

‘Polygyny’ in Benjamin Kwakye’s *The Sun by Night*: A Pragmatic Study

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Abstract

The present study aims at analyzing Benjamin Kwakye’s fiction *The Sun by Night* to present the dark side of the plural marriage form ‘Polygyny’. The researchers use the Pragmatic approach of discourse analysis to analyze the novel. The focus is on the intended meaning of the context of the fiction as well as on the influence that the given issue of the context can have on the message. It studies the effects and impacts of ‘Polygyny’ on Ghanaian women, through the story of the three male characters of the novel who practice ‘Polygyny’ in their life.

Keywords: Context; Ghanaian; Polygyny; Pragmatic; Women.

Marriage is a universal characteristic of social formulation and family relationships, plays a significant role in the establishment and the development of society. Various forms of marriage are prevailing in the society. ‘Polygyny’ is one among them. It is more popular in Africa than in any other part of the world. Chojnacka opines that,

“Polygyny is relatively frequent in the second half of the twentieth century among populations in Africa, a continent with high rates of population growth” (91). ‘

Polygyny’ is generally known as an accepted form of Polygamy involving the marriage of a man with several women. According to Chojnacka, the basic reason behind the practices of the polygynous marriage in Africa is

“as a means of obtaining and demonstrating social status, as the main source of securing an appropriate labour force and as a sexual necessity...” (91).

Polygynous marriages play a significant role in holding the power of masculinity in almost all over Africa. The plural marriage of a man creates inequality between wives and a husband in a family because it restricts the lives of women to a dependent, unequal, and secondary role in a family. According to Cook, plural marriage is implemented mainly to increase

marital fertility, property increasing factors and power of masculinity with the purpose to strengthen the pillars of a male-dominated society, “it is argued that Polygyny has a positive effect on population growth” (232). Ezeh’s observations on the positive side of polygynous marriage present the fact that,

“within countries there exist different polygyny regimes, each exhibiting a unique reproductive pattern” (355).

Ezeh also opines that,

“Because marital fertility is a major component of overall fertility, polygyny levels could significantly affect fertility by influencing the proportion of women of reproductive age...” (365).

Whereas, points of controversies on ‘Polygyny’ fabricate the negative perspectives, besides the above-mentioned positive viewpoints on this plural form of marriage. Scholars such as Ugгла, Gurmu, and Gibson discuss that,

“While the benefits of polygyny to men include both a larger family size and labour participation from multiple wives,... the benefits to women of sharing a husband with other wives are less evident” (160).

According to Rose McDermott and Jonathan Cowden,

“For those interested in human rights, the relationship between polygyny and violence against women should be particularly alarming. Indeed, an irony emerges from our analysis: conventional attempts to empower women in polygynous culture can be expected to make matters worse because they will increase the hostility felt by many men toward women and the cultural values that advocate for female emancipation” (31).

McDermott and Cowden also opine that,

“It is important to remain aware of the fact that areas where such practices are common may prove more impervious to an improvement in women’s rights than areas where such practices are less frequent” (31).

In brief, the status and rights of women suffer in a society where polygamous marriage is practice. Dissatisfaction among the spouses is common and familiar due to a lack of respect for each other’s decisions. Practicing polygynous marriage also affects the well-being and psychological health of women.

Likewise, Kwakye’s *The Sun by Night* is concerned with the negative aspects of practicing the plural form of marriage in Ghanaian society. Kwakye tries to present his argument by depicting the picture of the

women's depraved condition, psychological health, and feelings of insecurity. The present study uses the pragmatic approach to understand the painful lives of women characters, their loneliness, helplessness, inequality between husband and wives caused due to the tradition 'Polygyny' as depicted by Benjamin Kwakye in the fiction, *The Sun by Night*. The paper deals with the negative aspects and effects of 'Polygyny' rather than the positive side. In short, the present paper deals with the intended meaning of the context of Kwakye's fiction, mainly focus on the dark side of 'Polygyny'.

Pragmatics focuses on what people mean by the language they use or how they actualize and implicit its intended meaning potential as a communicative resource. It studies the expression in an actual utterance in a specific context to achieve the intended message of communications because people may not understand or know what might be meant by the statement, intention, and utterances of speakers in actuality. According to George Yule, there are four areas that Pragmatics is concerned with,

"Pragmatics is the study of the speaker meaning... Pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning... Pragmatics is the study of how more gets communicated than is said... Pragmatics is the study of the expression of relative distance" (3).

Yule also stated that,

"Pragmatics is the study of the relationships between linguistic forms and the users of those forms... only pragmatics allows humans into the analysis. The advantage of studying language via pragmatics is that one can talk about people's intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes or goals, and the kinds of actions (for example, requests) that they are performing when they speak" (4).

Joan Cutting in her book, *Pragmatics and Discourse: A Resource Book for Students* (2008) opines that Pragmatics and discourse analysis study the relation of language to contextual background features that study context, text, and function. According to her, Pragmatics focuses on what is not explicitly stated and on how to interpret an utterance in situational contexts. She also opines that Pragmatics not concerned much with the sense of what is said as with its force, that is, with what is communicated by the manner and style of an utterance. In short, to get a clear understanding of what people have spoken or written, context is necessary to be considered. Stephen C. Levinson too states that,

"the term pragmatics cover both context-dependent aspects of language structure and principles of language usage and understanding that have nothing or little to do with linguistic structure" (9).

Levinson's observations on Pragmatics also present the fact that, "Pragmatics is the study of the relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding" (21).

In addition, according to H. G. Widdowson,

"contexts can be thought of as situations in which we find ourselves, the actual circumstances of time and place..." (19).

Widdowson also states that, "Context, then, is an abstract representation of a state of affairs" (20).

The context of Kwakye's fiction is an abstract representation of a state of circumstances and affairs. In the context of the present study, *The Sun by Night*, Benjamin Kwakye mainly deals with the murder mystery. Born in 1967, Benjamin Kwakye is a person of intellectual personality with his prizewinning collections of literary works. His collections of writings include novels, short stories, poems, and a trilogy. He is the winner of the 1999 and 2006 Commonwealth Writer's Prize for both the novels, *The Clothes of Nakedness* (1998) and *The Sun by Night* (2005). The picture of his prolific writings is visible to his readers through his every published literary work. However, this 'Ghanaian-born' wordsmith has surprised the readers, especially by his second published and award-winning novel, *The Sun by Night* with its mysterious and puzzling criterion.

Researchers and scholars relate Kwakye's fiction, *The Sun by Night* as a study of social milieus, social context, post-colonial issues, experiences of the Ghanaian people, and mystery. Okyerefo observes that the novel is centered on the

"structure of social relationships among Ghanaians in the light of the country's socio-political trajectory... *The Sun by Night* portrays the vicissitudes of the day-to-day life of Ghanaians" (138).

In brief, Okyerefo remarks that Kwakye in *The Sun by Night* portrays the social issues or matters and realities of the people of Ghana. Next, Palmer finds it as

"a truly epic work encompassing the vast span of events and issues in post-colonial Ghana... understandably, covers issues in the immediate pre-and post-independence period, Kwakye's erudite work takes the situation up to the eighties and life in Ghana under the military and autocratic regimes that replaced Ghana's short lived democratic and pluralistic attempts at democratic rule that succeeded the momentous coup d'état of 1966. The work is distinguished both by its artistic virtuosity and the depth and thoroughness of its treatment of the issues" (127).

However, Palmer concludes his essay by stating that in *The Sun by Night* Kwakye "... explore various aspects of his country's life" (151). In addition, Geoff Gyasi opines that,

"*The Sun by Night*... begins like a riddle which seeks to unravel the secrets surrounding the death of an Accra prostitute. Right from the start, from the prologue, readers are presented with a tale and by the end of the novel, it is expected that the reader would have unraveled the mystery surrounding the whole tale" (1). In short, Gyasi observes that Kwakye's fiction, *The Sun by Night* is a mystery riddle/puzzle.

Ostensively, it appears that the novel starts with a courtroom scene in which the protagonist, Koo Manu, is a former politician and a prosperous and successful businessman of Accra, Ghana, stands accused as a murderer of a prostitute, Akwele. But in reality, the author presents the court trial as a framework of the fiction only through which the protagonist explores the multiplicity of themes that the novel has been concerned with. The talking points are as follows, the plural form of marriage or 'Polygyny', the position of women in a male-dominated society, the issues that create differences between generations, post-colonial issues of Ghana, the reasons behind prostitutes and prostitution, and others. The title of Kwakye's fiction and the title of the three books of fiction make readers aware of the facts, subject matters, and possibilities that the author intends and purports to explore the mysterious settings and surroundings. Except for the title of the first book, the idea of the title of the novel, *The Sun by Night*, and the title of the book two and three, 'The Eclipse of Mother' and 'The Rain of Snow', all these are acquired from the various objects and forms of nature which tries to suggest the cryptic, paradoxical, puzzling and catastrophic circumstances. Even the title of the first book, 'The Absurd Road' suggests and alerts the readers about the deformation and distortion.

'The Abused Road' is the story of Ama Badu, one of the jury members of the court trial of Koo Manu. Ama continuously struggles with her feelings, emotions, and perspectives of double personality. It is the story of the struggle of her choice between 'I' and 'You'. In other words, between the life of a reputed juror and the life of a scandalized prostitute. 'The Eclipse of Mother' is a narrative of 'The Defendant', Koo Manu and the 'The Witness-In-Chief', Akua Nsiah. It covers the subject matters such as socio-cultural contexts, problems of plural marriage or 'Polygyny', the gap between one generation and another, post-colonial Ghana, the position of women in a patriarchal society, and the gap between spouses. And the third one, 'The Rain of Snow' is a narration of the life of 'The Counsellors' of the Koo Manu's court case. It is the story of John Amoah, the

prosecutor and Ekow Dadzie, the defense lawyer in Koo's case. Earlier, both of them were good friends, but later they separated from each other due to some differences in their lifestyle and thoughts. But, at the end of the story, they become good friends when Koo is released from jail on bail, and the mystery of the real murderer is unveiled or revealed. The fiction thus concludes with the news that Koo's son, Kubi Manu has been arrested by the police.

In brief, Kwakye's *The Sun by Night* is a mystifying and cryptic puzzle that seeks to unveil or reveal the secrets of the death of an Accra prostitute. Also, having a universal property, characteristic, and dimension in its attempt to puzzle out the moral conflicts of human minds. And, the context of the Kwakye's fiction is rich in holding the attention of the readers to a logical and analytical conclusion with the manipulation of discourse without any complexity.

Benjamin Kwakye's *The Sun by Night*, apart from the murder mystery of the prostitute also deals with 'Polygyny' and its negative aspects of women as one of the significant themes of the novel. The author depicted three male characters whose lives are related to 'Polygyny' in the fiction. Kwakye's protagonist Koo Manu himself is involved in this practice. Apart from Koo, Koo's father and Koo's first wife, Akua's Grandfather also support 'Polygyny' and have more than one wife.

In the context, Koo Manu begins to narrate about the dark side of 'Polygyny' with an explanation of his relationship with his second wife, Ama Owusu, "My recent troubles started when I married a second wife" (Kwakye 98). He starts his story from the days of his youth to the readers. The researchers in this phase to present a clear picture of the problems of 'Polygyny' just as depicted by Kwakye in the fiction analyze the intended meaning of the speaker's utterances.

Koo talks about the rainy day when he first notices Ama Owusu outside his house. Though he lives in Accra city, still he wants to marry a village girl rather than a girl who lives in the city because he believes that village girls are decent,

"I had been in the city for many years. And I didn't like city girls. They are too arrogant. And they were spoilt. I had tried a couple. And I decided I need an authentic woman from the village" (Kwakye 98).

So, his search for a decent village girl as his better half brings him back to his village. But, from the day he reached his village, "It started raining badly... The gods were against me" (Kwakye 99), so like a helpless man, he watches the raindrops from inside. While engaged in observing the

raindrops he observes that a woman is running outside his house during this heavy rainfall. Koo ran outside to meet that girl with a thought that she might be the right girl for him and without any hesitation invites that lady,

"I wonder if you're lost. Or perhaps you're far from home? Maybe you can come inside and wait until the rain stops" (Kwakye 99).

She hesitated to accept Koo's proposal, but, when Koo introduces himself, she agreed to wait at his house,

"Don't you know my father, Opanin Mensah... My father was quite famous in the town. She wipes the rain from her face again. She looked at me carefully. Then she seemed to smile. 'Oh, you are Koo Manu. You've changed a little', she said. 'I can wait on your verandah'" (Kwakye 99-100).

Koo observes that the lady is beautiful and charming and from the moment he starts planning to marry Ama Owusu.

Next morning without any delay, he decides to discuss with his mother regarding this girl along with his plan to marry her. But, he is disheartened to know from his mother that she is not a decent girl,

"'Ama Owusu has a reputation.' My heart sank. A reputation! Mother said, 'She's very disrespectful. Everybody knows her for that'" (Kwakye 103).

He wants to marry her, but his mother does not agree to accept the girl as her son's better half and her daughter-in-law, "Don't be foolish. You don't have to pick a woman like her" (Kwakye 103). Koo replies to his mother that he likes the girl but, his mother orders him to, "Shut up and let her speak" (Kwakye 103). She advises him that,

"A marriage built on that will not last. But a marriage with foundation is the one where your wife, your husband, has a good character" (Kwakye 103).

She ordered him to marry Akua Nsiah instead of Ama Owusu and advised him not to "throw away the wisdom of your ancestors" (Kwakye 104). Koo's mother's words confuse him,

"It was ironic. Mother's own marriage wasn't a perfect model. She and father were not divorced. But they lived in different homes. Like strangers" (Kwakye 103).

It is ironic because his father lives with his second mother, Afia. So the advice of his mother forces him to think, "If she knew so much about marriage, why this?" (Kwakye 103) happens to her. Why? She lives a life of

loneliness without her husband even in this phase of her age.

This section of Koo's narration not only presents the loneliness of a woman because of the marriage form 'Polygyny' in a family but, along with the picture of a male-dominating society it also depicts the helplessness of a woman. Added to this, Koo's narrations regarding his first meeting with the girl and his mother's reaction towards his choice present the picture of the generation gap too. The gap that causes due to the differences of thinking towards the cultural and the social values. In this way, through the contextual analysis of Koo Manu's narration, while presenting the intended meaning of the speaker's utterances and expression, the present study follows Yule's observation on Pragmatics also.

Next, the researchers interpreting the further utterances of the speakers and tries to focus on the intended facts and situations present in the context. Researchers also seek to focus on the facts that to what extent the utterances of the speakers in the context of the text are situation based. This phase of contextual analysis of the fiction deals with social perspectives, moral values, and postcolonial aspects.

The protagonist Koo Manu even after passing a conversation regarding Ama Owusu's reputed character, started to protest the decision of his mother like a small kid. Then she advises him to return to Accra until he chooses the correct girl for him and the family. While finding it difficult to forget about this girl, Koo decides to discuss it with his father. But, when Koo discusses with his father that he wants to marry Ama Owusu, daughter of Kofi Appiah suddenly the face of his father "grew grim" (Kwakye 112) and without wasting any second he refuses to accept her as neither their daughter-in-law nor as Koo's wife. His father speaks of Ama,

"My mind is weak these days and my memory isn't as good as it used to be. But if I recollect correctly, this woman you talk about has a reputation as a bad girl" (Kwakye 112).

He also suggests Koo that the daughter of Agya Baako, Akua Nisha is the correct girl not only for him but, also for the family. Koo respects his father a lot, so he is unable to go against his decision and agrees to marry a girl of his father's choice. Thereupon, without any delay "A date was set" (Kwakye 114) by the elders of both the families to perform the marriage ceremony of Koo Manu and Akua Nsiah. After the marriage, he engages himself in the rules of family and involves in more business deals for his family, "Making deals and making sure they succeeded. It was non-stop" (Kwakye 129). Koo then because of his success and fame, "was invited to join the Government" (Kwakye 130) with the post, "Minister without

portfolio" (Kwakye 130). But, both the situation and position of Koo was changed when "the coup happened" (Kwakye 132) in Accra. He was arrested and detained by the soldiers. Akua somehow manages to release her husband Koo. But, after the released, he is fed up with city life so he decided to return to his village to take rest for some period.

The researchers, thus, justify the fact that it is not difficult to see that contextual analysis of the utterances in detail makes it easy to understand the nature of the context and in which situations the utterances are taking place. In this way, the present study presents a case of Cutting's observations on Pragmatics too.

In the final phase of the contextual analysis of Kwakye's text, the researchers focus on the facts that how the speakers make sense of each other's utterances linguistically, what is present in their mind during the narration, and also that the context is an abstract interpretation of a state of affairs. The present study thus follows Yule's and Widdowson's observations on pragmatics as well.

Kwakye's fiction mainly focuses on the impacts and effects of 'Polygyny' on Ghanaian women supports the fact that context is an abstract representation of the circumstances, affairs, and conditions. After the description of the story of the unfulfilled wish of life and the horrific experience of his political life, Koo continues narrating with the next phase of his story. He shares his experiences of an illicit relationship with Ama Owusu to the readers. The girl with whom he wanted to marry, but, because of his parent's opposition, he could not marry her. He once again meets Ama Owusu after twenty-five years of his married life. But, when they meet again after such a long period, he is once again attracted by Ama's beauty. After this meeting with Ama, Koo comes back to Accra to discuss his problem with Kwamena, his friend and also to ask for Akua's blessings for his second marriage. Koo has to face the opposition of not only his friend, Kwamena first, and, later from his first wife, Akua then of his children and society also,

"I faced more opposition than Sunday. After church service, Pastor Lawyer Amoah was aghast. He insisted that I shouldn't marry Ama Owusu" (Kwakye 146). But, while avoiding all these opposing faces he

"got married to Ama Owusu three months later. It was done quietly. I rented a little house for her. In Dansoman, near Accra" (Kwakye 151). Koo further describes to the readers about the problems also that he has to face due to his involvement in 'Polygyny'. He tells the readers that merely after a few months of his second marriage, he realizes the mistake

that is done by him,

"I discovered what Mother and Father had mentioned. About her character. She did have a very sharp tongue. But I learned to live and deal with it" (Kwakye 155). Now he is feeling very helpless and is spending his days with the hope that he will be able to compensate for this loss in the coming days,

"I had done damage. I had to repair it. I didn't know how. I hoped and hoped the damage was not permanent" (Kwakye 155). He feels bad for Akua too. He is no longer happy and satisfied after betraying his first wife. Thus, the selfish nature of the protagonist as a husband makes the fact clear that as he is not happy and satisfied because of the 'Polygyny' implemented by him so he feels bad for his first wife. But, instead of being unsatisfied if he was satisfied with his second wife, then would he feels bad for his first wife?

Thus, Koo's statement about the plural form of marriage practiced by him and his father presents the picture of his first wife's and mother's loneliness. Here another fact becomes clear to the readers that the protagonist, Koo Manu, and his father did not practice 'Polygyny' to increase their wealth, as they are quite wealthy and famous. However, they implement the plural form of marriage for the satisfaction of their manhood only. In addition to Koo and his father, Akua's Grandfather is also involved in the tradition of more than one wife and present another example of the dark side of 'Polygyny' in the novel.

Akua's grandmother also faced the problems of the plural form of marriage like Akua. Therefore, the narrator's first wife, Akua likes to share the story of her painful life due to 'Polygyny', with her grandmother. Akua Nsiah, who sacrifices her wishes and dreams in the name of the family is the main sufferer of the fiction of Kwakye. Kwakye presents Akua as a sitting duck right from the beginning of the story. When she was a maiden, she was forced to marry the man chosen by her parents instead of education and the University, "I knew I couldn't try to pursue an education when my parents wanted me to marry" (Kwakye 160). And now after marriage, she is being forced by her husband to accept another woman with whom he wants to marry,

"But, Akua, now you must understand. That I am a man. And sometimes I have feelings. For other women. Last time I went home, I met a woman. I had met her before. My feelings for her were renewed. Now I want to make her my wife. My second wife. And I want your blessing" (Kwakye 141-142).

She tells her grandmother that at this stage of her life she feels as a defenseless victim, but it's too late now because her husband has decided to implement 'Polygyny', "Koo had made the decision to take a second wife" (Kwakye 168).

Koo's decision not only makes her feel isolated, but purposeless also. So, she prefers to share her loneliness with her grandmother who is not alive. She chooses her grandmother as the only person who can redress her sufferings and confusion because her grandfather also implements 'Polygyny'. Akua request her grandmother to listen to her problems and guide her in such a confusing state of life,

"Nana, mother of my mother, please hear my call. Or is there a prayer I can make before even you? I know you have joined the ancestral pool, but, Grandmother, how are you treated over there? You, who shared her matrimonial bed with two other women" (Kwakye 157).

Thus, Akua's and her grandmother's conversation makes it clear that due to 'Polygyny' Akua's grandmother also has to face the loneliness in her life. Further, Akua's family is also a famous one, so there is no such reason behind her grandfather's plural marriage, that it is implemented by him with the purpose of wealth increasing factors. It also clears the state of affairs that reflects that not only the narrator and his father, Akua's grandfather also misuse the marriage culture to satisfy his manhood only.

Akua and her grandmother, then discuss not only these problems for several hours, but also discuss the ways that would help Akua to overcome this situation which is full of confusion. When Akua describes every little and important detail of her married life, then her grandmother teaches her the lesson of life with many valuable instructions from the depth of the experience of her own life as she is also a victim of this tradition. She also explains to Akua,

"Granddaughter, If you haven't used another road you hesitate to abandon the one you are used to It is the story of order. The natural inertia of humankind..." (Kwakye 171)

and also encourages her with the words "... Find the best one for yourself Work with that choice It shall be your sun by night" (Kwakye 181). In this way, the conversation between "woman to woman" (Kwakye 157) concludes with words full of hopefulness and aspiration.

Consequently, it cannot be denied that 'polygyny' leaves a negative impact on women's well-being. The present section of the context makes clear that in a family where 'Polygyny' practices, the wishes of the husband matter more in comparison to the emotions of wives. It also reflects

how Akua and her grandmother make sense of each other's utterances and pains linguistically. In this way, the contextual analysis of the fiction presents the purpose of the speakers, their assumptions, and the actions that are performed by the speakers during the narration. The study also supports that *The Sun by Night* is an abstract interpretation of a state of affairs. It holds a mirror to the society regarding the cynicism of the plural form of marriage.

This study has presented an overview of ruinous effects and unfortunate consequences resulting from the 'Polygyny' presented by Kwakye in *The Sun by Night*. The researchers seek to emphasize that a moment of courage is required to shatter centuries of patriarchy for the betterment of women. But due to the lack of this moment of courage and self-trust, female characters of Kwakye's fiction suffer from personality crisis and depression. At the end, the present study suggests a question before the readers that whether women are destined only for pains, sacrifices, and mental agonies.

Next, the study emphasizes that the reading of a text does not mean only to understand the basic meaning of the narration, but it also demands readers to interpret and communicate with the intended meaning present in the context of a text. The symbolic meanings bring much more information than explicitly written utterances. And the interpretations of intended meaning, unintended description, and unstated information of context help readers to understand the actual meaning of a text. Therefore, to analyze the intended meaning and unstated information present in the context of *The Sun by Night*, the researchers relate the present study to the Pragmatic approach of discourse analysis. It presents a connection between the oppression of women characters and stereotypical society through the pragmatic analysis of the novel. It focuses on the position of Ghanaian women in a family where 'Polygyny' is practice.

In conclusion, it can be said that 'Polygyny' is accepted in African society for population growth, the increase of wealth, and the power of masculinity. But the relations between language and context of Kwakye's *The Sun by Night* presents another point of view on 'Polygyny' before the readers. It clarifies that men who believe plural marriage is imperative, make the lives of their women traumatic to fulfill their satisfaction in the name of the tradition. The author presents this doleful aspect of the marriage form by depicting his women characters as women in the family model. The author does not allow them to play any role in the protest against their husband responsible for their painful lives because of this marriage tradition. The study focuses on the fact that where a husband tries to

control the feelings and emotions of his wives, disagreement between spouses becomes a common practice. The changes are observable in their utterances that present a contrasting picture between their peaceful and untroubled past with the stressful and traumatic present.

Thus, the present study that centers on the intended meaning and contextual analysis of Kwakye's fiction depicts the fact-based and sarcastic picture of deprived women in a male-dominated society due to the plural form of marriage. It also tries to attract the concern of the readers towards the alarming condition of the physical well-being and mental well-being of women.

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