernity, peers, behaviour and dressing shows that messages of sexuality passed through these issues do not make much impact on the teenagers. When parents refer to these issues to make indirect comments about sexuality to their children, the intention of the message seems to be lost. The high rates of indifference and non-response in the utterances on men, life, modernity, peers, behaviour and dressing imply that parents should change their approach as these utterances do not seem to help much in communicating healthy sexual behaviour amongst the young people.

Indignation was evoked by the utterances on modernity, men, peers and dressing. This implies that these utterances can actually be offensive to young people and parents would have to be careful when they talk about the said issues if they are to succeed in communicating to their children. The only utterances that brought about confusion were those in the men category. This would call for clarity on the parents' part when they talk about men in connection with responsible sexual behaviour.

The responses of the teenagers are the indicators of success or failure by parents to communicate with children about sex and sexuality. Approval is the only response that indicated successful communication. This means that most times, parents do not really succeed in making their intentions known to their children. Consequently, communication breaks down parents end up not contributing as much as they would wish to in assisting their children to make responsible decisions pertaining to their sexuality.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is a summary of the research, the second part forms the conclusions of the study while the third part gives recommendations and suggestions for further research.

#### 6.2 Summary

The main objective of the study was to describe the language used by parents to talk to their children about sexuality and to find out whether parents succeed in communicating their intended messages of responsible sexual behaviour and in so doing, play a role in preventing HIV and AIDS infection amongst young people. The assumptions of the study were that due to the sensitive nature of sexuality, parents avoid talking to their children about it and if they talk, they are quite indirect and this indirectness hinders the underlying message of responsible sexual behaviour to a certain extent.

Parents' utterances were analyzed to determine the kind of language that characterized their talk. The utterances derived from parents were sampled and presented to teenagers in groups and they were required to respond to them. The responses given by the teenagers were analyzed to determine how the language used by parents influenced the teenagers' views on sexuality. The study findings were that parents' talk on sexuality was characterized by indirectness, which was manifested in such styles as circumlocution, litotes, innuendos, metaphors and hyperbole. It emerged those parents made reference to some issues in their attempt to talk about sex. These issues were divided into nine categories namely: education, behaviour, modernity, life, men, dressing, age, peers and HIV and AIDS. The utterances presented to the teenagers were categorized on the basis of the nine issues.

On their part, the teenagers responded in various ways to parents' utterances and these responses included: approval, indignation, confusion and non-response. From the four responses, I was able to determine which utterances were effective in passing the message of responsible sexual behaviour and which ones were not.

## **6.3 Conclusions**

Conclusions are based on the objectives that the study sought to achieve.

### **6.3.1 Parents' Language in Sex Talk**

The study established that parents mainly used indirect language in their attempts to speak about sex to their children. In the analysis of parents' language, pragmatic theories such as Austin's Speech Act Theory, the Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson (1978) and Grice's (1967) theory of Cooperative Principle were used.

#### **6.3.1.1 Features of Style in Parents' Language**

The study established some features of style in parents' language. The styles were: circumlocution, litotes, innuendos, metaphors and hyperbole. Parents used circumlocution quite extensively. Faced by the difficulty involved in talking about sex parents opted to use many words than is necessary in the hope that their children would understand.

Litotes was also an important feature in parents' utterances in which case parents used fewer words than is necessary, again hoping that their children would get implicatures and grasp the bigger message. Parents also used innuendos or insinuations though to a less extent. Other features of styles were metaphor and hyperbole. Parents did not use these stylistic features extensively. It was also established that most of the utterances from parents targeted girls. It would seem that for many parents, girls are in more danger than boys as far as reckless sexual behaviour is concerned. Hence, while parents of boys said very little or nothing to their sons, those who have girls did make attempts. Parents of both boys and girls confessed that they mainly talked to their daughters. This was unexpected because one would suppose that in this HIV and AIDS era, parents would get concerned about boys and girls on equal basis.

#### **6.3.2 Teenagers responses to Parents' Utterances**

It was established that when parents talked to their children on matters of sexuality they elicited some responses from the teenagers. The teenagers' responses to parents' utterances were the indicators of whether parents succeeded in communicating to their children or not. Of the five kinds of responses elicited from teenagers, i.e. approval, indignation, indifference, confusion and non-response, the only response that showed successful communication between parents and their children was approval.

It was established that parents who spoke to their children about sexuality by making reference to HIV and AIDS and education were likely to be the most successful in imparting responsible sexual behaviour to their children. The two categories of utterances registered high levels of approval among the teenagers.

The utterances that that were least approved of were those that touched on modernity, dressing, men, life and peers. It would seem that when parents touched on these issues, their intention was not communicated to the teenagers. Hence, parents who referred to these issues were not likely to succeed in as far as passing the message of responsible sexual behaviour is concerned. The study also concluded that the when parents made reference to modernity, dressing, peers and men, they not only failed to communicate their message but also offended a large number of teenagers. Utterances on these issue elicited indignation from many teenagers.

The study also established that confusion was only brought by utterances on men. Confusion in this case was brought by failure to understand the utterance meaning. For all the other utterances, the negative responses of indifference, indignation, or non-response were brought by failure to understand the force of the utterances.

It was therefore concluded that in most cases, when parents talked to their children about sexuality, their intention was lost in the indirectness of their language. It would therefore be right to say that the contextual situations (provided by the issues the parents that parents referred to) did not, in most cases, meet the requirements needed for successful communication to take place. In this regard, the study concluded that most parents in Kenya do not contribute much in helping their children make informed decisions on their sexual lives, which would in turn help them to avoid risky sexual behaviour which could lead HIV and AIDS infection.

#### **6.4 Recommendations**

In cognizance of the fact that the subject of sexuality is sensitive and it is likely to remain a difficult issue for parents to raise with their children, the study gives several recommendations:



- Parents should understand that when they embark on talking to their children on matters of sexuality, they should have in mind that every human is sexual and must live in a sexual world (Adams, 1976). Hence parents must use a language that would make adolescents appreciate their sexuality as they teach them on how to tackle challenges that come their way.
- If indirect language is to be effective, then parents should suitable teachable moments, drawing from everyday experiences that are familiar to the teenagers. However, these familiar experiences must not be an end in themselves but a means to an end. That means that the parent's message must come out clearly.
- If parents realize their approach produces a negative response, it might suggest that the approach is not suitable and would therefore call for change of tact to ensure that one has communicated their intention.
- It may be necessary sometimes to use direct language in order to make one's point if one realizes that their intention is not being communicated. In this HIV and AIDS era, parents must be prepared to talk plainly and directly about the disease. This could help the teenagers to think rationally and know how best to handle situations to avoid risks.

### **6.5 Suggestions for Further Research**

Capturing the kind of communication that goes on between parents and their children on sex issues is quite complex and this study cannot claim to have exhaustively dealt with all the issues related to this area of study. It would therefore be important to look into other related areas that would help understand the findings of this study better. In this regard, further research should be carried on:

- The role played by variables such as age, level of education, religious affiliation, sex and ethnic background of parents in determining the language they use in communicating to their children about sex and sexuality.
- The kind of language teenagers themselves use within their peer groups when they discuss sex and sexuality with a view to explore how peer groups influence the individual.
- The language used by organizations such as churches to counsel the youth on sexuality to gauge the appropriateness of the language.

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## APPENDIX I

### Sample interview schedule for parents

- i) Do you think it is important for parents to discuss sex issues with our children?
- ii) Why?
- iii) Do you sometimes talk about sex and AIDS issues with your child?
- iv) If you do, how do you explain issues on the dangers of sex?
- v) Do you think he/she gets the message you intend to put across?
- vi) (For parents with daughters) how do you explain to her such things as menses and other bodily changes?
- vii) Everybody gets worried at the possibility of their children contracting AIDS. How do you discuss this important issue with your child?
- viii) Do they get the message?

## APPENDIX II

### Parents' utterances

I tell her that when <sup>1</sup>someone reaches her age, she must be very careful.. <sup>2</sup> One must tell them that nowadays things are not good at all you see. And again, <sup>3</sup>she should finish education first...

...<sup>4</sup> friends whether they are boys or girls I should be brought home; I don't want those who won't come home- what else can one say?

<sup>5</sup>I tell them not to joke with their education...<sup>6</sup> that these other things are not important, they will just destroy them.

You must tell them that <sup>7</sup>if they play around nowadays, they will get lost ... and <sup>8</sup>they must also be careful about the kind of friends they have.

How can one fail to tell them that <sup>9</sup> this thing will destroy them if they are not careful. <sup>10</sup> that AIDS is real and it infects people, not animals...I don't want them to say I never told them so I must tell them...

... No, I don't talk, what can I say. These children are bright. They know more than us...

Now what can one tell them? <sup>11</sup> I tell X, 'You are now a grown up and you must take of yourself'<sup>12</sup> I also say that education must come above everything else... it is the only thing that can help them...

<sup>13</sup>What can you tell them? I say one must know why they are in school and I don't expect other things...

...Well you know its not easy to talk but I mention something once in a while... <sup>14</sup> for instance I tell X that she must be careful with men because they are only interested in her for a while and then they dump her, she should not trust them at all.

...I usually say I won't tell them what to do but whatever they do, <sup>15</sup> they must know that this disease is real... I also tell them that they <sup>16</sup> must concentrate in their studies because education is the most important thing in their lives.

There's no way you can fail to talk to then...you are to blame if they get lost. I usually tell X that <sup>17</sup> she is now a big girl and <sup>18</sup> must be careful about men... they are not good at all.

Yes I do talk though not much ...<sup>19</sup> I tell them that they must think about their education and forget about these other things that do not help them at all.

<sup>21</sup> I tell them that when one walks in the night way, they'll be all okay and if they walk badly, their lives will be bad ... <sup>22</sup> especially nowadays, things are not good...

...<sup>23</sup> I tell X that what counts most in her life is education and I don't expect other things... I also urge her that she <sup>24</sup> should not let the boys touch her.

... I tell X that <sup>25</sup> she must take care, life is too precious and at her age <sup>26</sup> she should not think about anything else.... The other day I found her talking with a boy inside the house.... I asked her, 'what would your father say if he found you talking with that boy?'

<sup>27</sup> I keep telling X that I won't tell one how to behave but they must <sup>28</sup> know this disease is there and <sup>29</sup> I tell them this: if someone decides to sleep with a man, you'll not miss one thing, either or AIDS, why hide the truth from a child?

... I usually say that <sup>30</sup> one must know what they went to school to do and <sup>31</sup> they must never involve themselves in funny activities.

... it is difficult but once in a while <sup>32</sup> I do tell them that the world is not good nowadays there are lots of bad things and they must <sup>33</sup> be very careful in whatever they do. <sup>34</sup> I also caution them against bad friends who can mislead them...

...<sup>35</sup> I usually tell them to take care of their lives, they must not joke with lives and to <sup>36</sup> take their education seriously.

What can I say now? <sup>37</sup> I usually say that nowadays it is quite dangerous and one must be very careful and <sup>38</sup> she must never trust men, they can destroy her

... I tell X that <sup>39</sup> when one reaches her age, she must be careful...and <sup>40</sup> she should carry herself with care because <sup>41</sup> if she sleeps with men, she will either get AIDS or pregnant... <sup>42</sup> she is big now and must know how to behave.

I tell X that they must take <sup>43</sup> care that their friends don't mislead them, <sup>44</sup> it's their life... <sup>45</sup> I also stress that they must take their education seriously.

<sup>46</sup> I tell X not to play around <sup>47</sup> I also discourage X from wearing some clothes that are not good... you know the kind and talking about...another day she was wearing a very tight top and wanted to go out. I asked her, 'X are you going out like that?'

<sup>48</sup> I tell X that one cannot joke with life... and that <sup>49</sup> she should not trust men-they are animals that are just out to destroy her. <sup>50</sup> I also tell them that nowadays there are many diseases and they must be careful...

<sup>51</sup> I usually say that education is the only thing one should think about ... <sup>52</sup> nowadays things have changed so much and one must be very careful

I usually say that one <sup>53</sup> must be very careful how they behave, <sup>54</sup> and I also tell her men are only interested in her when they want to sleep with her ...<sup>55</sup> friends too, if I'm not comfortable, I ask where they're from because some are not good.

I usually say that <sup>56</sup> one must not joke with their lives and that <sup>57</sup> education must come first. <sup>58</sup> The other day, I had to tell her to remove a top that I thought was quite bad and I told her, 'X it's long since you wore that dress...'

<sup>59</sup>I tell X that she should not allow a man to cheat her because all they want is sex and all men are the same.... <sup>60</sup> they must be told these things because nowadays things are not good.

...X knows that <sup>61</sup>I always emphasize that it is dangerous nowadays and <sup>62</sup> one must just think about education, nothing else.

<sup>63</sup> I usually say I won't tell one what to do but they must not play around because <sup>64</sup> it is very dangerous nowadays and if they are not careful they will regret....

...<sup>65</sup>I tell X they went to school to study.

...<sup>66</sup> I tell them that life is very precious and <sup>67</sup> if one jokes around <sup>68</sup> especially nowadays they will get lost <sup>69</sup> I also discourage X from visiting friends who are not good.... you know they really get influenced.

.... <sup>70</sup> I usually tell X to be careful, concentrate on her studies and God will help her to go up to university... that education is the most important thing in her life...

...<sup>71</sup>I tell X that men are only interested in her when they want to sleep with her so she must be careful.. <sup>72</sup>I also tell X that she cannot go out wearing some clothes ... they are bad...<sup>73</sup> generally I tell her she must carry herself well...

<sup>74</sup> I say that one should first finish their education... these other things are not important. <sup>75</sup> I also warn X about bad company,

<sup>76</sup> ...I ask her, 'have you done that, have you reached there?' .....<sup>77</sup> I tell X that nowadays there so many bad things and diseases and they must be careful...<sup>78</sup> that she must be aware that men are just out to have a good time and she must not be cheated by them.

<sup>79</sup> I keep telling X that I won't tell one how to behave but they must <sup>80</sup> know this disease is there and one must take of themselves

<sup>81</sup> I tell X to be careful because men are just beasts, they use you and then dump you ...she knows that already (about menses), I don't need to tell her.....

<sup>82</sup>I usually say that education is the only thing one should think about ...<sup>83</sup>I also say that the world has really changed and there are a lot of bad things, they must be careful

... I tell X that <sup>84</sup> life is too precious and she must not waste it on useless things and now she is a grown up... <sup>85</sup> she should not trust men, not even her cousins and uncles.... men are bad..

<sup>86</sup> I usually tell X that she should handle herself with care and <sup>87</sup> she must never trust men because they will just ruin her...

<sup>88</sup>When she was fourteen, I was worried that she wouldn't tell me so I asked her whether she had started her periods .....I told her she was now a grown woman.



<sup>89</sup> I usually emphasize that education is very important and one must take it seriously....  
<sup>90</sup>Other things which are not important should not come in at all <sup>91</sup> I also say that some clothes are for inside the house, not for going out...

<sup>92</sup> I tell X that AIDS is real and they must take great care one can only pray they listen....<sup>93</sup>  
one must tell that they should not play with life....they will get destroyed

<sup>94</sup>What can one say apart from telling them that the world has become bad with diseases and many bad things.... that <sup>95</sup> they shouldn't joke around with their lives.

<sup>96</sup> I usually tell X that she should be a good girl and <sup>97</sup> not to allow herself to be cheated by men....<sup>98</sup> she should think about her studies...<sup>99</sup> I tell her that men are men...

<sup>100</sup> Now what one really say to them? I keep saying that their studies come above everything else and it is really up to them to choose whether to get involved in things that will distract their education or concentrate on their studies. ....

<sup>101</sup> I usually say I won't tell one what to do but they must know how to behave, <sup>102</sup> I tell them that in whatever they do, this must know that this disease is real and dangerous and they will get it if they are not careful.

## APPENDIX 111

### Interview Schedule for Teenagers

The first part of the interview is an informal discussion so that the group members can relax.

1. Do your parents talk to you about sex?
2. What do they say?
3. I want us to discuss some utterance that parents will probably tell you when they discuss sex and related issues. Feel free to say what you think of them.

#### • Education

- a) You must think about your education
- b) Remember why you are in school
- c) Education should be your only business

#### • Behaviour

- a) You must carry yourself with care.....
- b) You can not joke around
- c) Don't get involved in useless things..

#### • Modernity

- Nowadays life is bad
- The world has changed so much

#### • Life

- life is too precious, don't throw it away.
- You must take great care of yourself

#### • Men

- Men are not good as must not be trusted
- Men are animals
- Men are men

#### • HIV and AIDS

- This disease is real
- If you don't take care, you'll get destroyed
- There are many bad diseases nowadays, be careful

#### • Dressing

- Your parent tells you to remove certain attire

#### • Peers

- Your parent tells you some of your friends are not good

#### • Age

- Your parent tells you that at your age, you must be careful

#### APPENDIX IV:

##### A Sample Transcript: A Group Discussion with Teenagers

##### Do you talk to your parents about sex?

A. {Laughs}, gosh, no

B. Well (..)

C. {Looks shyly at the group, saying nothing}

B. My mum (...) She doesn't like (..)She says I should be careful

D. {Hasn't spoken, lightens up} She says that I should be careful with men and (..)okey

E. hawasemi direct, kama baba yangu husema that I must be careful.

*Okey they don't say direct, like my father says I should be careful*

##### What if your parent told you that men are not good at all, that you must avoid them?

B. {Frowning} why?

A.I don't think its good coz (..) what about dad?

D. eeh and our brothers!

B. Surely you cant say that.

E. pengine they want to say that(..) we shouldn't joke around

##### Q. What if they actually told you that men are animals?

{Simultaneously exasperated}

D. What?

B. Please....

E. kwa nini?. .Apana hio ni mbaya(..) avadhali hata aseme(..) *no that is bad its better to say*

C. yes aseme, mtu atake care lakini asiseme wao ni wanyama. *Yes its better to say one*

*should take care but not to call them animals*

C. {looking at interviewer} can they really say that?