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The Analysis of Politeness Strategies in Casual Conversations in Matengo

[1]Ezekiel Kumburu
College of Business Education
kumburueze@gmail.com
[2]Shingwa Magashi
University of Dodoma
magashivalue@gmail.com

Abstract

*Politeness has garnered the attention of many scholars worldwide, who have focused on the types of face-threatening acts and the strategies employed to mitigate them. Despite extensive theorisation of politeness, empirical studies in many African languages remain scarce. This study analyses the politeness strategies used by Matengo speakers to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) in casual conversations. The research adopted a qualitative, descriptive design and was conducted in Mbinga District, Ruvuma Region, Tanzania. Data were collected through audio recording of naturally occurring conversations, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with Matengo native speakers. The interviews were intended to confirm the information collected through participant observation. A total of ten conversational transcripts and interviews with fifteen informants were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that Matengo speakers employ a range of politeness strategies to mitigate FTAs. The strategies include the use of past tense forms when making requests, plural personal pronouns with singular reference, the politeness clitic **oti/ote** 'please', diminutive morphemes **ka-** and **tu-,** and traditional specific address names. These strategies function to minimise imposition, signal deference, and protect the negative face of interlocutors. The study further demonstrates that politeness in Matengo is strongly shaped by social variables, including age, kinship relations, marital status, and relative power, resulting in a predominance of vertical politeness over horizontal solidarity-based politeness**.** This study, therefore, provides insights into how Matengo speakers maintain respect, harmony and order within their community. Furthermore, the findings document linguistic practices that may be at risk of change due to language contact.*

Keywords: Casual conversations, Matengo language, politeness, politeness strategies, face-threatening acts, honorifics

1 Introduction

Despite their grammatical competence in a language, speakers often experience communication breakdowns caused by a lack of knowledge of the language-specific politeness norms and strategies governing appropriate social interaction (Leech, 1983, p. 75). According to Brown and Levinson, human beings have face, and they are rational agents. Face in this context is 'a public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself (1987, p. 61).

Brown and Levinson further argue that 'face is something that is emotionally invested, and it can be maintained or lost'; thus, 'face must constantly be attended to in social interaction' (1978, p. 66).

On the other hand, rationality is the mode of reasoning from ends to means. This means that all human beings have ends they wish to achieve; thus, they devise means to achieve them. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 65) further argue that 'certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face.' These are the acts that, by their nature, run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker. According to them, these are called Face Threatening Acts, henceforth FTAs. These acts include, but are not limited to, requests, orders, disagreements, refusals, complaints, and compliments. Thus, politeness is viewed as a strategy for redressing FTAs in social interaction.

Since these publications, various scholars have conceptualised politeness in terms of its role in social interaction, i.e., the ways it shapes social interactions among people and cultures. Lakoff (1975, p. 64), for example, perceives politeness as "a social lubricant that aims at reducing friction in interpersonal interactions." Yule (1996, p. 134) views politeness as 'showing awareness of another person's face.' Sell (cited in Yoshimura and Whinney, 2011) views politeness as a velvet glove within which to hide one or another kind of iron fist. Watts (1992, p. 44, cited in Yoshimura and Whinney, 2011) perceives politeness as "a mask used to conceal egos which functions to avoid conflicts and tone down potential aggression and ensure interactions are smoothly accomplished." Yule (2010, p. 135) further contends that politeness is showing "awareness and consideration of another person's face." Generally, politeness can be viewed as the use of the right word, phrase or acting properly in a context determined by implicit rules that exist in a particular society.

Studies on linguistic politeness have revealed that politeness is a universal phenomenon (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Brown, 2015; Brown & Levinson, 2000). Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 44), for example, argue that the universality of politeness phenomena is founded in three major aspects: face, rationality, and mutual knowledge between interactants. Thus, interactants choose appropriate means to achieve their ends. Generally, Brown and Levinson (*ibid.*) argue that there are 'universal principles that underlie the construction of polite utterances across languages and cultures, although the realisation of these principles varies across cultures and languages. This idea is also supported by Brown (2015, p. 326), who argues that although politeness is a universal phenomenon, it is 'conventionally attached to certain linguistic forms and formulaic expressions which may be very different in different languages and cultures.' Therefore, it is safe to argue that, although politeness is a phenomenon that is found in every culture and language, the realisation of politeness differs significantly from one language and/or culture to another.

Yule (1996, p. 134) also contends that 'ideas about appropriate language to mark politeness differ substantially from one culture to another.' Consequently, Ogiermann (2009, p. 1) highlights the importance of studying politeness within a specific language, arguing that it is difficult to generalise the concept across all languages. She states, "the longer politeness is studied, the more ambiguous and less transparent it becomes, and the more difficult it appears to capture specific features of politeness". This stance calls attention to investigating politeness in individual languages and/or cultures to identify the nuances of each language. Additionally, literature has shown that politeness can be expressed both verbally and nonverbally (Leech, 1983). Yoshimura and Whinney (2011) argue that non-verbal forms of politeness include dressing styles, facial expressions, gestures, and specific forms of a particular language.

Studies on politeness have been conducted in various languages around the world. For example, House (2005) explains that in German, politeness is typically expressed through direct language when making requests, refusals, and criticisms, as indirect expressions are often associated with insincerity. Nadia and Nurizah (2021) examined politeness strategies in the Malaysian Prime

Minister's Maiden speech. The study revealed that the Prime Minister employed politeness strategies such as using group identity markers, exaggeration, avoiding disagreement, and attending to the receiver's interests in the speech. Similarly, Mutunda (2006) examined verbal politeness strategies in Lunda culture in Zambia. The study reported that kinship terms, pronouns, personal names, taboos, and euphemisms are strategies used by the Lunda in their verbal interactions to convey politeness.

In Tanzania, unlike other parts of the world, politeness in ethnic community languages has received limited scholarly attention. One of the few existing studies on politeness in Tanzania is Magashi (2017), which examined linguistic politeness in social interactions among Sukuma speakers. The findings revealed that the past tense, in-group identity markers, plural personal pronouns, self-denigration, diminutives and augmentatives, address terms, white lies and repetitions are among the strategies used to redress FTAs. However, this study alone is insufficient to explain politeness phenomena across Tanzania's diverse communities, given the significant cultural differences in this multicultural society. In addition, although some studies on the Matengo language exist (Ndomba, 2007; Kapinga, 2018), none have focused on politeness. This study, therefore, aimed to analyse politeness strategies used by Matengo speakers to redress face-threatening acts (FTAs) in casual conversations. Thus, the study provides an understanding of politeness practices by unveiling strategies for mitigating face-threatening acts in the Matengo language. The strategies highlight the need to preserve politeness norms as part of the Matengo people's cultural identity.

2 Methodology

The target population of this study comprised Matengo native speakers who were born and lived in Mbinga District of Songea Region, Tanzania. Four wards, namely Mikalanga, Maguu, Litembo and Mpapa, were purposively selected because they are the homeland of Matengo native speakers. As such, the study involved all Matengo native speakers who were born and reside in Mbinga District. The study employed a qualitative approach, which allowed the collection of rich, detailed data through direct interactions with native speakers to gain insights into their cultural norms, values, and relationships that shape politeness. Further, the study employed a descriptive design, which helped to describe the politeness forms used by the Matengo speakers to redress FTAs. The sample of 15 informants was interviewed, while 10 transcripts of naturally occurring conversations collected from Matengo native speakers were used in this study to analyse politeness strategies. The interview informants were purposively focused on Matengo native speakers. The number of these informants for interviews and the transcripts of naturally occurring conversations were determined by data saturation. Additionally, purposive sampling was used to select Mbinga District and the wards within which the study was conducted. In this study, data were collected using audio recordings of naturally occurring conversations, participant observations of strategies the Matengo speakers employed in interactions, and interviews, which served to probe the meaning and interpretations of the data collected through participant observation. The conversations were recorded with the Matengo speakers' consent during family gatherings, traditional ceremonies, and sports and games. Thematic analysis was used as the data analysis method, and the audio data were first transcribed. Thereafter, words, phrases, and sentences from naturally occurring conversations and participant observation that contained themes were identified and presented accordingly.

3 Findings

This part presents the linguistic strategies the Matengo speakers use to express politeness in casual conversations. It presents five linguistic politeness strategies discussed and realised by the data analysis, namely plural personal pronouns, the past tense, the clitic *oti* and its variant *ote* "please", the diminutive morpheme *ka-* and its variant *tu-,* and address forms.

3.1 The use of plural personal pronouns

The analysis of the data collected in this study revealed that the first-person plural "*twe*" 'we' and the second person plural "*mwe*" 'you' are used to express politeness in Matengo. Extract 1 illustrates this argument:

(1)	F: bo-m-jomba-gu-jumwich-e?
	Hello-3SG-uncle-2SG-PRES-fine-AGR
	'Hello uncle, are you fine?'
(2)	D: e:na. abali-ju-ku-nyumba.
	Yes-information-of-to-house
	'Yes, how is home?
(3)	F: salama tu, m-jomba.
	Fine-only-3SG-uncle
	'It is fine, uncle'
(4)	D: twe, tu-bil-e
	We-SM- PRES-exist-AGR
	'We exist'
(5)	F: mbona-ngasetu-bon-an-a au le ma-jukumo? gwi-temba-li-aotikunyumba mjomba.
	But-1PL-see-REC-FV-or-because of-PL-responsibility? -2SG-visit-APPL-FV-please-home-uncle
	'But, we don't see each other, or because of responsibilities? You, please, visit your uncle'
(6)	D: lyoba-limu lama twite-mbalyaj-e mjomba
	day-one- must-1PL-visit-AGR-SG-uncle
	'One day we must visit uncle.'

Extract 1: The use of the plural personal pronouns "twe" and "mwe"

Extract 1 is part of a conversation between F and D, in which F is the uncle to D, and F is older than D. In line (5), F tells his nephew, D, that they do not see each other often and invites him to visit his home, saying, *"mbona ngase tubonana, au le majukumo? Gwitembaliaoti kunyumba mjomba",* which translates to, "but we don't see each other, is it because of responsibilities? Please visit home, uncle". In line (6), D responds that he will visit one day, stating, "*lyobalimu lama twitembaliaje mjomba, meaning* 'One day, we must visit you, uncle'. But, in his response, D uses the first-person plural pronoun "*twi*" 'we' instead of the first-person singular "*ni*" 'I'. This choice suggests that D is either including others in their conversation or employing plural pronouns as a linguistic strategy. Similarly, Extract 2 illustrates how the second person plural form is used to express politeness in Matengo.

(1).	A: masigetwe ganga	
	Water- is- here.	
	'Here is the water.'	
(2).	B: Asandi	
	'Thank you.'	
(3).	A: gwe, jendakukajonguku-pwalanajumbech-e oti m-pukugukubeche i-lombiy-a.	
	2SG-PRES-go-FV-to-Jongo-OM-tell-FV-1SG-OM-PRES-ask for-FV-	
	For storing-PL-maize-my	
	'You, go to Jongo, tell him I am asking for bags for storing my maize, please'	
(4).	B: na n-obik-a mu-ka-nyozuch-e-chwidogu.	
	1SG-SM-PST-ask-FV-2PL-to- add-FV-some more.	
	'I was asking you to add me some more, please.'	

Extract 2: The use of the plural personal pronoun *"twi"*

In Extract 2, A had given B some drinking water. After finishing it, B requested more water. In doing so, B used a plural second-person pronoun to refer to the addressee. This plural form is marked by the morpheme *"mu"* ('you' plural) attached to a verb *mu-ka-nyo-nzuch-e* 'you add me', instead of the singular morpheme *"gu"* ('you' singular), which could have been used to refer to a single addressee.

Similarly, data from observation revealed that first-person and second-person plural pronouns are used to express politeness in Matengo. Just as a sample, a woman in her 30s met her father-in-law, who was in his 60s. As they met, the woman first greeted her father-in-law by saying, *"Jambu atati"* (good afternoon, father). Her father-in-law responded with *"ena nzumwichi"*, yes, are you fine? The woman then replied: *"twe tujumukanile"* 'we are fine'. In this exchange, the woman used the first-person plural pronoun *twe* 'we' instead of the singular *ne* 'I' to refer to herself. Similarly, the man used the second person plural second pronoun, marked by the morpheme *nzu* ('you' plural) in the verb *"nzumwiche"* 'are you fine', instead of the singular *"gu"* ('you' singular), which would refer to an individual.

This observation was followed by interviews. A man in his 40s was presented with the examples above, which illustrate how speakers used first-person and second-person plural pronouns to refer to a single individual in conversations. He was then asked to explain why this occurs. The man replied: *"Ajaku alonje ilipe kuletaisima, tena ajaku alonjende ana pakuba na mundu joahesimu ngani'* "They speak this way to show respect, and they usually do so when addressing a person whom they highly respect."

Based on the above arguments, it can be concluded that the first person plural *twe* 'we' with its variants *twa* and *twi,* along with the second person plural pronoun *mwe* 'you' and its variants *mwa* and *mwi,* serve as strategies for expressing politeness in Matengo. These pronouns are typically used in conversations between people who highly respect each other. In particular, the plural personal pronouns are employed when speakers request something from those who are older or more socially and economically superior to them. Therefore, in Matengo, an utterance is perceived as more polite when plural person pronouns are used to address a single individual rather than a singular personal pronoun.

3.2 The use of the past tense

The analysis of the data collected for this study revealed that the past tense plays a significant role in expressing politeness in the Matengo language, especially when making requests. The Extract 3 illustrates this argument:

(1)	C: enuna-no-bik-a li-jelalyakuni-kulagal-i chilabo
	Thus-1SG-SM-PST-request-FV-3SG-hoe-your-SM-FUT-weed-AGR- tomorrow.
	'I was requesting your hoe that I will weed tomorrow.'
(2)	A: kolakola le ngasegwa-jomwil-e ku-kulagal-i?
	There-NEG-OM-PST-finish-AGR-FV-PROG-weed-AGR
	'Didn't you finish the wedding there?'

Extract 3: The use of the past tense

In Extract 3, C in line (1), was requesting a hoe from A, which she intended to use the next day. In so doing, C used the past tense when presenting the request, saying: *"enu na nobika lijela lyaku nikulagali chilabo"* 'I was requesting your hoe so that I can use it to weed tomorrow'. In Extract 3, C appears to use the past tense to make a request and to express a present state rather than the present tense.

In an interview aimed at exploring the opinions of Matengo speakers on why speaker C in line (1) used the past tense to express the present request, a man in his 40s was presented with the scenario in which speaker C used the past tense to make the request. He was then asked to provide reasons why speaker C might have chosen the past tense to make the present request. The man replied: *"Jwapaga ana ili enu kuloba koni gunyenyachela*, 'she said so to request humbly.' The same scenario was described to a woman in her 60s, who was then asked to explain why speaker C should make a request using the past tense. The woman replied: "*Ejuwaga ana manachi enu jukubajuloba kwisima nu nukunyenyache*." 'When she says that, she asks humbly and with respect.'

Based on the arguments above, it can be generalised that the past tense is one of the linguistic strategies used to express politeness in the Matengo language, particularly when making requests. In particular, the past tense is used when interlocutors are unfamiliar with each other. It is also used when interlocutors with lower status make requests to interlocutors with higher status. However, the past tense is not important for intimate people, who do not need to sound polite when making requests of each other. A request made with the past tense sounds more polite than a request made with the present tense.

3.3 The clitic *oti* /*ote* 'please'

The data analysis revealed that *oti,* and its variant *ote,* which is equivalent to the English word 'please', are common strategies for expressing politeness in Matengo. The clitic *oti* typically appears within a phrase or clause alongside other words to express politeness. When attached to a verb, it transforms the entire sentence into a polite form, regardless of whether the original sentence was interrogative or imperative. This is illustrated in Extract 4:

(1).   B: HHHHHHH gu-lombi-oti-omba-kunza-ako
          SM-PT-buy-AGR-please-PL-fish-there-out side
          'Just buy fish there outside, please.'
(2).   C: HHHHHHHH.

Extract 4: The use of the clitic *oti /ote* 'please'

In Extract 4, B, in line (1), told C to buy the fish that was being sold outside. To make the request polite, B attached the clitic *oti* 'please' to the verb *gulombi* 'buy'. C did not respond verbally but laughed, indicating that the statement was not perceived as a threat.

Observational data further revealed that the clitic *oti* 'please' and its variant *ote* function as linguistic strategies for expressing politeness in Matengo. This was observed on one occasion where a man in his 30s greeted his stepmother, who was in her 50s, by saying, *Jambu oti* 'good afternoon, please. His stepmother replied with, "e gujumwichi," meaning "yes, are you fine?" In this conversation, the man used the clitic *oti* alongside his greeting, making it sound more polite than it would without it. However, in her response, the stepmother omitted the clitic *oti* 'please', and the conversation continued smoothly. This implies that, in this context, respect is not reciprocated but flows in one direction.

The interviews were conducted to explore opinions from Matengo speakers about the essence of using the clitic *ote* 'please.' A 30-year-old man was presented with the scenario the researcher observed involving the man who greeted his stepmother. The man was then asked to explain the essence of using the particle *oti* 'please' in presenting the greetings. The man replied that, *ajaku bandu atumile nielii lialonje aibonikana alonje kuchibuli"*, translated as, "people employ *oti* in conversations to avoid sounding rude". The same question was posed to a woman in her 40s, who also answered that, *"ajaku linenu oti litumika kuwasegupwaga se esi ngasalasima"*, which means that "the word is used to indicate that what you are saying is not a command". From this evidence, it can be argued that the clitic *ote* 'please' is a strategy for expressing politeness in Matengo.

3.4 The diminutive morpheme

The data analysis revealed that the diminutive morphemes *ka-* and *tu-* are also linguistic strategies for expressing politeness in Matengo. The morpheme *ka-* is usually attached to singular nouns, while *tu-* is usually used with plural and uncountable nouns. For example, one may say: *na mbeche ka-omba kamo* 'I ask for one small fish' or *na mbeche tuombi tubele* "I ask for two small eggs". Extract 5 is taken from one of the conversations that illustrate how the diminutive morpheme expresses politeness in Matengo.

(1).   F: na m-ma-gul-i ka-tochika-mu anyenga.
             1SG-2PL-OM-ask-AGR- DM-banana-AGR-one- SG-aunt
             'I ask you for one small banana, Aunt.'
  (2).   A: jo-pa ale.
            OM- take- this
            'Take this.'
 (3).   F: asandi anienga
            'Thank you, aunt'.

Extract 5: The use of dimunitive morpheme

In Extract 5, F in line (1) requested a banana from A (her aunt). In doing so, she attached the diminutive morpheme *ka-* to the noun 'banana.' This use of the diminutive morpheme *ka-* was intentional, serving to minimise the degree of imposition that could otherwise pose a threat to the addressee. Similarly, observational data revealed that the diminutive morphemes *ka-* and its variant *tu-* function as linguistic strategies for expressing politeness in Matengo. It was observed that incorporating the diminutive morpheme in requests helps to reduce the perceived imposition on the addressee.

This can also be illustrated by an observed interaction in which a man in his 40s requested a woman in her 30s to help him cultivate his garden. The man said, *"Na mwinyangati oti kulema ka-bustani ka chilabu kano"* I ask you to help me cultivate my small garden tomorrow, please. In presenting this request, the man attached the morpheme *ka-* to the noun *bustani* 'garden'. This use of the diminutive morpheme *ka-* conveys a sense that the task is not burdensome, implying that the addressees will experience much difficulty. Diminutive morphemes generally function to soften the degree of imposition on the addressee, reducing the likelihood that they will perceive the request as intrusive.

This exchange was followed by interviews aimed at gathering speakers' views and opinions on the use of the diminutive morpheme *'ka-'* and its variant *'tu-'*. A man in his 50s was presented with the scenario of a man requesting a woman to help him cultivate his garden. He was then asked to explain why the man attached the diminutive morpheme *ka-* to the word *bustani* 'garden'. The interviewee replied: *"Malajenji bandu atumi ilikupungusa ukaligwa se pwaga", meaning* 'Sometimes, it is used to reduce the severity of words that one speaks'. The same question was asked to a woman in her 30s, who responded: "*ili enu kumfanya jogu mpwaji jubonape sindu sikawaida",* meaning, 'To make the addressee perceive it as something ordinary.

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that the diminutive morpheme *ka-* and its variant *tu-* serve as a linguistic strategy for expressing politeness in Matengo. This morpheme modifies the meaning of the base word, shifting it from its neutral form to convey the sense of few, little, or small. Furthermore, the use of the diminutive morpheme reduces the degree of imposition, as it implies that the speaker's request is minimal and unlikely to burden the addressee.

3.5 Address terms

The data analysis revealed that specific address terms are used to express politeness in Matengo. It was revealed that politeness features associated with terms of address are important at the onset of

conversations since they can mark friendliness or respect. Below are the terms of address revealed to express politeness in Matengo.

3.6 Married women's ethnic names

Observation revealed that the Matengo have special ethnic names for married women. These names function similarly to the English title Mrs and are determined by a woman's surname and lineage. In interactions, Matengo women are addressed by their ethnic names rather than their first names or surnames. It was observed that, before marriage, women in the Matengo community are addressed by their first names. However, upon marriage, they are given ethnic names that are recognised exclusively within the Matengo speech community. These names signify respect, as married women hold a higher social status than unmarried ones in Matengo culture in daily interactions. Thus, the ethnic names assigned to them serve as a marker of respect, distinguishing them from their unmarried counterparts. Addressing a married woman by her first name is considered disrespectful. Table 1 presents the ethnic names given to married women in the Matengo community.

Table 1: *Matengo women's ethnic names*

No.	Surname	Women's ethnic names	No.	Surname	Women's ethnic names
1	Ndunguru	*Mwejela*	11	Ili	*Lugali*
2	Lupogo	*Chindembu*	12	Sangana	*Ndeka*
3	Kumburu	*Mauka*	13	Kapinga	*Peleka*
4	Komba	*Chitonda*	14	Milinga	*Jeu*
5	Kinunda	*Chinunda*	15	Mbunda	*Bolela*
6	Nombo	*Chiosi*	16	Lilo	*Mwanzaga*
7	Ngongi	*Chejeto*	17	Nchimbi	*Kigumi*
8	Mapunda	*Njindo*	18	Kihuru	*Siga*
9	Ndomba	*Tindu*			
10	Ndimbu	*Mangu*			

Source: Field Data (2021)

The observation was followed by interviews. A man in his 60s was asked to explain why ethnic names are assigned to married women. The man replied: *ajaku bachema kwisima enu nukwa topautisa na banji binga kutoguleka.* This translates to: 'They are given these names to show respect and distinguish them from unmarried women.

Based on this discussion, it can be argued that ethnic names assigned to married women are linguistic politeness strategies in Matengo. These names are like titles that signal respect for the married women. These ethnic names enable Matengo speakers to avoid the potential threat that may arise when addressing married women by their first names.

3.7 *Bambu* 'sir' or 'chief'

The data analysis revealed that, in Matengo, the address term *bambu* 'sir' or 'chief' is used to show respect when addressing men. This term is used to avoid mentioning first names. In Matengo, *bambu* 'sir' or 'chief' is used as a direct form of address to refer to all males politely. However, young men

are not permitted to use this term when addressing adults and elderly individuals. *Bambu* is typically used by speakers of the same social class, like age mates, close friends, and people with similar power or economic status. If a young male uses it to address an older male, it is interpreted as rudeness or disrespect. However, there are exceptions in which an older man may address a young man as *bambu* to elevate his status. Extract 6 supports this argument:

A:	*bambuleleno le ngatujendi kunywaugwembe"*
	'Sir, are we not going to drink local beer today?'
B:	*"twijenda chilabo bambu"*
	'Let us go tomorrow, sir.'

Extract 6: The use of the term, *bambu*

This observation was accompanied by interviews intended to gather views from Matengo speakers about the usage of *bambu.* A man in his 50s was presented with a scenario in which two men addressed each other using the term *bambu* instead of their names.' He was then asked to explain why they did so. The man replied: "*ilienukuleta heshima kuku nzachijwe*", meaning, 'In order to show respect to his colleague.

On another occasion, a boy was heard telling his fellow: "*Bambu, ngatuselegwi le kusule?",* *translated as,* 'Won't we be late for school, sir? This observation was also followed by an interview in which a 15-year-old boy was presented with a scenario involving two boys playing cards at home. The young boy was then asked to explain why the schoolboy addressed his fellow as "bambu". The young boy replied: "*sabu jolajola jabya bamboo jwache", meaning,* 'Because he was his fellow sir. From these observations, it may be argued that the address term *bambu* is a politeness strategy in Matengo as it is used to show respect towards one's interlocutor. This implies that, in this context, respect is reciprocal. These findings relate to the findings by Brown and Levinson (1987), who contend that address terms are 'in-group identity markers that are used to claim ground with H that is carried out by those definitions of a group,' thus, encoding a relationship between speaker and addressee.

3.8 The use of *Ala:mu* 'sister-in-law or brother-in-law'

Ala:mu 'sister or brother-in-law is used in Matengo to mean one's brother's wife or one's sister's husband. The term *ala:mu* 'sister or brother-in-law' by itself contains politeness features; that is, it carries a special meaning of respect when addressed to a person. The term is also used to address both males and females in Matengo. This is illustrated by Extract 7.

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(1).    A: a-jibich-i-ko?
        SM-PERF-steal-AGR-where
       'Where have they stolen?'
(2).    C: kuku n-kosimundo
        From-3SG-his friend
       'From his friend'
(3).    A: kuku nkosimundu?
        To his friend?'
       'To his friend?'
(4).    B: kukaamone
       'To Amoni.'
(5).    A: amonibo: ala:mu?
        amoni-which-3SG-sister-in-law?
       'Which Amoni; sister-in-law?'(Meaning, which Amon my sister-in-law?)
(6).    B: katolemwa-namarehemu katole
        3SG-katole-3SG-son-3SG-late-3SG-katole
       'Katole. The son of the late Katole.'
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Extract 7: The use of *Ala:mu*

In Extract 7, A in line (1) asked where the thieves had stolen from. C in line (2) responded, 'from his friend.' In line (3), A asked: 'Which friend?' B in line (4) replied: Amoni. A in line (5) asked again, 'Which Amoni, sister-in-law?' In line 6, B responded: Katole, 'The son of the late Katole'. Thus, in this extract, A addressed B, who is his brother's wife, as *ala:mu* 'sister-in-law'.

During interviews with Matengo natives, the researcher presented the scenario in Extract 7 to a man aged 40. He was asked to explain why A addresses B as *ala:mu* 'sister-in-law' instead of using her personal name. The man replied: "*ajaku jwachema alamu ili enu kuleta isima",* meaning, 'he addressed that way to show respect.' The same question was asked to a woman in her 70s, who replied: "*aji toka samani achema ahelahela. Aji alamu bi ngakwachema liina lyabo, ngasape. Jikuba tabia jiliyaha*", meaning, 'It has been this way since ancient times; you cannot address your sister-in-law by her first name. It is not good; it signals bad behaviour.'

Based on this discussion, it can be concluded that the address term "*ala:mu*" brother or sister-in-law is connotatively used to signal respect in casual conversations in Matengo. The term is always reciprocal, although a lack of reciprocity is still less threatening. The address term is not, however, used to redress face-threatening acts; instead, it is used to portray a sense of respect at the beginning of a conversation.

3.9 *Nkoanu* vs. *anihala* 'father-in-law or mother-in-law'

On the one hand, the term *nkoanu* 'mother or father-in-law' refers to one's wife's parents, encompassing both male and female parents-in-law. This term carries the sense of 'the highest level of respect' when it is used in direct address. In the Matengo culture, a mother-in-law is regarded with more respect than one's own mother. Observational data demonstrate how the term "*nkoanu*", mother-in-law or father-in-law, is used to express politeness in casual conversations in Matengo. On one occasion, a 40-year-old man at home saw his mother-in-law coming from the farm with his wife.

The man approached them to greet his mother-in-law and addressed her as "*nkoanu*", 'mother-in-law,' before continuing with the greeting.

On the other hand, the term "*anihala*" in Matengo refers to one's husband's parents, encompassing both male and female parents. The term *anihala,* as a politeness strategy, is illustrated by data from observation. On one occasion, a woman aged 30 was heard telling her neighbour: *"Chilabo ne nijenda kwajangati anihala ba kutupu ngonde",* meaning, "Tomorrow, I shall go to help my mother-in-law to harvest beans."

This observation was followed by interviews in which a man aged 60 was presented with a scenario in which he greeted his mother-in-law using the term *nkoanu* 'mother-in-law' instead of her personal name. The interviewee was asked to explain the reason for doing so. The interviewee responded: *"Nkoanu ndejo. Enundenga kutachiwa kulogoliina lya chemana che enugwibya gukosichi adabo. Eguchema nkoanu kukubaenu nisima."* This translates to: "A mother-in-law is someone you respect very much. For that reason, one is not allowed to mention her real name, as it would sound rude. However, when you call her *nkoanu*, you show respect". Based on these discussions, it can be generalised that the terms *nkoanu*/*anihala* 'father-in-law'/'mother-in-law' are strategies for expressing politeness in Matengo culture. However, these terms are not used to redress face-threatening acts when presented.

4 Discussion

This study explored the linguistic strategies used by Matengo speakers to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) in casual conversation. The findings demonstrate that politeness in Matengo is systematically realised through a set of recurrent linguistic resources, namely the use of past tense forms, plural personal pronouns with singular reference, the clitic *oti/ote* 'please', diminutive morphemes *ka-/ tu-,* and culturally specific address terms. These strategies reveal a politeness system that is strongly oriented towards the protection of negative face and the maintenance of hierarchical social relations.

Regarding the use of plural personal pronouns, Brown and Gilman (1960) observed that in most European languages, such as French, there is a binary distinction between the second person singular pronoun *tu-* (T), which is used to address less powerful interlocutors and the second person plural pronoun *vous* (V), which is typically used to address superior interlocutors. According to them, this distinction is determined by age, sex, physical strength, and institutionalised role, for example, in the army, church, or family (Brown and Gilman, 1960, p. 255). Similar findings were also reported by Magashi (2017, p. 161) in Sukuma, who argues that 'the first- and second-person plural pronouns can be used with singular referents as a politeness strategy to redress face-threatening acts, particularly in making invitations and expressing compliments. In relation to politeness theory, the use of a plural personal pronoun is an example of a negative politeness strategy that aims to show difference (P) or distance (D), thereby achieving the same goals as indirectness (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 198). However, the findings of this study contrast with those of Zeynalova (2025), who reported that personal pronouns are pragmatic tools that signal social status, inclusion, identity and communicative intent, not simply a politeness strategy. This implies that some politeness strategies, such as the use of plural personal pronouns, are not universal to all languages.

The findings of this study have further revealed that the past tense is one of the strategies that are used to remedy face-threatening acts in the Matengo language. These findings are consistent with

those of Thorstein (2005:151), who asserts that in Norwegian, the most common strategy for making requests is the use of the past tense, and that 'a request made in the present tense does not sound like a request. However, it sounds as if the speaker is literally describing what is going on in his/her mind at the time of the utterance, and it would sound more likely that the speaker is addressing him/herself rather than the person he/she is facing.' Magashi (2017) also found that the past tense is a strategy used to redress face-threatening acts in Sukuma, particularly when making requests. Therefore, taking politeness theory into account, the past tense is a negative politeness strategy intended to serve one's comfort zone, acting on one's negative face. However, Thanh, Ngoc, An, Thu, and Huong (2022) assert that past tenses are not classified as independent strategies; rather, strategies are defined in terms of FTA mitigation.

Another significant finding in this study is the use of the clitic *oti/ote* 'please'. These findings concur with the findings by Thorstein (2005), who argues that Norwegians employ 'please' as a politeness marker. In Norwegian, the politeness marker 'please' is used to redress requests even without combining it with other politeness markers. As such, a request made by the combination of modal auxiliary 'can' and politeness marker 'please' in a structure like 'can you come here please?' implies the highest degree of politeness that is beyond normal politeness. Magashi (2017) also reported similar findings in Sukuma. These findings run contrary to the findings by Thorstein (2005) in that, in Matengo, the politeness marker *oti/ote* 'please' can co-occur with other politeness markers like diminutive morphemes in ordinary politeness. For instance: boa oti kalibu kalaka 'remove that small stone, please'. Thus, in the Matengo language, the clitic oti/ ote, 'please', is a negative politeness strategy employed by speakers to minimise the possible threat that might happen if the same message were presented using forceful statements.

The diminutive morpheme is another linguistic strategy employed by Matengo speakers to redress face-threatening acts. These findings align with those of Eshreteh (2017), who explored the pragmatic functions of diminutives in Palestinian Arabic. Eshreteh argues that, in Palestinian Arabic, the diminutives minimise imposition, soften negative statements, express affection and endearment, intensify the speaker's emotions, and express intimacy and connectedness to one another. Magashi (2017) also argues that the diminutive morpheme expresses politeness in Sukuma. Specifically, it adds goodness (beauty) to the noun in question, therefore, expressing admiration and approval. However, these findings are contrary to Appah and Amfo (2011), who reported that the diminutive morphemes in Akan convey senses such as small, young, feminine, or insignificant, without framing diminutives primarily as politeness strategies.

With respect to forms of address, this study found that address terms are highly significant in fostering harmonious interactions, as they signal respect or friendliness at the onset of a conversation. These findings align with Hwang's (1991) findings regarding terms of address in Korean and American cultures. Hwang (*ibid*.) argues that American culture is first-name-oriented; however, in Korean culture, family and title names are more prominent. Hwang also argues that first names in Korean culture are restricted in use, as they are most commonly used among children's and young people's peer groups and by older persons addressing younger persons within the family. However, there is a difference between Korean and Matengo cultures in the emphasis placed on names and surnames. Thus, this becomes a Matengo cultural orientation. Brown and Levinson (1987) also argue that address terms such as dear, love, and friend are used to create an in-group identity marker between the speaker and the addressee, and that one feels good before the FTA is presented. Similar findings were reported by Katakami (1997) regarding the names and address

terms in Mbeere. Her study revealed that it is taboo for a daughter-in-law to mention her father-in-law's first name, as it is for a son-in-law to mention his mother-in-law's first name. As a result, if a woman has a son named by the first name of her father-in-law, and a daughter named by the first name of her mother-in-law, then she calls the boy Mugendi 'traveller' and the girl kaari 'a little girl' as an attempt to avoid mentioning the name of her father or mother-in-law. This is similar to the Matengo culture, where it is taboo for a son to mention his mother-in-law's first name, as it is for a daughter to mention her father-in-law's first name. However, in Matengo, if a woman has a son named after her father-in-law and a daughter named after her mother-in-law, she may use those names when addressing them. Magashi (2017, p. 209) reports similar findings in Sukuma, where the honorific terms mayʊ bhʊko 'mother-in-law' and bha:bha bhʊko 'father-in-law' are also used in Sukuma as avoidance strategies by daughters and sons-in-law in an attempt to avoid mentioning the first names of their parents-in-law. Overall, the findings of this study show how Matengo speakers use address forms to redress FTAs in casual conversations. However, the findings of this study run counter to Vismans (2023) and Yuwono and Santoso (2024), who argue that the choice of address terms does not directly align with politeness interpretation; instead, it implies sociolinguistic framing and identity.

5 Conclusion

This study analysed the politeness strategies used to redress FTAs in casual conversation in the Matengo language. The study identified five linguistic strategies used to remedy FTAs in casual conversations in the Matengo language. These are past tense, plural personal pronouns, the clitic *oti* and its variant *ote* (please), the diminutive morphemes *ka-* and its variant *tu-,* and terms of address. These strategies are aimed at counteracting negative face. It can, therefore, be concluded that the Matengo culture values negative politeness more than positive politeness. This is because most strategies, except for the diminutives, observed in the data were geared towards redressing FTAs that threaten the negative face of the interlocutors, including address terms. Consequently, vertical politeness is more prominent than horizontal politeness. For example, most address terms such as *bambu* ('sir' or 'chief'), *ala:mu* ('sister' or 'brother-in-law'), *nkoanu* and *anihala* ('*mother/*' or '*father-in-law*'), and married women's ethnic names are intended to show respect rather than solidarity or friendliness. This indicates that respect is more valued than friendliness or solidarity in this culture. Generally, the findings of this study show that the Kimatengo language has universal politeness strategies which cut across world languages, particularly Bantu languages. However, the use of women's ethnic names as a politeness strategy in the Matengo language is a significant and distinctive feature, given that the strategy is not attested in other Bantu languages, such as Sukuma.

6 Limitations

This study examined the linguistic strategies the Matengo speakers employ to mitigate face-threatening acts, focusing on casual conversations. However, the study did not include the paralinguistic aspects of language in its analysis of politeness strategies. That is, it did not include the nonverbal cues, the aspect of language that could serve similar roles in interactions. Furthermore, because this study focused solely on casual conversations, excluding analysis of politeness strategies in formal settings, such as meetings and dowry negotiations, a politeness study of formal events and nonverbal cues may be conducted to provide a deeper understanding of Matengo politeness and its contribution to the general theory of politeness.

7 Declaration of conflict of interest

8 Funding

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Analysing the Literary Representation of Women's Influence in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals

[1]Caroline Nimehi Mugolozi
The Open University of Tanzania
caroline.mugolozi@out.ac.tz

[2]Yohana Makeja John
The Open University of Tanzania
yohana.john@out.ac.tz

Abstract

In many African countries, women's roles have historically been marginalised in both literature and everyday life. Against this backdrop, this study analyses how African literary works represent women's influence in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Guided by African Feminist Literary Theory and Gender and Development Theory, the study adopts a qualitative case study design, grounded in close textual reading and thematic analysis. The target population comprised African literary works that portray women's roles in society. Four texts were purposively selected: Osman Conteh's Unanswered Cries, Nawal El Saadawi's Woman at Point Zero, Guillaume Oyônô Mbia's Three Suitors: One Husband, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's This Time Tomorrow. Data were generated through multiple close readings of the primary texts and analysed thematically, with interpretation informed by the researchers' scholarly expertise. The findings reveal that women are portrayed as contributors to the achievement of the SDGs, though in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways. While many representations depict women as promoters of gender equality and empowerment (contributing to poverty reduction, advocates for quality education and educational reform, enhancers of health and well-being, highlighting gender inequality, and preservers of ethical and culturally acceptable practices), other portrayals present women in more problematic roles, including as objects of male pleasure. Hence, the study recommends that African governments strengthen laws against harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation and that societies reject domestic violence and outdated beliefs that deny women equality and access to education.

Keywords: Representation of women, literary works, sustainable development, oppression, Sustainable Development Goals

1 Introduction

Women have historically occupied a complex and evolving position within African literature, where they are simultaneously silenced, symbolised, celebrated, and empowered. As African societies grapple with the interconnected challenges of sustainable development, literary representations of women emerge not merely as reflections of social realities but as critical instruments for interrogating patriarchal norms, reimagining gender relations, and inspiring transformative action. Although recent scholarship has examined women's representation in African literary works in relation to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 on

gender equality, such studies remain limited in scope. They often overlook how literary portrayals function as active mechanisms for awareness-raising, resistance, and sustainable social transformation—an analytical gap that the present study seeks to address. Consequently, literary works have gained renewed importance as powerful vehicles for advancing social progress and structural change (Lomotey, 2024).

Grounded in Feminist Literary Theory, this study aligns with the view that women in literature should be portrayed as fully recognised individuals endowed with agency, participation, and the capacity to shape their own destinies (Singh, 2022). However, in many African societies, women's roles have historically been marginalised in both literature and everyday life (Adewumi, 2024). This contradiction underscores the need for sustained critical inquiry into how African literary texts construct women's identities and contributions. Accordingly, this study analyses the representation of women's roles, identities, and agency in selected African literary works in relation to sustainable development across political, cultural, and economic domains.

To achieve this objective, the study purposively samples two novels and two plays noted for their strong representation of women: Osman Conteh's *Unanswered Cries*, Nawal El Saadawi's *Women at Point Zero*, Guillaume Oyônô Mbia's *Three Suitors: One Husband*, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *This Time Tomorrow*. Examining these texts enables a comparative and cross-cultural exploration of women's experiences and representations within diverse African contexts.

Unanswered Cries, set in Sierra Leone in 2002, foregrounds the struggle against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) while simultaneously offering emotional, moral, and cultural insights into the lived realities of women and girls. *Women at Point Zero*, set in Egypt in 2007, exposes the harsh realities of patriarchal domination and women's struggle for autonomy, emphasising financial independence as a critical pathway to self-determination. The novel further underscores the importance of self-worth, dignity, and honour, even as it reveals the severe limitations placed on women's autonomy in male-dominated societies.

Similarly, Guillaume Oyônô Mbia's *Three Suitors: One Husband*, set in Mvoutess Village in Southern East Cameroon in 1960, critiques traditional marriage practices by foregrounding Juliette's struggle to choose her own husband amidst competing suitors. Finally, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *This Time Tomorrow*, set in Uhuru Market, Kenya, during the 1970s post-independence period, examines social and economic inequalities, with particular attention to women's representation in a rapidly changing society. Through its title and setting, the play reflects the everyday struggles and aspirations of Kenyan women in the aftermath of independence.

Collectively, these texts provide a rich analytical framework for examining how African literature not only represents women in relation to gender equality but also actively advances awareness, resistance, and sustainable development.

2 Literature review

Recent scholars have increasingly explored how African literary works represent women in relation to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5, which promotes gender equality. Adewumi (2024) qualitatively examined two Nigerian novels by female authors, focusing on depictions of womanhood through themes of marriage, motherhood, and agency. The study revealed persistent marginalisation of women and underscored how literature both reflects and

critiques gendered inequalities. Adewumi's analysis links directly to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and indirectly to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), arguing that literary portrayals of women's realities can promote social awareness and transformative change. Although Adewumi links literary depictions to SDGs, the gap lies in the absence of a comprehensive, intersectional, and Pan-African literary analysis.

Similarly, Yussif and Nsowah (2024) investigated how African women writers reconstruct female identity through their literary works. Drawing on feminist theoretical frameworks, the authors demonstrated that texts by writers such as Mariama Ba, Nawal El Saadawi, and Amma Darko challenge patriarchal narratives, reclaim women's voices, and highlight resistance to oppression. Their findings emphasise literature's capacity to advance SDG 5 by fostering equal representation and promoting women's agency in both cultural and intellectual spheres. The study also connects SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by revealing how literary empowerment can inspire broader societal transformation in women's economic participation. Be that as it may, the study lacks literary representations of women's roles across diverse African contexts, with respect to educational, economic, and policy impacts linked to multiple SDGs.

In the same vein, Masha and Mogoboya (2024) analysed the portrayal of female academics in novels by Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie through a Stiwanist (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) lens. Their research found that even educated, professional women in literature encounter entrenched sexism and structural barriers, reflecting real-world inequalities. The study aligns with SDG 5.5, which calls for women's full and effective participation in leadership and decision-making, and SDG 10, which targets social inclusion. By illustrating how professional women navigate and resist systemic constraints, African literature contributes to conversations about equity and empowerment. The existing scholarship insufficiently explores how literary constructions of non-elite women translate into tangible educational, policy, and socio-developmental impacts, thereby limiting understanding of African literature's broader role in advancing inclusive and sustainable development.

Nyairo (2025) extended this discourse by analysing agency and representation of female characters across selected African literary texts. The study categorised women into agentive and non-agentive characters, revealing how some female protagonists actively resist patriarchal dominance while others remain victims of societal control. Nyairo argued that literary constructions of agency mirror broader gender dynamics in African societies and that such portrayals can influence perceptions of women's empowerment. The study directly supports SDG 5's emphasis on eliminating discrimination and ensuring women's equal participation in all areas of life. However, the study ignores comprehensive representations of female characters linked to multiple SDGs.

Hasan (2025) examined the way patriarchal power structures in *Woman at Point Zero* systematically subjugate the protagonist Firdaus physically, psychologically, and socially, thereby exposing the pervasive gendered oppression in patriarchal African and Middle Eastern contexts. It foregrounds how cultural conditioning and internalised trauma shape women's experiences under dominant gender hierarchies. The study reveals a gap in comparative, interdisciplinary research linking such literary representations to broader sustainable development outcomes, including measurable impacts on education, economic participation, legal reforms, and policy discourses aligned with the SDGs.

Niwabiine and Ocan (2025) examined post-colonial representations of women's education in African novels. Their qualitative analysis revealed tensions between traditional expectations and

modern educational aspirations for women. The study connected these literary depictions to SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5, highlighting how education serves as both a tool for empowerment and a site of struggle against patriarchal norms. The authors concluded that literature not only mirrors women's evolving educational roles but also advocates for equitable access and transformative learning.

Together, these empirical studies demonstrate that African literature remains a powerful medium for interrogating and reshaping gender relations. By revealing women's struggles, resistance, and aspirations, these works align with the core objectives of the SDGs, particularly SDG 5, by promoting gender equality, empowerment, and social justice across African societies. Be that as it may, very few of the existing studies explicitly connect these literary representations to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly from a Pan-African and interdisciplinary perspective. In this regard, the present study fills this gap by connecting the representations of women not only to gender inequality but also to practical, educational, and policy-oriented implications for sustainable development. This approach is significant because it positions African literature as an active contributor to development discourse, demonstrating how literary analysis can inform social awareness, educational reform, and evidence-based policymaking across the continent.

3 Theoretical framework

This study was guided by African Feminist Literary Theory, which examines how African women writers and their works represent women's roles, resist oppression, and envision liberation, drawing on concepts and approaches that emerge from African worldviews (Masha & Mogoboya, 2024). The theory was pioneered by a Nigerian scholar called Molara Ogundipe-Leslie in 1994 in her book *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women & Critical Transformations.* She coined the term Stiwanism (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) as an African-centred variant of feminism. In her work, she argues that Western feminism does not always fit African contexts, prompting her to propose a model in which women are included as agents of social transformation in Africa rather than simply opposing men (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994). In this study, the theory provided a critical lens for analysing how women are represented in African literary works, predominantly in terms of power relations, gender dynamics, and cultural narratives that either empower or marginalise female characters.

Although this theory places strong emphasis on social change and inclusiveness, its major weakness is that it is mostly text-based and lacks the structural and policy components needed to connect literary representations to actual development processes. Therefore, in this study, the weakness of the African Feminist Literary Theory is complemented by the Gender and Development (GAD) Theory, developed by Caroline O. N. Moser, a British feminist scholar and development planner, in her 1993 book Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training. In her work, she focuses on socially constructed gender relations and how power dynamics between men and women influence socio-economic development outcomes rather than women alone (Moser, 1993; Kabeer, 1994). GAD offers a useful framework for comprehending how literary portrayals of women either support or contradict current gender roles, processes of empowerment, and sustainable development goals.

4 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study design grounded in close textual analysis and thematic interpretation of selected African literary works. Rather than pursuing a single, uniform notion of realism tied to a specific place or period, the study approaches realism as a comparative literary lens through which women's experiences under patriarchy are examined across diverse African socio-cultural contexts and historical moments. The target population comprised African literary works that portray women's roles within their societies, acknowledging that gender inequality and struggles for sustainable development manifest differently across regions and time.

Purposive sampling was employed not to generalise contemporary African realities, but to enable analytical depth and contrast. The selected texts span different geographical locations and historical periods, allowing the study to trace both continuities and shifts in women's roles, identities, and agency. Including texts from earlier periods, such as the 1970s, was intentional, as it allows for a diachronic understanding of how literary representations of women anticipate, critique, or illuminate ongoing gender challenges that persist despite social change. This approach recognises that literary realism captures structural patterns of inequality that often endure beyond specific temporal settings.

The sample comprised two novels and two plays, selected based on their thematic relevance to women's experiences rather than to confirm predetermined outcomes. To mitigate research bias, the study applied maximum variation sampling, ensuring that the texts differ in genre, region, historical context, and authorial perspective, thereby providing a broad range of representations around a shared thematic concern. The focus on women's roles, identities, and contributions to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was therefore analytical rather than selective, emerging from the texts through systematic interpretation rather than being imposed in advance.

Data were generated through multiple close readings of the primary texts. Passages depicting women's roles, voices, actions, and social positioning were identified, annotated, and organised into a corpus of textual evidence. Thematic analysis was employed as it is a flexible and rigorous method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. The process involved: (i) familiarisation through repeated reading of the texts; (ii) open coding of passages related to women's representation; (iii) theme development guided by the theoretical frameworks; (iv) refinement of themes in relation to the texts and the SDGs; and (v) the development of a final thematic map comprising six major themes. This method enabled analysis to remain grounded in the authors' perspectives while allowing for critical interpretation.

Ethical considerations were observed by ensuring respectful, non-stereotypical interpretations of women's experiences, avoiding cultural reductionism, appropriately acknowledging authorship and sources, and critically engaging with gendered realities without reinforcing harmful narratives. The study aligns with ethical scholarship on gender equality and sustainable development while recognising the contextual limits of literary representation.

5 Findings and discussion

This section presents an analysis of the representation of women's influence in selected African literary works in relation to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Africa, as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of themes across selected African literary works

Theme	Unanswered Cries (Conteh)	Women at Point Zero (El Saadawi)	Three Suitors: One Husband (Oyônô Mbia)	This Time Tomorrow (Ngũgĩ)	Total tallies
Women as agents of gender equality, empowerment, and awareness	5	4	6	4	19
Women as agents of poverty alleviation	4	2	4	5	15
Women as facilitators of health and well-being	5	3	4	3	15
Women as embodiments of gender inequality	4	6	3	4	17
Women as promoters of quality education	5	3	4	5	17
Women as preservers of ethics and cultural practices	4	2	4	5	15

The frequency counts presented in Table 1 represent the number of coded textual instances identified during repeated close readings of each literary work. A coded instance refers to a passage, dialogue, character action, or narrative event that explicitly reflects a thematic category related to women's roles and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The analysis reveals that women in these texts are represented in diverse and often contradictory ways, ranging from active contributors to social, political, and economic development to figures constrained, exploited, or instrumentalised within patriarchal structures. The details of the representations are presented in the following subsections, thematically.

5.1 Women as agents of gender equality, empowerment, and awareness

African literary works frequently portray women as active agents who challenge patriarchal structures, promote gender equality, and raise societal awareness about injustice. Through courage, resistance, and the exposure of oppression, female characters are depicted not only as victims of inequality but also as empowered voices that confront and destabilise dominant gender norms.

In Guillaume Oyônô Mbia's *Three Suitors: One Husband*, Juliette exemplifies women's agency and empowerment through her resistance to patriarchal control over marriage. She rejects the tradition that allows her family to choose her husband and insists on her right to marry the man she loves. Her declaration, "*Father, I shall marry the man I love, not the man you choose for me*" (p. 38), encapsulates her defiance of patriarchal authority and affirms women's autonomy and self-determination within a restrictive cultural context. Juliette's courage challenges inherited norms in Mvoutess Village and raises awareness about women's right to freedom of choice and expression.

Similarly, Nawal El Saadawi's *Women at Point Zero* portrays Firdaus as both a victim of systemic patriarchal violence and a powerful agent of resistance. Subjected to abuse, sexual exploitation, and

economic oppression by male figures, including her uncle, husband, and later Marzouk, Firdaus's lived experience exposes the brutality of male-dominated power structures. Her refusal to submit culminates in the killing of Marzouk, an act that symbolises her ultimate rejection of domination. Her assertion, "*I have triumphed over both life and death because I no longer desire to live, nor do I any longer fear to die*" (p. 110), reflects her profound self-awareness and fearless defiance of oppression. Through Firdaus, the text not only portrays women's struggle for empowerment but also functions as a whistle-blowing narrative that exposes gender-based violence and the commodification of women.

Women's roles as awareness-raisers are further evident in *Unanswered Cries* by Osman Conteh, where female characters such as Makalay and Olabisi reveal the persistence of sexual exploitation and harmful traditional practices. Makalay's sexualisation by Mr Ade and Olabisi's exploitation by Mr Eddy highlight entrenched gender inequality and moral hypocrisy. Olabisi's forced circumcision exposes how Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is justified through tradition, thereby unveiling the cultural mechanisms that sustain violence against women. These portrayals transform women's suffering into acts of social exposure, encouraging readers to question and critique oppressive norms.

These literary representations demonstrate that women's empowerment and awareness-raising are deeply interconnected. By exposing injustice, women promote dialogue, education, and reform. To keep in line with these findings, Neethu and Das (2022) argue that gender-based violence is sustained through oppressive rituals that cause severe physical and psychological harm, while Ashimbuli and Woldemariam (2024) observe that women within patriarchal systems are often exploited and discriminated against in multiple forms. Through whistle-blowing narratives, literature challenges the normalisation of such practices and positions women as catalysts for social change, as also revealed by Braun and Clarke (2021) and Nephawe and Abodunrin (2023).

The urgency of this awareness is underscored by the continued practice of FGM and domestic violence in many African societies, particularly in rural areas, despite legal prohibitions. Even educated women, such as Makalay in *Unanswered Cries*, are sometimes shown defending harmful traditions, as when Oyah asks, "*Mrs Kamara, do you not find it surprising to see a college-educated woman supporting and defending cruelty to a child*?" (p. 81). In *Women at Point Zero*, Firdaus's mother's role in performing the clitoridectomy further reveals how patriarchal values are internalised and transmitted across generations.

Overall, these portrayals show that women in African literature function as agents of gender equality, empowerment, and awareness by resisting oppression and exposing injustice. The findings align with African Feminist Literary Theory, which emphasises women's agency and resistance to patriarchy, and with Gender and Development Theory, which highlights gender equality and empowerment as essential to sustainable social and economic development (Duflo, 2012; Joyia & Gull, 2017; Kabeer, 2020; Suryaningsih & Sayuti, 2023). Through courage and consciousness-raising, women in these texts demand transformative change and contribute meaningfully to sustainable development.

5.2 Women as agents of poverty alleviation

Women are portrayed as promoters of poverty alleviation in selected African literary works through their hard work. The representation of hardworking women highlights their unacknowledged

economic contribution and challenges discourses that render female labour invisible, thereby supporting SDG 1 (No Poverty) in their societies. For instance, in Guillaume Oyônô Mbia's *Three Suitors: One Husband*, women are portrayed as hard workers because they do almost all the work, while their husbands are lazy and blame their wives. A good example is Makrita, the wife of Atangana. She always does all the farm and housework for her family, but her husband blames her for being late coming home from the farm to cook for him.

The same applies to Monica, Ondua's wife. She prepares illegal alcohol commonly known as Arki in Mvoutess Village. She sells in order to sustain her family. Her husband, Ondua, blames her since she refuses to provide him with a bottle of alcohol. In Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *This Time Tomorrow*, Njango is portrayed as a hard worker. She wakes up very early in the morning, prepares soup, and sells it to customers at Uhuru Market. She works very hard in order to earn money and support her family's daily needs. The results suggest that the efforts of hardworking women in literary works raise awareness of poverty alleviation within their families, while also helping other women in African societies work hard in different fields, such as home, markets, farms, factories, and large-scale trade. In fact, they promote women's participation in social, political, and economic development in both rural and urban areas.

These results are supported by Ambepitiya (2016), who argues that hardworking women involved in activities such as entrepreneurship, especially in rural and urban areas, contribute to creating employment opportunities and eliminating poverty. Bergnehr & Henriksson (2021) add that hardworking women promote social, political, and economic improvements by demonstrating struggle in various activities and a high level of resilience, thereby promoting poverty alleviation. This practice of hard work is currently flourishing among most African women. Tanzanian societies show that women are hard workers in various social and economic sectors, such as farming, business, entrepreneurship, and civil service, to mention a few. A few examples from Tanzania include Neema Lugangira, a former member of parliament and digital advocate, Faraja Nyalandu, a social entrepreneur, and Dr Ellen Mkondya Senkolo, a public health leader. They all struggle to earn money and support their families, thereby contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa. These findings align with African Feminist Literary Theory by emphasising the economic contribution, resilience, and agency of women as a means of empowering them in patriarchal society, and with Gender and Development Theory by highlighting the active roles that women play in reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development through their empowerment and economic engagement.

5.3 Women as facilitators of health and well-being

Women are depicted as facilitators of a healthy life. These women in selected African literary works enhance their families' emotional well-being and physical health. In Guillaume Oyônô Mbia's *Three Suitors: One Husband*, women are depicted as the family's caretakers and held accountable for the children's misbehaviour. Consider the way Makrita is held accountable for teaching Juliette such a shameful act. She also places the blame on Juliette, who is thought to have acted inappropriately, saying, "Juliette, haven't I always told you to be obedient to your family?" (p. 18). Literary works such as Osman Conteh's *Unanswered Cries* portray women like Makalay, who takes care of her daughter, Olabisi, offering a platform to demonstrate that nurturing is not a passive act; rather, it is a transformative process to bring better health and well-being to present and future generations.

The findings show that the women's responsibilities often extend beyond national borders, impacting education, healthcare, cultural exchange, social justice, and resilience. Through love, hard work, and effective leadership, they mould the upcoming generation, safeguard vital knowledge, and maintain the structure of communities. Cahn (2000) argues that most women, when performing household activities and childcare, demonstrate more of their powerful identity as mothers, influencing their children. Becker (2000) adds that women have a vital role in child care and caretaking because most of them are mothers, and, beyond doubt, they help bring health and well-being to present and future generations. Ahun *et al* (2024) are in line with the argument that women are regarded as the first teachers of their children, playing a significant role in imparting knowledge, skills and competences that benefit children's well-being from home to society at large. Ashimbuli & Woldemariam (2024) cement that the depiction of women as caretakers of their children is to improve their children's well-being. These findings align with African Feminist Literary Theory by honouring women's nurturing responsibilities as catalysts for social change and empowerment, and with Gender and Development Theory by demonstrating the concrete contributions that women's leadership and caring make to sustainable development, health, and social advancement.

5.4 Women as embodiments of gender inequality

The representation of women as ignorant or denied access to education in African literary works embodies the deep-rooted gender inequality embedded within patriarchal social structures. These portrayals do not merely depict individual shortcomings but symbolise systemic discrimination that restricts girls' access to knowledge and opportunities. By situating women within conditions of exclusion and marginalisation, such texts reveal how gender inequality is reproduced and normalised across generations.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *This Time Tomorrow* illustrates this embodiment of gender inequality through the character of Wanjiro, whose lived experience exposes unequal access to education between boys and girls. Wanjiro's frustration stems from being denied schooling while her brother is sent to town to pursue his education. Her lament, "*Mother, you mock me with your talk of clothes and school. Where is my brother? You sent him to my uncle so that he might attend school. Me, you kept here to work for you*" (p. 35), captures the structural injustice that assigns domestic labour to girls while privileging boys' education. Wanjiro's condition embodies the gendered educational gap characteristic of Kenya's post-independence society, where cultural norms and economic priorities systematically favoured male children.

Such representations expose how women are positioned as second-class citizens and deprived of fundamental rights due to ignorance, misperceptions, and entrenched patriarchal beliefs. Akhter (2020) observes that although women are traditionally expected to sustain family well-being, they are frequently denied access to education, healthcare, and employment, thereby reinforcing gender inequality at both familial and societal levels. Similarly, Fitriani and Muassomah (2021) argue that literary depictions of uneducated women reveal how gender inequality is sustained by treating women as inferior beings rather than as full social actors.

In *Unanswered Cries* by Osman Conteh, the portrayal of uninformed women such as Makalay further embodies gender inequality. Makalay's lack of education and awareness of broader social and legal frameworks reflects how patriarchal traditions limit women's capacity to question harmful practices. Her condition illustrates how ignorance, rather than individual failure, is a product of systemic exclusion from quality education. Through such characters, the text exposes the cyclical

nature of gender inequality, in which women's lack of access to knowledge perpetuates their subordination and the continuation of oppressive customs.

These literary representations embody the realities faced by many girls in African societies, particularly in rural areas, where the denial of education remains prevalent. Girls are often prepared for early marriage and domestic roles, reinforcing traditional values that restrict their intellectual and personal development. By portraying women within these limiting conditions, literary works reveal the structural foundations of gender inequality and invite critical reflection on the necessity of educational inclusion.

Overall, these findings align with African Feminist Literary Theory by demonstrating how patriarchal systems restrict women's access to education and institutionalise inequality. They also resonate with Gender and Development Theory, which underscores that sustainable social transformation and gender equality depend on equal access to education. Through their embodied experiences of exclusion and marginalisation, women in these literary works serve as living representations of gender inequality, making visible the urgent need for structural change.

5.5 Women as promoters of quality education

The selected African literary works foreground women as educated agents and active promoters of quality education and social awareness within their societies. Through their knowledge, critical thinking, and courage, female characters demonstrate how education empowers women to challenge oppressive traditions and advocate for individual and collective rights. These portrayals highlight the transformative role of quality education in fostering social consciousness and progressive change in African communities.

In Guillaume Oyônô Mbia's *Three Suitors: One Husband*, Juliette exemplifies a woman who uses education as a tool for empowerment and awareness-raising. Through her character, the text promotes women's rights to education, freedom of expression, self-determination, and informed decision-making, particularly in matters of marriage. Juliette challenges inherited traditional values that silence women and deny them the right to choose whom to love or marry. Despite facing resistance from her grandfather Abesollo and other family members, she persistently voices her opinions. Abesollo's question, "*Since when do women speak in Mvoutess*?" (p. 15), reflects entrenched patriarchal attitudes that Juliette confronts through her education and awareness. Even her mother, Makrita, reinforces traditional obedience by reprimanding her, saying, "*Juliette, haven't I always told you to be obedient to your family*?" (p. 18).

Juliette's education enables her to articulate her humanity and reject the commodification of women through bride price. Her protest— "*You want me to let them sell me like a goat? After all, I'm a valuable human being*" (p. 18)—underscores how education equips women with the language and confidence to assert their dignity and challenge dehumanising customs. By resisting being treated as property, Juliette becomes a symbol of educated African women who advocate for reform and promote critical awareness within their societies.

Similarly, Osman Conteh's *Unanswered Cries* presents female characters such as Olabisi, Oyah, and Dr Asiatu as promoters of quality education and social awareness. Through their advocacy against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), they educate their communities about its severe physical, psychological, and social consequences, including death. Their efforts highlight the role of informed

women in protecting children's rights and promoting women's autonomy in decision-making. By standing firmly for freedom of expression and informed choices, these characters demonstrate how education catalyses social transformation.

Overall, these findings suggest that representing women as promoters of quality education and awareness encourages the effective use of education as a lifelong tool for resisting ignorance and fostering progressive change. Such portrayals inspire critical thinking, challenge harmful traditions, and stimulate reform movements within African societies. Kim (2024) argues that elevating women's perspectives enriches our understanding of struggles for freedom, equality, and justice, while Bulut (2024) notes that educated women who apply their knowledge effectively become independent and capable of achieving meaningful success. Consequently, these literary representations encourage African societies to prioritise education and awareness, particularly for women.

These findings align with African Feminist Literary Theory, which emphasises the portrayal of intelligent, courageous women as agents of empowerment and social change. They also resonate with Gender and Development Theory, which recognises women's education and awareness as central to sustainable development, gender equality, and societal advancement.

5.6 Women as preservers of ethics and acceptable cultural practices

The women represented in African literary works serve as people who foster family values and maintain cultural standards such as language, rituals, folklore, dress, food, and religion, thereby preserving social materials and the continuity of their societies. In Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's play *This Time Tomorrow*, for example, Njango is portrayed as a woman who maintains societal values and provides moral guidance to her daughter Wanjiro. Although Wanjiro has genuine love for Asinjo, Njango denies her daughter, Wanjiro, the right to marry Asinjo, because he comes from another tribe. She is afraid that a man from another tribe cannot take care of her daughter. She is believed to be a tribalist who maintains Kenyan traditions. That is why she is against Wanjiro. She says Wanjiro, '*With that man? A man from another tribe?"* (p. 55). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o portrays strong beliefs in African traditions. Osman Conteh's *Unanswered Cries* also reveals women to be traditionalists, as they believe in superstitions such as bondo gods and spirits. For example, Makalay insists on saying that "*When a circumcised woman reveals to a gborka the secrets of gods, something terrible will happen to her"* (p. 85). This statement means it is prohibited for a circumcised woman to reveal the secrets of their gods to a gborka (uncircumcised woman) unless she will get into trouble. Conteh, through women, portrays strong beliefs in African traditions, even when those traditions have less value to people.

The results show that through preserving ethical behaviour, building communal cohesion, embodying and upholding cultural values, women are represented as preservers of ethics and acceptable cultural practices that support sustainable development goals in Africa. The findings also demonstrate their part in maintaining moral principles and preserving constructive cultural customs. Mahmud (2019) argues that the depiction of female characters meant to reveal cultural values plays a vital role in preserving ethics and cultural practices. Liailia Ihsanovna *et al*. (2023) argue that literary works have a strong chance of preserving the national identity of a given society. These findings align with African Feminist Literary Theory by acknowledging women in their communities as stewards of moral integrity and cultural authenticity, and with Gender and

Development Theory by demonstrating how women's ethical leadership and the upholding of strong cultural values support sustainable social development.

6 Limitations

This study has several acknowledged limitations. First, the selected literary texts span different historical periods, with some dating back to the 1970s; as such, they do not directly reflect all contemporary developments in women's roles and gender relations. However, this temporal range was intentional, as it allows the study to trace enduring structural patterns of gender inequality that continue to inform the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) today, rather than offering a snapshot of current conditions alone.

Second, the use of purposive sampling means that the selected texts are not representative of African literature as a whole. The focus on works that foreground women's experiences and gendered power relations may limit generalisability. Nonetheless, this approach was adopted to enable in-depth, comparative analysis across diverse regions, genres, and contexts, thereby prioritising analytical insight over statistical representation.

Finally, the study relies on qualitative close reading and thematic interpretation, which inevitably involve the researcher's judgment. While this may limit reproducibility when compared to computer-assisted or AI-supported textual analysis, the methodology remains appropriate for literary inquiry, as it allows for contextual sensitivity, theoretical engagement, and nuanced interpretation. The findings should therefore be understood as interpretive rather than exhaustive, offering grounded insights into literary representations rather than definitive empirical claims.

7 Conclusion

The analysis of women in selected African literary works does not show bias. Women were analysed both positively and negatively, but they all contribute to achieving sustainable development goals in Africa by either adopting or avoiding certain behaviours or practices by African societies. Hence, the representation of women in selected African literary works demonstrates their contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals in Africa in several ways. These include promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, reducing poverty, enhancing health and well-being, exposing gender-based violence, revealing gender inequality, and advocating for reforms in educational systems, promoting quality education and awareness, and preserving ethics and acceptable cultural practices. These findings revealed that women are represented as catalysts of societal transformation, combining cultural insights with emotional resonance. Their representation strives to make meaningful contributions to sustainable development goals, encompassing economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection, in a rapidly evolving world. Therefore, African literary works play a significant role in recognising that women contribute to socio-economic development in their societies, countries, and worldwide. Through this study, the African governments are recommended to establish laws that can help different societies to abandon the outdated traditional values, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). FGM causes severe pain to girls during childbirth and sexual intercourse, as well as the potential risk of death. In addition, most African women are advised to be hard workers, just as Makrita, Monica, and Njango, to support and sustain their families, because women are caretakers and play a significant role in their families and society as a whole. Additionally, the study recommends that African societies have to struggle to eradicate the outdated traditional values which deny women the right to education. The modern

world is highly influenced by science and technology; thus, it needs both men and women to pursue education to fight for their rights and benefit themselves, their families, and society at large. Moreover, further studies are recommended to explore how women are represented in oral literature, such as folktales, songs, and proverbs, which continue to shape societal values and development narratives.

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Strategic Code-Switching in Digital Marketing: The Functions of Facebook Money-Lending Advertisements in Tanzania

[1]Nicholaus Ngulo,
nickngulo@gmail.com

[2]Ancyfrida Prosper
The Open University of Tanzania
ancypro@gmail.com

[3]Elizabeth Kyara
The Open University of Tanzania
elizabeth.kyara@out.ac.tz

Abstract

While previous studies have explored code-switching in social, educational, and user-generated online contexts, little attention has been given to its strategic use in digital advertising, particularly within Tanzania's financial sector. In this regard, this study investigated the sociolinguistic features of code-switching in Facebook money-lending advertisements in Tanzania, focusing on the types, influencing factors, and communicative functions of language alternation between Kiswahili and English. Guided by Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame model and the Pragmatic-Functional Perspective, the study employed an interpretivist approach, using netnography and thematic analysis, to examine 20 Facebook adverts and 100 user comments collected between 2023 and 2025. The study finds that code-switching in Tanzanian Facebook money-lending advertisements performs multiple interrelated functions that enhance communication effectiveness. Persuasively, English is often used in slogans and taglines to signal professionalism, credibility, and global standards, while Kiswahili maintains cultural accessibility. It also serves as an emphatic and attention-grabbing device by highlighting key actions and services, making messages more engaging in fast-paced digital contexts. Additionally, code-switching fulfils relational, identity, informative, and instructional functions by bridging local and urban identities, guiding users through digital processes, and building trust through clarity, modernity, and audience alignment. In conclusion, code-switching in Tanzanian Facebook money-lending advertisements functions as a strategic resource that combines Kiswahili's cultural appeal with English's professionalism to enhance persuasion and trust. Marketers should therefore use it purposefully, supported by training in Business Linguistics and Sociolinguistics and further research on audience perceptions and measurable impacts. More broadly, policymakers, educators, and consumers should recognise code-switching as a functional tool in effective and inclusive digital financial communication. The study is essential in business as it explores strategic language use in online financial marketing and its implications for marketers, policy, education, and consumer understanding.

Keywords: Code-switching, digital marketing in Tanzania, Facebook, language of money lending

1 Introduction

Language plays a central role in human communication by enabling the expression of ideas, emotions, and information (Kamariah & Ambalegin, 2019). In multilingual societies, speakers often draw on more than one language within a single interaction, a practice known as *code-switching*. Code-switching refers to the alternation between two or more languages within the same discourse to enhance clarity, express identity, or achieve communicative goals (Wardhaugh, 1992). This means that code-switching is when a speaker changes from one language to another while speaking or writing in the same conversation or text.

Code-switching is not limited to face-to-face interaction. It has become increasingly visible in digital and online communication. Studies indicate that multilingual users frequently engage in code-switching on social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, TikTok and Instagram (Ismail & Abdullah, 2023; Hayati & Hum, 2024). In these online spaces, code-switching appears in various structural forms, including tag-switching, intra-sentential switching, inter-sentential switching, and intra-word switching (Daulay *et al*., 2024). These forms reflect strategic linguistic choices made to accommodate audiences, align meanings, and enhance message effectiveness in multilingual environments.

Previous studies have extensively examined code-switching in social, educational, political, health and technological contexts, particularly within user-generated social media content (Septiani, Petrus & Yunus, 2018). Studies such as Alamri (2022), Almoaily (2023), Al-Qaysi and Al-Emran (2017), Baidya (2021), Das and Gambäck (2013), and Daulay *et al*. (2024) have focused on the types, motivations, and functions of code-switching in online discourse. These studies highlight factors such as topic change, lexical gaps, social identity, prestige, emphasis, and audience engagement as key motivations for code-switching (Kamariah & Ambalegin, 2019; Meliani *et al*., 2021). Together, these scholars demonstrate that code-switching in digital platforms is a strategic communicative resource rather than a linguistic deficiency, underscoring its role in shaping meaning, interaction, and identity in online discourse.

However, despite this growing body of literature, existing studies primarily concentrate on posts, captions, conversations, and educational contexts, paying limited attention to digital advertising as a strategic communicative domain. In particular, there is a notable lack of research examining how code-switching is deliberately employed as a marketing strategy in financial advertising, especially within the Tanzanian context. This gap is significant given that advertising language is purposefully designed to persuade, build trust, and influence consumer behaviour. This study addresses this gap by focusing on Facebook money-lending advertisements in Tanzania. Facebook is selected for its large user base and prominence as a digital marketing platform in the country, while money-lending advertisements are chosen because they rely heavily on persuasive language to attract and influence potential clients in the financial sector (Situmorang & Sinaga, 2023). In a multilingual society like Tanzania, where English and Kiswahili coexist, code-switching becomes a crucial linguistic resource for advertisers seeking to reach diverse audiences effectively.

Accordingly, the study analysed the types of code-switching, the sociolinguistic factors influencing their use, and the communicative functions they serve in Facebook money-lending advertisements in Tanzania. By examining code-switching within this specific digital advertising context, the study aims to provide empirical evidence on how language choice operates as a strategic tool in online financial marketing. Hence, the findings of this study are expected to be significant in several ways.

Practically, they offer insights for digital marketers on effective language strategies in multilingual advertising. Socially, the study helps consumers to understand better persuasive linguistic techniques used in online financial advertisements. Academically, the study contributes to Sociolinguistics and Business Linguistics by extending code-switching research into underexplored digital advertising contexts within Tanzania.

2 Literature review

This section reviews relevant literature to establish the theoretical and empirical foundation of the research. It critically examines previous studies to identify research gaps and justify the need for the present study. To begin with, code-switching is broadly defined as alternating between languages within the same conversation or discourse (Yao, 2011). Generally, code-switching is a universal phenomenon reflecting the simultaneous use of two languages, particularly in bilingual communities. It involves mixing words, phrases, and sentences from different grammatical systems within a single interaction. It allows second-language learners to incorporate elements of their mother tongue to facilitate communication (Myers-Scotton, 1993). This study examines code-switching in online interactions, highlighting that it also occurs on social media platforms, not just in face-to-face communication.

On the contrary, code-mixing is defined as the mixing of dissimilar linguistic elements from different grammatical systems within a single sentence (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2004). Some scholars use the term broadly to describe related phenomena such as borrowing, transfer, or even code-switching (McLaughlin, 1984). Beardsmore (1991), however, offers a more nuanced view by treating code-mixing as a natural and systematic outcome of bilingual competence rather than as linguistic confusion. He argues that bilingual speakers possess an integrated linguistic repertoire, which allows them to draw elements from two or more languages within the same utterance in a rule-governed manner. Beardsmore adds that code-mixing reflects linguistic creativity and communicative efficiency, especially in multilingual societies, and should therefore be understood as a normal feature of bilingual speech rather than a deviation from monolingual norms.

On the other hand, a digital money-lending platform refers to a channel through which the financial service provider offers its digital products, such as loans or other financial services, typically through online or mobile platforms, and digital loan services means services or arrangements where money is lent, borrowed or repaid through a digital channel (BoT, 2024: 2). In this study, it refers explicitly to financial institutions that provide money-lending services through social media platforms, allowing users to access, apply for, and repay loans via digital content such as text, images, audio, and video.

Moreover, a social media platform and application that enables users to share information, including photos, videos, and experiences, for social networking. It is owned by Meta (a US-based tech company headquartered in Menlo Park, California, known for owning Facebook, Instagram, Threads, and WhatsApp), which allows users to connect, expand their communities, and engage in both personal and professional interactions (Situmorang & Sinaga, 2023, p. 77). For this study, Facebook is operationally defined as the platform through which money-lending institutions post advertisements, interact with potential clients, and engage audiences using posts, videos, and comments relevant to financial services.

Studies by Nordin (2023), Das & Gambäck (2013), and Al-Qaysi & Al-Emran (2017) demonstrate a strong connection between code-switching and broader phenomena such as bilingualism, multilingualism, and globalisation. Nordin (2023) conducted a content analysis on social media posts from bilingual users, showing that online communication often mirrors habitual oral code-switching patterns. Similarly, Das & Gambäck (2013) analysed digital discourse in English and Arabic forums, highlighting hybrid forms like "addaing" and "jugading," which blur traditional language boundaries. Al-Qaysi & Al-Emran (2017) used surveys and online text samples to show that code-switching functions as a linguistic and cultural bridge, enabling speakers to express multifaceted identities. These studies indicate that globalisation normalises linguistic hybridity in digital communication, affecting language policy, education, and content creation.

Other research emphasises the educational potential of code-switching, particularly in EFL contexts. Mainake (2021) used experimental designs to test vocabulary retention among learners exposed to advertisements containing code-switching, while Kamariah & Ambalegin (2019) employed classroom observations to highlight the pedagogical relevance of sociolinguistic analysis. Situmorang & Sinaga (2023) and Devikasari & Markhamah (2023) applied mixed-method approaches on social media interactions, showing that code-switching facilitates comprehension, expression, and language mastery in multilingual learners.

While these studies provide valuable insights into code-switching in digital and educational contexts, they primarily focus on general user-generated content, language learning, or cross-cultural communication. What remains underexplored is the strategic use of code-switching in digital advertising, particularly in Tanzanian Facebook money-lending advertisements. This gap is important academically, for guiding marketers, and for understanding how Tanzanian consumers engage with financial advertising. Therefore, this study focuses on identifying the types, sociolinguistic factors, and functions of code-switching in this advertising context.

The studies by Karapetjana & Rozina (2022), Alamri (2022), and Almoaily (2023) highlight regional variations and the sociocultural functions of code-switching. For example, in Latvia, English increasingly replaces Russian due to geopolitical changes, while in Saudi Arabia and Oman, Arabic-English switching dominates as a result of globalisation and educational shifts. The studies employed content analysis of social media posts and influencer communications to explore patterns and motivations behind language choices. Findings indicate that code-switching is context-dependent, reflecting factors such as social class, modernity, accessibility, and marketing appeal (Almoaily, 2023). Consequently, any interpretation of digital code-switching must account for the historical, cultural, and technological environment of the speech community. These studies inform the present research by demonstrating that code-switching is socially and contextually driven. However, they primarily focus on broad regional trends rather than on targeted advertising in Tanzania, leaving this underexplored.

Meanwhile, empirical research on Tanzanian youth shows a dynamic interplay between Kiswahili, English, and urban vernaculars in digital communication, advertising, and SMS texting, reflecting both local identities and global influences. Drawing on evidence from Dzahene-Quarshie & Sosoo (2023), Malangwa (2019), and Dzahene-Quarshie (2016), these studies collectively demonstrate that code-switching among Tanzanian youth is a creative and adaptive practice through which speakers negotiate modernity, social belonging, and communicative efficiency. Telecom and digital advertisements often combine Standard Kiswahili, English, and street slang to mirror urban linguistic realities. At the same time, the increasing integration of English lexical, morphological,

and structural features into Kiswahili discourse points to evolving hybrid norms shaped by digital interaction. Although these studies establish youth as key drivers of linguistic innovation in Tanzania's digital space, they focus mainly on informal communication and general advertising; consequently, they offer limited insight into how similar code-switching strategies operate in financial advertising, where language choice is closely tied to persuasion, credibility, and consumer trust, a gap addressed by the present study through its focus on Facebook money-lending advertisements.

Existing literature establishes that code-switching in digital environments is socially motivated, context-sensitive, and functionally rich. However, there is a clear gap in empirical research on how code-switching operates strategically in Tanzanian Facebook money-lending advertisements, particularly with respect to persuasive, relational, emphatic, and instructional functions. This study addresses this gap by analysing the types, sociolinguistic factors, and communicative functions of code-switching in digital financial advertising, thereby extending sociolinguistic inquiry into an economically and socially consequential domain.

3 Theoretical framework

This study is guided by two theories: Myers-Scotton's Model of Code-Switching and the Pragmatic-Functional Perspective, as follows:

3.1 Myers-Scotton's Model of Code-Switching

Myers-Scotton's Model of Code-Switching, also known as the Matrix Language Frame (MLF) model, introduced in 1993, provides a framework for analysing intra-sentential code-switching by distinguishing the matrix language, which supplies grammatical structure, from the embedded language, which contributes semantic and pragmatic meaning (Myers-Scotton & Jake, 2009). Although the model is primarily structural and gives limited attention to pragmatic motivation, it was adopted in this study because it enables systematic identification of code-switching types and their sociolinguistic implications, which aligns with the first two research objectives. Applied to Facebook money-lending advertisements, the MLF model explains how Kiswahili and English interact to reflect identity, social roles, and persuasive intent, offering an integrated approach suitable for analysing language use in digital marketing contexts.

3.2 The Pragmatic-Functional Perspective

The Pragmatic-Functional Perspective, developed by Gumperz (1982) and further refined by Auer (1998), views language as a resource for achieving communicative goals in real social contexts, focusing on what language does rather than on form alone. Meaning is shaped by context, intention, and interaction, with linguistic choices, such as code-switching, serving functions like persuasion, emphasis, identity construction, and relationship management. Gumperz conceptualised code-switching as a meaningful communicative resource influenced by social relationships, roles, audience, and topic, while Auer proposed a continuum of language alternation ranging from code-switching to language mixing and fused lects.

The perspective is relevant to the findings because it explains code-switching in Tanzanian Facebook money-lending advertisements as a strategic communicative resource rather than a random practice. The study shows that advertisers alternate between Kiswahili and English to

achieve pragmatic goals such as persuasion, emphasis, identity construction, and instruction, reflecting language use shaped by context, audience, and intention (Gumperz, 1982). English signals professionalism and credibility, while Kiswahili ensures cultural accessibility and trust, and Auer's (1998) continuum accounts for the varying forms of language alternation used to enhance audience engagement.

4 Methodology

This study adopted an interpretivist philosophy to understand the subjective meanings individuals attached to their experiences (Morgan, 2020). Unlike positivism, which focused on measurable facts, interpretivism valued the depth of human perspectives and cultural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This philosophical stance supported the use of netnography to explore interactions in Facebook money-lending advertisements and thematic analysis to identify linguistic patterns and sociolinguistic factors that influenced code-switching. The research followed a descriptive design, which provided a detailed explanation of how code-switching operated within digital financial marketing. The design integrated content and netnographic analyses to examine language use, user reactions, and sociocultural meanings in Tanzanian Facebook adverts from 2023 to 2025.

The study involved 20 Tanzanian Facebook money-lending advertisements posted between 2023 and 2025 and 100 associated user comments. Convenience sampling was employed to select advertisements and comments that were readily accessible during data collection. This sampling technique was suitable for digital ethnographic research, as Facebook content is continuously produced and algorithmically curated, and thus, lacks a complete sampling frame. Data were collected from recorded videos, short clips (reels), live streams, and screenshots of user comments. Then, the data were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2021) six steps: familiarisation with the data, initial coding, grouping codes into themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report. Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of online videos and user comments, dependability through a transparent audit trail of analytic procedures, and confirmability through peer review to minimise researcher bias and ensure findings were grounded in the data. Ethical standards were upheld by anonymising identifiable information, using only publicly accessible online videos and user comments, and obtaining institutional ethical clearance from the relevant academic authorities before data collection.

5 Findings and discussion

This section analyses the communicative functions of code-switching in Tanzanian Facebook money-lending advertisements, revealing that alternation between Kiswahili and English serves persuasive, emphatic, identity-expressive and audience-engaging purposes. Advertisers strategically deploy both languages to enhance clarity, capture attention, and establish trust with a linguistically diverse audience, demonstrating deliberate and context-sensitive use of bilingual communication.

5.1 Persuasive function

The analysis of twenty Tanzanian Facebook money-lending advertisements shows that code-switching serves as a deliberate persuasive strategy. This consistent pattern was observed across 12 out of 20(60%) adverts, indicating a systematic rather than incidental practice. English appeared at the end as slogans or taglines, formalising the message and enhancing its professional appeal. The

alternation between Kiswahili and English boosts credibility by aligning the product with global business standards while maintaining cultural accessibility, demonstrating that these conclusions are grounded in systematic observation of the corpus rather than intuition. Table 1 presents some of the utterances with code-switching that illustrate the persuasive function in the analysed advertisements.

Table 1: Instances of code-switching demonstrating the persuasive function

Advertising Company	Utterance	Switched phrase/sentence
Platinum Credit	"… Au kama unahitaji kuagiza gari, mteja unalipia asilimia therathini tu ya thamani ya gari. Tunakulipia mpaka asilimia sabini ya thamani ya gari. Karibu Platnum Credit kwa huduma bora na huduma nzuri. *Platinum Credit, there when you need us*."	*platinum credit, there when you need us*
SoftFinance	"SoftFinance, Karibu! Tunakujali mteja wetu. timiza ndoto zako, njoo upate mkopo. ni haraka, ni nafuu. Tupigie *chap.* SoftFinance, *today/tomorrow/together.*"	*chap, today, tomorrow, together*
BayPort	*Guys*, naitwa Kajala Masanja, ni balozi wako kutoka BAYPORT. BAYPORT saivi tuna huduma mpya kabisa inaitwa *Chat Chap*. Yaani wewe una-*chat* tu WhatsApp unajipatia mkopo wako *faster faster*. Unasubiri nini wewe mtumishi wa umma? Tuma meseji WhatsApp iwe *Chat Chap*, *faster* unapata mkopo wako. BAYPORT tupo kwa ajili yako.	*guys chat chap whatsapp faster faster message*

Source: Field data (2025)

As shown in Table 1, advertisers strategically blend Kiswahili, which fosters familiarity and cultural connection, with English expressions that convey modernity, efficiency, and credibility. For example, Platinum Credit's slogan "there when you need us" signals reliability, SoftFinance's "today, tomorrow, together" suggests long-term partnership, and BayPort's informal English items like "guys," "chat chap," and "faster faster" highlight speed and convenience, appealing to urban, digitally savvy audiences. In this way, English enhances emphasis, recall, and engagement, while Kiswahili ensures accessibility, allowing financial services to appear both locally rooted and globally aligned, a reflection of the widespread Kiswahili–English mixing in Tanzanian urban and digital communication, especially among younger speakers.

5.2 Emphatic and attention-grabbing function

The data indicate that in Tanzanian Facebook money-lending advertisements, code-switching functions as a deliberate, emphatic and attention-grabbing strategy. Out of the twenty adverts analysed, 10 (50%) included English terms such as "faster faster," "chat chap," "Yees!" and "change your life" to highlight key services and actions. These lexical switches typically appeared at the end of sentences or as call-to-action phrases, with a total of 18 instances across all adverts, emphasising critical information, sustaining audience interest, and maintaining a dynamic tone. Table 2 presents the distribution of cases across adverts, showing sources and end-position frequency, highlighting the strategic use of code-switching for emphatic and attention-grabbing purposes in fast-paced digital environments.

Table 2: Code-switching illustrating emphatic and attention-grabbing function

Advertising Company	Utterance	Switched phrase/sentence
PesaX	"…*Yees! Call me* DC Mwijaku. Leo nakupa *good news*, wanaita PesaX. Hii ni *application* ambayo inakupa nafasi ya wewe Mtanzania kuweza kukopa hadi milioni. Yaani unachotaka wewe tunakukopesha…"	*Yees!* *good news,*
Bayport	"…una-chat tu WhatsApp unajipatia mkopo wako faster faster… Tuma *message* WhatsApp iwe *chat chap*, *faster faster* unapata mkopo wako."	*chat chap* *faster faster*
FX Pesa	"FX Pesa, Furahia 30% Zaidi. Bonus ya ziada kwa deposit ya kwanza."	*Bonus*
Imarisha Maisha	"…Karibu sana. Ukija hapa Mbeya Mjini unaweza ukajipatia mkopo wako na maisha yakawa safi kabisa, burudani. Imarisha Maisha, *change your life*."	*change your life*

Source: Field data (2025)

As illustrated in Table 2, PesaX employs the exclamatory Yees! alongside the evaluative phrase "good news" to immediately capture the audience's attention and create a sense of excitement and anticipation, signalling positive outcomes associated with their services. Similarly, Bayport strategically repeats phrases such as "faster faster" and "chat chap" to underscore speed, ease of use, and convenience, qualities highly valued in digital lending platforms, particularly among urban, tech-savvy users. FX Pesa highlights material incentives through the term "bonus," appealing directly to clients' desire for tangible financial benefits. Meanwhile, Imarisha Maisha's tagline "change your life" functions as a motivational and aspirational message, reinforcing the notion that engaging with their service can lead to personal transformation and improved living standards. Across these examples, English is deployed selectively to heighten emphasis, create persuasive appeal, and draw attention to critical aspects of the service. At the same time, Kiswahili preserves narrative flow, cultural resonance, and accessibility, ensuring that messages remain relatable and comprehensible to the broader Tanzanian audience.

5.3 Relational and identity functions

The analysis of twenty Tanzanian Facebook money-lending advertisements indicates that code-switching predominantly serves relational and identity functions, appearing in 12 adverts (60%) within the dataset. English is frequently placed in final positions to emphasise key messages, while Kiswahili maintains cultural familiarity, reflecting a deliberate strategy to engage both urban, English-proficient audiences and local Kiswahili-speaking consumers. This pattern illustrates how advertisers use bilingual language to convey modernity, aspiration and social identity, effectively bridging diverse audience segments while reinforcing brand relatability and trust. Table 3 presents examples of code-switching that illustrate the relational and identity functions in the analysed advertisements.

Table 3: Code-switching illustrating relational and identity functions

Advertising Company	Utterance	Switched phrase/sentence
Platinum Credit	"Platinum Credit, *There When You Need Us*."	*There When You Need Us*
Imarisha Maisha	"Imarisha Maisha, *Change your Life*."	*Change your Life*
SoftFinance	"Karibu! Tunakujali mteja wetu. Timiza ndoto zako, njoo upate mkopo. Ni haraka, ni nafuu. Tupigie chap. SoftFinance, *Today, Tomorrow, Together*."	*Today, Tomorrow, Together*
Yas (Tigo)	"Endelea kuunganishwa kupitia Tigo Niwezeshe… *Live it. Love it*."	*Live it. Love it.*
Bayport	"*Guys,* naitwa Kajala Masanja, ni balozi wako kutoka BAYPORT… BAYPORT tupo kwa ajili yako."	*guys*

Source: Field data (2025)

As illustrated in Table 3, Tanzanian advertisers strategically use Kiswahili–English code-switching to perform relational and identity functions in advertising discourse. English phrases such as "There When You Need Us," "Change your Life," "Today, Tomorrow, Together," and "Live it. Love it." are employed to signal modernity, aspiration, and alignment with globalised lifestyles, while Kiswahili grounds the message in familiar socio-cultural realities. For instance, Platinum Credit's "There When You Need Us" constructs an image of reliability and emotional support, fostering trust and companionship, whereas Imarisha Maisha's "Change your life" appeals to aspirations for upward mobility and personal transformation, particularly among urban and semi-urban audiences. Similarly, SoftFinance's slogan "Today, Tomorrow, Together" conveys continuity and long-term partnership, reinforcing relational commitment, while Yas (Tigo)'s "Live it. Love it." promotes an experiential, youthful brand identity. Bayport's use of the informal English address "guys" alongside Kiswahili narration further enhances closeness and relatability. Overall, these examples demonstrate that code-switching functions as a deliberate pragmatic strategy through which advertisers balance global identity construction with local audience connection, strengthening both brand image and consumer engagement.

5.4 Informative and instructional function

Among the twenty Tanzanian Facebook money-lending adverts analysed, 18 (90%) displayed code-switching fulfilling an informative and instructional function. In these adverts, English directives such as "save number", "download app", "apply now" and "terms and conditions apply" frequently appeared, particularly in the final position, with a total of 12 end-position occurrences across the sample. This pattern demonstrates how advertisers strategically guide users through digital processes, enhance comprehension, and build confidence in using online financial services. Table 4 lists the adverts and the thematic instances of informative and instructional function, providing a clear summary of how this theme manifested in the corpus.

Table 4: Code-switching illustrating informative and instructional functions

Advertising Company	Utterance	Switched phrase/sentence
PesaX	"…Yaani unachotaka wewe tunakukopesha. Alafu uzuri hauhitajiki kuja ofisini. Unachotakiwa kufanya, *download application* ya PesaX, baada ya hapo kopa, alafu anza kulipa pole pole…"	*Download application*
Cash X	"Ingia Google Play Store na u-*download* Cash X."	*u-download*
Topapu	"Mkopo wa TOPAPU kwa riba nafuu na haraka. *Apply now.*"	*apply now*
Ultimate Finance	*Chat* nasi kupitia WhatsApp… *Save number (0677…) Scan QR code* kusajili namba yetu."	*chat, save number scan qr code*

Source: Field data (2025)

As illustrated in Table 4, code-switching in these advertisements primarily serves informative and instructional functions by delivering clear, step-by-step guidance on how customers can access financial services. For instance, PesaX employs the English directive "download application" to specify a concrete procedural action within an otherwise Kiswahili explanation, ensuring clarity in a digital context. Similarly, Cash X's instruction to "u-download Cash X" directly guides users to the Google Play Store, reducing ambiguity about the access point. TOPAPU's succinct command "apply now" operates as an immediate call to action, encouraging prompt engagement with the service. Ultimate Finance extends this instructional role through multiple English imperatives, "chat," "save number," and "scan QR code", which collectively guide customers across different communication and registration channels. Generally, the strategic insertion of English instructional terms enhances precision, efficiency, and ease of use, particularly for technology-mediated services where such terminology is widely standardised and easily recognised.

6 Discussion

First, the findings demonstrate that code-switching in Tanzanian Facebook money-lending advertisements primarily serves a persuasive function, operating as a deliberate and systematic marketing strategy rather than an incidental linguistic choice. Analysis shows that 12 out of 20 advertisements (60%) employ Kiswahili–English alternation to shape audience attitudes, enhance brand appeal, and motivate action, particularly through the strategic placement of English slogans or taglines that formalise messages, increase memorability, and project professionalism. Consistent with Nordin (2023) and Al-Qaysi and Al-Emran (2017), this practice reflects habitual bilingualism while signalling modernity, credibility, and globalised identities. In the Tanzanian context, Kiswahili ensures cultural accessibility and emotional resonance, whereas English indexes institutional legitimacy and global business standards, a balance that strengthens persuasive impact and mirrors urban digital communication norms among younger speakers (Dzahene-Quarshie & Sosoo, 2023). The findings also align with Myers-Scotton's MLF model and the Pragmatic-Functional Perspective (Gumperz, 1982; Auer, 1998), with Kiswahili providing structural continuity and English adding emphasis and persuasive force, confirming that code-switching functions strategically at linguistic, social, and ideological levels in digital financial marketing.

Second, code-switching in Tanzanian Facebook money-lending advertisements functions as a purposeful, emphatic and attention-grabbing strategy, with English strategically deployed to foreground speed, incentives, and key actions. At the same time, Kiswahili maintains cultural relevance, clarity, and broad accessibility. These switches are contextually motivated rather than random, targeting digitally literate audiences who associate English with urgency, innovation, and promotional value (Alamri, 2022), while Kiswahili sustains narrative flow and audience inclusivity. The frequent placement of English elements in salient positions, especially at the end of utterances, heightens perceptual prominence and ensures that critical calls to action are easily noticed in fast-scrolling social media environments, thereby maximising persuasive impact. This pattern aligns with Myers-Scotton's MLF model and the Pragmatic-Functional Perspective, with Kiswahili functioning as the matrix language and English as the embedded language used for emphasis and engagement, reflecting Gumperz's (1982) and Auer's (1998) view of code-switching as a systematic, audience-driven resource for attention management, identity construction, and persuasive digital marketing.

Third, the findings show that code-switching in Tanzanian Facebook money-lending advertisements functions as a strategic emphatic and attention-grabbing device, with 50% of the analysed adverts incorporating English expressions to foreground key services, speed, and incentives. These switches, often realised as exclamations or call-to-action phrases, heighten emphasis, sustain audience interest, and create a dynamic promotional tone, with English enhancing urgency and persuasion. At the same time, Kiswahili maintains accessibility and cultural resonance. Situated within the Tanzanian sociolinguistic context, where Kiswahili–English bilingualism indexes urban identity and socioeconomic aspiration (Malangwa, 2019), this practice bridges local belonging and global orientation, reinforcing relational and identity alignment between brands and audiences, consistent with Nordin (2023). The pattern aligns with Myers-Scotton's MLF model and the Pragmatic-Functional Perspective, with Kiswahili operating as the matrix language and English as the embedded language that signals modernity, aspiration, and shared values, reflecting Gumperz's (1982) and Auer's (1998) view of code-switching as a systematic, audience-driven resource for identity construction, symbolic capital, and engagement in digital marketing.

Fourth, the findings show that code-switching in Tanzanian Facebook money-lending advertisements primarily serves an informative and instructional function, with 90% of adverts using English directives, often sentence-final, to guide users through digital procedures such as downloading apps, applying for loans, or scanning QR codes. Kiswahili provides narrative coherence and accessibility, while English ensures clarity, efficiency, and professionalism, reflecting users' digital literacy and familiarity with English-dominated interfaces. This pattern, supported by 18 of 20 adverts, aligns with Das and Gambäck (2013) and Karapetjana & Rozina (2022), showing that bilingual alternation bridges functional gaps and signals technological competence. According to Myers-Scotton's MLF model, Kiswahili serves as the matrix language and English as the embedded language that delivers procedural commands, while pragmatic-functional analysis (Gumperz, 1982; Auer, 1998) shows that these audience-driven switches enhance engagement, clarity, and credibility.

7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that code-switching in Tanzanian Facebook money-lending advertisements is neither random nor merely stylistic, but a deliberate, platform-specific marketing strategy shaped by the immediacy of digital lending, audience linguistic hybridity, and the need to

signal speed, trust, and institutional legitimacy in a competitive online financial space. Unlike earlier studies that interpret advertising code-switching mainly as an identity or prestige marker, the findings reveal a clear functional differentiation in which English is selectively used for action-oriented, procedural, and credibility-building purposes. At the same time, Kiswahili anchors emotional appeal, accessibility, and local relevance. This systematic alignment of language choice with communicative intent and audience digital literacy positions code-switching as a structured communicative resource in multilingual digital marketing, contributing empirically by documenting an underexplored digital financial genre and theoretically by refining understandings of code-switching in contemporary, technology-driven economic interactions. Based on the findings, marketers and advertisers are encouraged to use code-switching purposefully by balancing English for professionalism with Kiswahili for cultural connection to enhance clarity, trust and persuasion in digital advertisements. Marketing programmes should incorporate Business Linguistics and Sociolinguistics to support effective bilingual messaging. Meanwhile, future research should examine audience perceptions and quantitatively assess the impact of code-switching across platforms and industries. Policy makers and educators should recognise the value of code-switching in language frameworks and curricula, and consumers should develop critical awareness of how bilingual language use shapes advertising and financial decisions.

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Semantic Analysis of the Ndali Place Names: A Case of Bundali Division of Ileje District, Tanzania

[1]Raytoni Brauni Songa
Mbeya University of Science and Technology
songaray1999@gmail.com

[2]Chrispina Alphonce
University of Dodoma
chrispina.alphonce@udom.ac.tz

[3]Andwele Mwakasege
University of Dodoma
andwelemwakasege2@gmail.com

Abstract

Place names carry the memories, historical background, and dynamism of the respective communities and their environment. However, Ndali names have not been analysed, overshadowing their rich cultural and historical meanings. To address this lacuna, the paper analysed 148 Ndali place names in the Bundali Division, Songwe Region, to determine how they reflect cultural and environmental contexts. The study used qualitative and descriptive design to analyse data. Snowball and purposive sampling were used to collect data from 69 participants through focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and introspection. The analysis reveals that the Ndali place names derive their meanings from water bodies, landscape features, flora, fauna, historical events, and prominent individuals. Consequently, paper analysis demonstrates that these place names are both linguistically and geographically specific, reflecting the pivotal role of language in documenting local environments, history and culture. Moreover, the findings emphasise the significance of place names in cultural and environmental preservation and historical documentation. Future research may focus on evaluating the impact of modernisation on the preservation of place names in other regions of Tanzania and globally.

Keywords: semantics analysis, naming, toponymy, language

1 Introduction

Naming is a universal human practice; nevertheless, there is consensus that naming systems are profoundly shaped by the specific language, culture, history, and environment of each society. Ainiala et al. (2016) argue that places are named primarily for recognition, such as identifying fishing areas, farms, or water bodies. Elias et al. (2023) similarly assert that naming practices are society-specific, while Stewart (1954) maintains that the meanings conveyed by place names are not universal but are influenced by the motives and mechanisms of naming within a particular speech community. These views converge on the idea that understanding place names draws attention to local semantic and cultural frameworks.

In the African context, naming systems are important for they express community identity, history, and cultural heritage (Mandillah, 2022). David (2011) and Jenjekwa (2021) concur that place names are more than linguistic labels, for they reveal social, economic, religious, and historical values. Patrick (2021) adds that linguistic elements in place names reflect settlement history, economic activities, and political change, while Williams (2023) holds that place names act as evidence of human interaction with the environment and with other people. Collectively, these studies highlight the multifunctional role of place names in documenting societal experience.

Place names carry information about political, social and cultural views of a given society (Abdikhalikovna, 2020). Machaba (2004) adds that the naming of objects does not occur in a vacuum but in society. So, the name of places is directly connected to the society in which they take place. Nkansah & Bonsu (2024) argue that place names reflect the historical, cultural and linguistic factors of the society they represent. This aligns with Alasli (2019), who claims that past events are reflected in the current generation through place names. Likewise, Buberwa (2012) contends that place names derive meaning from references to flora, fauna, personal names, natural phenomena, and senses of belonging, while Jenjekwa (2021) expands this view by linking place names to religious, historical, social, and economic dimensions of society. Similarly, several toponymic scholars emphasise that place names function as repositories of communal memory, history, and lived experience (Alphonce & Sane, 2019; Alasli, 2019; Nwaha, 2020). This shared perspective underscores the linguistic and cultural value of place names as carriers of collective knowledge.

Despite broad agreement on the significance of place names, there is theoretical debate about whether names inherently possess meaning. Classical philosophers such as Mill (1884), Russell (1940), and Gardiner (1954), as cited in Helleland (2012), argue that names merely refer to entities and are themselves meaningless. In contrast, Hilgermann (1974), also cited in Helleland (2012), argues that names acquire meaning through connotation and association. This debate is crucial to the present study, as it frames place names not as arbitrary labels but as meaningful signs shaped by social and cultural reference.

Many scholars consistently show that while place names do carry meaning, such meanings are language-specific (Anindo, 2016; Buberwa, 2012; Liu & Rybakov, 2021; Schotsman & Bryceson, 2006). Elias et al. (2023) note that both meanings and structural patterns of place names vary across languages, reinforcing the need for language-specific studies. Moreover, Cantile and Kerfoot (2016) warn that place names are vulnerable to loss if they are not documented. Tent and Blair (2021) further argue that naming practices are influenced by semantic components relevant to toponymic motivation of a respective speech community. Employing this perspective in the Ndali context suggests that the Ndali place names reveal culturally and historically specific meanings that cannot be fully understood without focused analysis.

Although extensive studies on place names have been conducted globally and in Africa, including Tanzania, limited attention has been paid to the meanings of the Ndali place names. In response to this gap, the present study focuses on analysing the meanings of the Ndali place names to uncover the historical, cultural, and social elements they convey. By analysing the Ndali place names through the lens of reference, the study examined how these names relate to objects, experiences, and environments within the Ndali speech community, thereby contributing to the preservation and understanding of Ndali linguistic and cultural heritage.

2 Methodology

The study employed qualitative approach to obtain in-depth information about place naming in the Ndali speech community. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) assert that qualitative research seeks to understand how people interpret their experiences, construct the world, and attribute meaning to them. So, the approach was relevant to the study, as it helped the researchers obtain the views, opinions, and experiences of Ndali native speakers regarding the meaning of the Ndali place names. A descriptive research design was used in capturing narratives and descriptions of the Ndali place names. The data were collected through semi-structured interview and focus group discussion (FGD) that involved narrating and describing the meanings of the Ndali place names. A total of 148 place names were gathered from interviews and FGDs.

The paper used non-probability sampling techniques to select participants, as it allowed the researchers to select participants who were available and convenient and had the required information the investigators sought. Thus, purposive sampling was used to select Ndali native speakers who know the meanings of the Ndali place names, and snowball sampling helped the researchers identify additional participants referred by the selected participants. The sample consisted of 69 participants. In-depth interviews were conducted with 50 participants, mainly elders who are native speakers and have extensive knowledge of the Ndali place names.

Additionally, four focus group discussion (FGD) sessions were conducted, involving a total of 19 participants, with each session comprising 4 to 6 participants. Participants were purposively selected with the assistance of village leaders who possessed in-depth knowledge of individuals with expertise on the subject matter. Introspection was also employed as a methodological approach to capture an insider's perspective while minimising potential researchers' bias.

Data collection procedures included audio recording and systematic note-taking during interviews and FGDs. The data were subsequently transcribed, translated, coded, and organised into themes, which were then analysed using thematic analysis. As articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis entails the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns or themes within qualitative data.

Ethical considerations were rigorously observed by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring they were fully informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequences. The researchers' insider perspective, grounded in their proficiency in the Ndali language and familiarity with the cultural context, enhanced the depth and credibility of the analysis. To address potential bias, analytical interpretations were cross-validated with participants' responses and further scrutinised through peer feedback.

With regard to the theoretical framework, the study was guided by the African Onomastic Theory of Proper Names (AOTPN), developed by Batoma in 2006. The theory assumes that a name is a cluster of three layers of meaning: the basic layer, the cultural layer, and the pragmatic layer. The theory shows that place names, like other names, have meanings that are created by the society in which they were coined. Helleland (2012) demonstrates this by contending that place names are important in characterising people's feelings of social group affiliation. A proper name's linguistic or basic layer of meaning reveals its essential meaning, enabling the creation of additional meanings. According to Botoma (2009), linguistic meaning helps construct, deconstruct, and understand onomastic meaning, but cannot supersede it. Therefore, the researchers' interpretation of the

onomastic meaning of place names in the Ndali speech community was guided by the linguistic layer of meaning.

The cultural layer of meaning dwells on the ground that proper names have meaning beyond the motivation of the people who coined them. The layer connects a language to its culture, with a language serving as a medium for cultural expression. Batoma (2009) states that the cultural layer demonstrates the language community's sociocultural and philosophical motivations. The pragmatic layer of meaning depicts the context in which a proper name is used. Proper names are used in a variety of circumstances, including societal, situational, and interpersonal ones, depending on the social norms of the society in question. Since the Ndali place names acquired their meanings from the environment, the context of use, and the cultural practices of the Ndali community, the theory helped the researchers interpret and analyse data on the meanings of the Ndali place names. The idea is pertinent to the study because the context of use determined the meaning of the Ndali place names, and the basic meaning contributed to the construction of their onomastic meaning.

3 Findings and discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings in relation to the context of the Ndali place names. This is because the meanings of place names cannot be separated from the social, economic, historical, and environmental contexts from which they were coined. It is difficult to define the meaning of names clearly; as a result, two major schools of thought have emerged: The Millian and the Fregean approaches, which differ in their views on whether names are meaningful or meaningless (Nguyen, 2022). Millian theorists argue that names do not possess meaning but function merely as designators or referents. In contrast, Fregean scholars maintain that names have both referents and senses. Guided by the Fregean perspective, this paper argues that the Ndali place names are meaningful.

The study examined a range of the Ndali place names, including those of wards, villages, hamlets, and their subdivisions, reflecting the population distribution within the study area. The findings reveal that these place names are imbued with meanings deeply rooted in the region's history, lifestyle, and natural environment. Specifically, the meanings of the Ndali place names are influenced by local flora and fauna, landscape features, water bodies, and significant historical events. Overall, these names reflect the linguistic environment and cultural heritage of the Ndali community, encapsulating their interactions with and perceptions of their surroundings. The analysis below reveals the way the meaning of the Ndali place names reflects the Ndali context.

3.1 Place names associated with flora

The study's findings reveal that native vegetation, encompassing a diverse range of plants and trees, significantly influenced the meanings of place names within the Ndali speech community. Table 4.1 illustrates the linkage between place names and plant species that were prominent in the region at the time of coinage.

Table 1: The Ndali place names reflecting vegetation

Place name	Meaning	Frequency in interviews	Frequency in FGDs	Plant common name
Muchitete	A place with reed plants	9		Reed plants
Mwakakoma	A place with a fan palm tree	6	4	Fan palm tree
Mukashunguti	A place with small species of olive plants	5	4	Olive plant
Muhalale	A place with halale banana tree	4	5	Banana tree
Mwisoko	A place with sokola thatching grass	8	0	Thatching grass
Mumishununu	A place with mishununu sugar cane	5	4	Sugar cane
Mukafule	A place with African teak	10	0	African teak

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

The place name *Mukafule*, which means "small African teak tree," underscores the importance of local flora in naming practices. As one participant elaborated during an interview, the name is rooted in historical and cultural contexts, highlighting how the presence of specific tree species has influenced the identity and meaning of place within the community. This connection highlights the deep relationship between the Ndali people and their natural environment, with place names serving as a living record of the vegetation that once defined their landscape. This is captured in the narration of one participant below.

> *Ijholo kakabhapo akafule kamu panu, popapo abhandu bhakati tukomane pakafule pala, papo kakabha pa sila indekaania. Po ukwandila lulalula ingamu jikapya, bhandu kuti Mukafule papo akafule kakabhapo. Nuruu she po umfule ghughu ghulipo lole po ghukangele.* (A long time ago, there was a small tree of African teak here; then people declared it an easy place to meet one another, for it was at the junction. Since then, the name has become famous, as people call the place Mukafule after a small African teak tree. Even now, the tree is there, but it is too old, and it is about to fall.) (Interview, Kafule)

The quotation indicates that the place name *Mukafule* is deeply rooted in the natural vegetation that once characterised the area, specifically the African teak tree, known locally as *mfule*. As noted by Anindo (2016), place names frequently reflect the physical characteristics of their locations, particularly the plant life present at the time of naming. Accordingly, *Mukafule* derives its name from the prominence of the African teak tree in that region.

Similarly, the place name *Mwakakoma* is associated with the *mkoma* tree, a fan palm species native to the region and culturally significant in the Ndali language. According to the majority of participants, six out of seven interviewees and four out of five focus group discussion participants, the place was named *Kakoma* after a small mkoma tree that once grew beside a steep slope along the main road. Although the tree no longer exists, the name *Mwakakoma* continues to be used, symbolising the community's enduring historical and cultural connection to its natural environment. This pattern aligns with Buberwa's (2012) observation that many place names in the Ruhaya region

derive their meanings from local flora. For instance, *Kisheka* refers to a large tree called *o-musheka*, and *Mishasha* denotes a species known as *e-mishasha*. These names reflect a broader cultural practice of embedding ecological knowledge within toponyms.

The findings from interviews and focus group discussions indicate that Ndali place names often carry symbolic meanings linked to plant species, even when the actual vegetation has disappeared. Specifically, data from 47 of 50 interviewees and 17 of 19 focus group participants revealed that certain place names preserve ecological and cultural memory. For instance, the place name *Mulyale*, meaning "a big *mwale* tree," continues to be used despite the absence of the tree. This persistence highlights the community's role in maintaining connections to its historical and natural environment.

The case of *Mulyale* illustrates the concept of ecological memory within the Ndali community. Although the *mwale* tree is now scarce due to timber harvesting and other economic activities, the place name serves as a living record of the species' former presence in the landscape. This underscores the broader cultural function of place naming, whereby communities embed ecological knowledge and historical experiences into the nomenclature of their environment. Consequently, Ndali place names operate not only as geographic identifiers but also as instruments for preserving environmental history and cultural identity.

These findings underscore how place names function not only as spatial identifiers but also as reservoirs of ecological and historical knowledge. Even amid environmental change, the symbolic value of these names persists, reinforcing their cultural significance. This supports the idea that African toponymy is a dynamic system that records environmental, botanical, and cultural transformations across generations. The findings are consistent with the first layer of meaning of AOTPN, which states that the basic meaning of proper name constructs onomastic meaning, as the meaning of *Mulyale* and *Mwakakoma* has been built from *lyale* and *kakoma*, respectively.

Responses from 47 of 50 interviewed participants revealed that neighbouring plant and tree species significantly influenced the meanings of place names. For example, *Muhalale,* meaning "a place with the *halale* banana tree," derives its name from a specific type of banana tree. One participant explained that this area was the first to cultivate the *halale* banana, which later spread to other regions. Thus, the name *Muhalale* serves as a cultural and historical marker, linking the Ndali community to their tradition of using banana as food and preserving this association even if the *halale* species were to disappear. The findings are in line with the pragmatic layer of AOTPN, which states that the context of use determines the meaning of a proper name. Consequently, the way *Halale* was used has facilitated the meaning of *Muhalale*.

Another example is *Mwisoko*, meaning "a place with *sokola* grasses." According to 8 of the 9 participants interviewed, the name originated from isokola, a type of local grass used for roofing houses. When missionaries arrived in the area, they struggled to pronounce the original term and shortened it to *isoko*, effectively clipping the syllable *–la*. This phonological adjustment resulted in the place name *Mwisoko*, illustrating how linguistic adaptations can shape toponymy. The connection between the plant name *sokola* and the place name *Mwisoko* exemplifies the first layer of meaning in the African Onomastic Theory of Proper Names (AOTPN), wherein the linguistic meaning of a plant contributes directly to the onomastic meaning of a place. These examples demonstrate the integral role of local plant species in shaping place names, serving as enduring records of historical, cultural, and environmental knowledge.

The participants' responses during the focus group discussions illustrated how local flora, including grasses, plants, and trees, contributed to the meanings of various places. These contributions were evident in the narratives shared during the discussions.

> *Kula bhakati mwo Mumswanga papo kukabha nimikokwe mywingi, na abhoswanga bhakimama mumikokwe jhilajhila. Abhoswanga bhabha bhakalya utukuku po abhandu bhajhipa ingamu imikokwe jhilajhila jhabha miswanga. Po abhandu bhakati bhakusenga utwajha kula kula bhakakupa ingamu jha mumuswanga. Po linga umundu akujha kula kula po bhatingiishe najha mswanga. Jho nongwi ijhi bhakuti Mumuswanga* (That place is called Mumswanga because there were many trees where hawk birds were hiding. Those hawk birds were eating chicks, so people named those trees after them. It reached a time when people started to establish a settlement in the area, then they opted for the name of the tree called mswanga to be the name of the place.) (Malangali, FGD)

The quotation demonstrates that the name of the *Mswanga* tree influenced the meaning of the place name *Mumswanga*, which means "a place with the *Mswanga* tree." This place was named after the trees where hawk-birds, known as *swanga* in the Ndali language, used to perch and hide. The coinage of the name *Mumswanga* was directly shaped by both the local vegetation and the behaviour of the hawk-birds, which hid in the trees to attack chickens. This reflects the pragmatic layer of meaning described in the African Onomastic Theory of Proper Names (AOTPN), which emphasises that the context in which a name is used contributes significantly to its meaning. In this case, the naming was informed by environmental and behavioural context, as well as by the interaction between specific trees and the birds they shelter.

These findings align with Machaba's (2004) observation that the vegetation characteristic of a given area often shapes the meanings of place names. Similarly, Anindo (2016) found that in the Lulogooli community, the use of flora, especially for medicinal purposes, influenced place naming. For instance, *Kisangula* was named after the *Masangula* tree, while *Muhalia* refers to plants believed to enhance milk production in cows. Therefore, the meanings of names like *Mumswanga* and *Mukambakasa* reveal the relevance of the third layer of AOTPN, which posits that meaning is generated from the context of coinage, particularly from the symbolic and functional significance of local flora, as *tumbakasi* was used as food for the Ndali community.

The findings are contrary to those of Tent and Blair (2011), who argue that many place names in Australia emerged from colonial, political, or administrative processes, often detached from local ecological knowledge and community participation. This perspective foregrounds external authority in the naming process. Thus, being contrary to Ndali place names, which were locally generated, arising from communal interaction with flora. The Ndali naming practices reflect indigenous knowledge systems rather than imposed administrative frameworks.

3.2 Place names associated with water bodies

The findings revealed that water bodies, such as rivers and springs, play a significant role in shaping the meanings of place names within the Ndali speech community. This is mainly due to the community's geographic location in a mountainous region rich in freshwater sources. Many places in the area derive their names from nearby rivers and springs. For instance, *Mwasongwe,* meaning "along the *Songwe* River," is named after the *Songwe* River, which flows through the region and forms part of the border between Tanzania and Malawi. The physical presence of the river and the

community's proximity to it directly influenced the coinage and meaning of the place name. The findings align with the first layer of meaning in the African Onomastic Theory of Proper Names (AOTPN), which posits that the fundamental meaning of a proper name contributes to its onomastic meaning. In this case, the *Songwe* River serves as the referent that constructs the onomastic meaning of *Mwasongwe*.

Furthermore, the geographical name *Mukishima,* which means 'a place with a water spring', has a meaning that was influenced by the water spring found in the area. The residents of the area were using fresh water from the spring. This can be proved by a narration of one of the participants during interviews:

> *Ijholo, abhandu bhakasemba amishi kukishima kula kula, po abhomama bhakatingiishe bhakujha kusemba amishi bhatii najha mukishima. Po abhandu bhakati bhakusenga nyumba mula mula bhakakupa ingamu jha mukishima. Po nulu she ichishima chilipo, lole po abhandu bhakaleka ukusemba amishi muchishima papo bhali na mabhomba mutwajha twabho* (A long time ago, people were fetching water from the spring. So, when women went to fetch water in the spring, they claimed that they were going to Mukishima. Then, when people began to establish settlements in the area, they named it Mukishima. Currently, the spring is present, but people have stopped fetching water from the spring because they have water taps at their homes). (Interview, Ibeta).

The participants' responses from the interviews highlighted that the place name *Mukishima* is directly associated with a spring that existed before the location was named. In the Ndali language, *kishima* means "water spring." Given the abundance of springs in the Ndali community, many local place names have been influenced by them. For instance, *Mwiteja* derives from the *Iteja* spring, *Mwachembe* from the *Chembe* spring, and *Mukilege* from the *Kilege* spring. Similarly, the place name *Muchifu* originated from a nearby river. Locals would commonly say they were "going to *Chifu*," which eventually led to the area being named *Muchifu*. The Ndali community's mountainous geography, a natural source of freshwater, has significantly influenced the naming and meanings of places in the region. This pattern aligns with the pragmatic layer of the African Onomastic Theory of Proper Names (AOTPN), which states that proper names often reflect practical and environmental realities. In this context, the names of rivers and springs are not only geographical markers but also serve as cultural signifiers, shaping the linguistic landscape of Ndali community as well as acting as boundaries between places.

The findings are consistent with Jenjekwa's (2021) research on Zimbabwean toponymy, which demonstrates that river names have influenced the meanings of local place names. For instance, *Dewure* River gave rise to the meaning of *Dewure*, and *Mutirikwi* River influenced the meaning of *Mutirikwi*. Similarly, Nwaha (2020) observed that rivers played a significant role in shaping the meanings of place names among the Basa'a people of Cameroon. These examples highlight a widespread pattern in African toponymy, where the names of water bodies often predate and inform the naming of surrounding locations. This analysis suggests that the naming practices within the Ndali speech community are consistent with broader trends across the continent. However, the Ndali case offers specific insights, as natural features such as springs and rivers are not only geographical markers but also reflect the community's environmental and historical identity.

The findings differ from those of Guyot and Seethal (2007), who argue that place names are redefined due to political transformation and identity reconstruction rather than to water bodies. This

happened in South Africa, where places like Gauteng, 'the place of gold', and KwaZulu-Natal were renamed during political transformation after apartheid. Their study in post-apartheid South Africa shows that historical events and sociopolitical agendas can override long-standing geographically motivated names. This contrasts with the Ndali context, where rivers and springs have maintained a stable influence on place naming over time.

3.3 Place names related to fauna

Some place names in the Ndali community are derived from local wildlife, particularly birds and other animals. A notable example is the place name *Muchikubhi*, which means "a place with small hawk birds." This name originates from the presence of the *hawk* species (*kubhi)*, which were known to prey on chicks in the area. According to the participants interviewed, the abundance and predatory behaviour of these birds were the key reasons the area was given this name. As detailed in Table 2, the participants' responses reveal the significant role of local wildlife in shaping the meanings of place names. The presence and behaviour of animals, especially hawk-birds (*kubhi*), have directly influenced naming practices in the Ndali community. These findings highlight how local fauna serve not only as environmental features but also as cultural signifiers that inform and preserve aspects of communal knowledge and history through toponymy. In the case of the Ndali community, the naming of *Muchikubhi*, based on the behavioural traits of local birds, reflects a broader pattern in traditional African onomastics, where names are not arbitrary but deeply rooted in environmental observation and communal experience.

Table 2: The Ndali place names reflecting names of animals and birds

Place name	Meaning	Frequency in interviews	Frequency in FGDs	Animal/bird common name
Muchibhuli	A place with a honey badger	5	4	Honey badger
Muchikubhi	A place with a small hawk bird	8	0	African goshawk
Kwafuko	A place with moles	4	4	Moles

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

Table 2 illustrates that place names in the Ndali-speaking community are deeply influenced by the local fauna, particularly animals and birds. For instance, *Muchibhuli*, meaning "a place with a honey badger," is derived from *Chibhuli*, the local name for the honey badger, an animal noted for raiding beehives in search of honey. This reflects how animal behaviour directly shapes place naming. Similarly, *Mumijhuni*, which translates to "a place with many big birds," was named after a forest in the area known for hosting many big birds. The prevalence and behaviours of these birds contributed to the naming of the place, underscoring the role of environmental context in shaping linguistic identity.

These findings resonate with the pragmatic layer of meaning of the AOTPN framework, where the meanings of place names emerge from their contextual use. In this case, the names *Muchibhuli* and *Mumijhuni* gain significance from the honey badger's environmental presence and the large birds' cultural awareness, respectively. Buberwa (2012) makes similar observations about the Ruhaya language, in which place names often refer to animals that once inhabited the region. For example, *Kyenjubu* denoted an area inhabited by hippopotamuses, while *Kankende* was named after monkeys.

However, the animals that influence the meanings of place names vary from one community to another due to cultural differences. Anindo (2016) agrees that place names derived from animals can be language-specific. In his study of Lulogooli, place names like *Chamakanga*, which means 'of guinea fowl', and Wamage, which means 'of termites', differ from Ndali names, for in Ndali, they have different names; that is, Mumakanga means 'of guinea fowl', and *Mwang'era* means 'of termites', respectively. This emphasises the unique linguistic and cultural context of the Ndali place names. In Ndali, the place name *Muchikubhi* derives from *kubhi,* a small hawk known for preying on chicks, highlighting the community's close observation of animal behaviour.

Overall, these findings show that place names function as cultural memory, preserving ecological and historical knowledge. They serve as a "living voice" of the past, transmitting the environmental experiences and cultural priorities of the Ndali community to future generations. The findings highlight how local wildlife significantly affects place names, reflecting their symbolic meanings. They illustrate the distinctive role of local wildlife in shaping place names within the Ndali community, contributing to a broader understanding of how environmental factors influence onomastic practices. In this particular study, the findings suggest that the Ndali place names are more than locational labels; they are living archives that encode interactions between people and their natural surroundings. This supports broader theories in African onomastics that emphasise the pragmatic and referential roles of proper names in oral cultures

3.4 Place names associated with landscapes

The findings of this study demonstrate that place names in the Ndali-speaking community are deeply rooted in both the natural environment and cultural practices, reflecting a dynamic interplay between physical geography, ecological knowledge, and socio-cultural interpretation. Through the lens of the Analysis of AOTPN, the research reveals that the Ndali place names function not merely as geographic labels but as communicative acts rich with contextual meaning.

One prominent theme that emerged is the impact of topography and landscape features on place naming. Names such as *Mubwima* and *Mundambala*, both denoting "highland" areas, were mentioned by many interviewees. 4 out of 5 participants interviewed across different study areas reported that the places were named for their landscape. This illustrates how elevation is used as a referential and orientational tool. The contextual understanding of these names aligns with the third layer of AOTPN, which emphasises the role of interpellation- the process by which a name is called into being within a specific social and spatial context. Similarly, place names like *Pabhunwongala*, "having many sharp corners", and *Pachipalapatwe* ", linked to steep slopes", highlight the significance of physical terrain in shaping linguistic identity, confirming Gammeltoft's (2016) argument that place names are spoken reflections of the surrounding environment.

Additionally, the research highlights the symbolic role of visibility and concealment in the naming process. Names such as *Mulundo*, "not seen," and Mulufunda, "being hidden", are tied to geographical seclusion, areas obscured by mountains or located in valleys. These findings reveal how visual perception and spatial isolation become culturally meaningful. In particular, Mulufunda carries deeper cultural resonance, as it metaphorically links to the practice of using *kafunda* (a traditional bag for hiding valuables), revealing how the second layer of AOTPN culturally influences and shapes toponymic meaning. This reflects a localised way of understanding and encoding space, where physical features acquire significance through metaphor and cultural practice.

The findings are similar to those of Tent and Blair (2021), who contend that island landscapes influenced the meaning of Australian place names. For instance, *Broken Bay* was named for its unique environment, formed by broken land. These findings are also connected to the assumption of AOTPN's first layer of meaning, which holds that proper names contain a basic meaning that may be used to generate further meanings. Consequently, the core meanings of the words *lundo* and *lufunda* have been used to construct the meanings of the place names *Mulundo* and *Mulufunda.* This shows how the environment is intertwined with place names, as the meaning of a place is derived from the environment.

The findings also indicated that flat terrain affected the meaning of certain places. Although the Ndali speech community is located in mountainous areas, there are a few flatlands. For example, the place name *Mwibhanda* designates a flatland next to a river, and *Mulusungo* designates a flatland situated between two rivers. These findings are consistent with Buberwa's (2012) argument that the Ruhaya community's place names were influenced by the area's topography, which includes valleys, mountains, and other natural features. However, Buberwa notes that each speech community has its own unique set of natural features, as numerous places were named based on the characteristics of their landscapes. Thus, the landscapes of the Ndali-speaking community play a crucial role in defining the meaning of place names, as these names reflect the physical characteristics of the local environment.

3.5 Place names deriving from the famous people

The findings of the study reveal that in the Ndali speech community, many place names are derived from the names of prominent individuals. These individuals are honoured for their leadership, social contributions, or status as early settlers. Such naming practices serve not only as geographical identifiers but also as cultural records that preserve the community's social memory. For instance, the place names *Kwamwandenga* and *Kwakiloso* commemorate early settlers who played significant roles in their respective communities. *Kiloso*, in particular, is remembered not only as a pioneer settler but also for his role in cassava farming and its distribution among locals, which earned him recognition and respect. Similarly, the name *Mwikinga* is derived from the original inhabitants, who were migrants from *Ukinga* (Makete). As explained by local participants, the area was initially referred to as "the place of *Mkinga*," which eventually evolved into *Mwikinga.*

Other place names, such as *Kwamwanyale* and *Pamwatila*, reflect symbolic recognition of local leadership. *Kwamwanyale* means "at Mwanyale's place," a reference to a respected traditional leader who ruled the *Msongwi* area. His influence was so profound that the area became known by his name among locals and visitors alike. *Pamwatila* similarly honours Chief *Mwatila,* meaning 'At Mwatila's place', a chief who inherited from his father, *Mulagha. Mwatila's* residence also functioned as a communal space for essential gatherings, further solidifying its symbolic and practical significance within the community. Consequently, adding Kwa- before a person's name changed it to the name of the place, which was then the community's capital.

These examples illustrate how the Ndali place names are deeply embedded in the community's socio-cultural framework. They not only reflect individual contributions to the community but also function as repositories of local history, leadership succession, and collective memory. In doing so, these place names act as enduring records of African cultural heritage, preserving narratives of identity, migration, and governance for future generations. Furthermore, these findings support the second layer of the African Onomastic Theory of Proper Names (AOTPN), which emphasises the

philosophical and cultural dimensions of naming practices. In the Ndali context, the meanings of place names are shaped by the lived experiences and societal roles of renowned individuals. This reinforces the idea that African toponymy is not merely descriptive but is a powerful medium for expressing communal values, honouring ancestry, and transmitting indigenous knowledge systems.

These findings align with Zwinoira (1984), who argues that the names of chiefs, such as Chief Manzini Motse and Chief Mbabane Kunene, influenced the meanings of the places Manzini and *Mbabane* in Swaziland. The findings also align with Chilala and Hang'ombe (2020), who claim that the names of prominent political figures influenced the meaning of renamed international airports and national stadia in Zambia. For example, *Kenneth Kaunda International Airport* was renamed after the first president of the Zambian Republic, and Levy Mwanawasa Stadium was renamed after the third president of the Zambian Republic.

In contrast, the findings differ from Algeo's (1988) assertion that colonial leaders, including the Queen of England, influenced Australian place names such as Victoria, Queenstown, and Queensland. The study revealed that the Ndali place names reflect the contributions of prominent indigenous members of the Ndali speech community rather than colonial figures. This suggests that the Ndali place names were not shaped by colonial influences. Moreover, the findings differ from those of Schotsman and Bryceson (2006), who claimed that some place names in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, were influenced by religious leaders. For example, the name *Idrissa* honours a well-known imam of a mosque. The Ndali place names, however, do not derive their meanings from religious leaders.

3.6 Place names associated with historical events

The findings indicate that some place names in the Ndali-speaking community are derived from significant historical events, especially those that were traumatic, unusual, or socially impactful. These names serve as cultural markers that preserve collective memory and embed historical narratives within the linguistic landscape. One such example is *Kulutagho*, which translates to "a place where dead bodies were thrown." According to community participants, this name refers to a period before colonial influence, when deceased individuals were not formally buried but discarded in that area. The perceived impurity of the site also led to cultural restrictions, such as prohibitions against using water from the area's rivers or collecting firewood nearby. Another powerful example is *Mwitunga Bhandu*, meaning "hanging people," which recalls a violent episode during which invaders from Chief Merere's local army, known as Tuta, executed individuals who resisted capture.

These names reflect an enduring imprint of collective trauma and the historical memory of the Ndali community. These findings strongly align with Algeo's (1988) assertion that historical events are a significant influence on place naming, as in the case of *Anxious Bay* in Australia, named after a distressing maritime incident and *Mount Spec*, named during a period of mineral speculation. The names in the Ndali context illustrate how socio-historical occurrences are encoded into local geographies. Similarly, Onipede (2020) found that names in Ogbomoso, Nigeria, such as Apake (kill toads), stem from local incidents, further supporting the broader applicability of this phenomenon across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts.

Within the theoretical framework of the Analysis of AOTPN, these findings reflect the third layer of meaning, which emphasises the role of historical and situational context in shaping the interpretation of proper names. Place names like *Mwitunga Bhandu* gain their semantic significance

from the specific historical incidents they commemorate, illustrating how names are not arbitrary but are deeply tied to local lived experiences and collective memory. Therefore, toponyms function as historical texts in their own right, revealing the emotional and cultural impact of past events while serving as geographical reference points. They reveal how the Ndali-speaking community has preserved its history through naming practices, reinforcing the view that place names act as vessels of memory and identity across generations.

4 Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that place names in the Ndali-speaking community operate on multiple semantic layers, encompassing ecological awareness, spatial understanding, and cultural symbolism. This study concludes that place naming in the Ndali-speaking community is a culturally embedded and environmentally responsive practice. Place names are shaped not only by the physical characteristics of the landscape, such as hills, slopes, and visibility, but also by the community's interaction with local fauna and symbolic cultural practices. The interplay between environment and naming practice illustrates that toponyms are not static identifiers but dynamic cultural artefacts. Using the AOTPN framework, the study has shown that the Ndali place names convey meaning through pragmatic use, contextual origin, and cultural reference, serving as a rich repository of indigenous knowledge systems that reinforce communal memory and provide insight into the ways communities perceive and interact with their environment. The findings reinforce the view that toponyms are living linguistic expressions that encapsulate a community's history, identity, and values. Further studies should be conducted on place names at the global level and in other regions of Tanzania to examine how modernisation has influenced their meanings and the extent to which these names continue to reflect the identities of their respective communities. Since place-name meanings are shaped by a society's environment, history, and culture, such studies would contribute to a deeper understanding of cultural change and continuity. Additionally, future research should focus on the morphological structure of the Ndali place names, as morphological elements are closely related to meaning and can provide further insights into the linguistic and cultural significance of these names.

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Personality Traits in the Characterisation of the Main Characters in "Watoto wa Mamantilie" and "Daladala Kutoka Mbagala: A Psychoanalytic and Narrative Analysis"

[1]Faustine Deogratius John
The Open University of Tanzania
faustinejohn370@gmail.com

[2]Zelda Elisifa
The Open University of Tanzania
zelda.elisifa@out.ac.tz
Orcid 0000-0002-03786147

Abstract

This paper examines the representation of character traits through the fictionalisation of protagonists in Emmanuel Mbogo's Watoto wa Mamant'ilie and Mussa Shakinyashi's Daladala Kutoka Mbagala. By analysing how protagonists are constructed, the study provides insight into the cultural narratives and societal values reflected in contemporary Tanzanian literature. The research adopts a qualitative approach and employs a hybrid analytical framework that integrates Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory and Puckett's Narrative Theory. These theoretical lenses enable a detailed examination of how characters' personalities are expressed, narrated, and performed within the selected texts. The study is grounded in the Constructivist Paradigm, an interdisciplinary theoretical perspective widely recognised in education, psychology, sociology, and epistemology. This paradigm holds that individuals construct meaning and perceive reality through personal experiences, beliefs, interpretations, and social interactions. Guided by this framework, the study relies on close textual reading as its primary method of data analysis, focusing on narrative description, dialogue, behaviour, and social interaction to interpret the development of key characters. The analysis reveals that Peter is portrayed as a psychologically complex character whose personality is marked by sociability, empathy, analytical thinking, and creative adaptability, reflecting resilience shaped by social marginalisation and personal loss. In contrast, Fikara emerges as a more authoritative and force-driven figure, whose personality is defined by assertiveness and controlled emotional expression, suggesting a limited yet distinct rhetorical dominance within the narrative. Together, these portrayals demonstrate how characterisation functions as a critical literary device for revealing personality types, power relations, and social identity, thereby enriching the interpretative depth of African literary analysis.

Keywords: Psychological complexity, cultural identity, social power relations.

1 Introduction

Literature, expressed through novels, plays, and poems, mirrors life and communicates values, beliefs, and social realities (Ngesa et al., 2015). Through literary texts, authors engage with human experience and social conditions, enabling readers to reflect on their own realities. This article examines the novels Watoto wa Mamant'ilie and Daladala Kutoka Mbagala, focusing on characterisation as a pedagogical tool that reveals the personalities and unique traits of key

figures. Characters provide depth to narratives and foster emotional engagement between texts and readers.

Protagonists often embody their authors' social commentary (Bwelele, 2016). Their traits influence actions, decisions, and relationships, making personality a critical subject in literary interpretation (Charters, 2011; Poetry, 2014). Through well-crafted characters, authors communicate moral lessons, social criticism, and cultural values, allowing readers to engage critically with the text.

Characterisation, the depiction of a character's appearance, thoughts, behaviour, and inner life, is a fundamental literary device for creating psychological depth and emotional impact. As noted by Clemence (2015), effective characterisation conveys complex emotions such as guilt, love, fear, and jealousy, thereby strengthening the connection between writer and reader. Understanding these traits enables readers to trace how characters shape plot development and reinforce central themes (Feisal, 2011).

Characterisation, defined as the representation and development of a character, conveys identity through background, gestures, values, and lived experiences. Fadhil (2014) emphasises its role in revealing personal traits, while Reams (2015) identifies two principal approaches: direct and indirect characterisation. Direct characterisation explicitly describes a character's traits, commonly through narration, whereas indirect characterisation reveals personality through dialogue, actions, and behaviour, requiring greater reader interpretation. This distinction is further elaborated by Burroway (2000) and Kimambo (2015), who argue that both approaches are essential for crafting realistic characters and revealing their psychological states. Together, these techniques help explain how personality traits shape narrative structure and deepen thematic meaning.

Despite extensive scholarship on characterisation, limited attention has been given to its pedagogical significance in contemporary Swahili novels, particularly in Watoto wa Mamant'ilie and Daladala Kutoka Mbagala. This study seeks to address this gap by analysing how characterisation functions as a tool for conveying moral, social, and educational messages in the selected texts. Specifically, the study aims to examine the methods of characterisation employed in the novels and to explore how these methods contribute to character development, thematic construction, and reader engagement.

2 Literature review

Scholarly studies consistently acknowledge characterisation as a central element in literary analysis, through which authors reveal personality, motivation, and moral orientation. Characterisation enables readers to engage emotionally with fictional figures while interpreting broader social meanings embedded in texts. According to Charters (2011), characters function as vehicles for thematic development, with their psychological traits shaping narrative progression. Similarly, Reams (2015) argues that effective characterisation allows readers to infer complex emotions and inner conflicts, thereby enriching textual interpretation.

Researchers distinguish between direct and indirect characterisation as principal methods for constructing literary personalities. Direct characterisation involves explicit descriptions of characters' traits, while indirect characterisation reveals personality through dialogue, behaviour, and interaction (Burroway, 2000; Kimambo, 2015). Herman's narrative schema further emphasises the role of actions and speech in uncovering psychological depth. Despite extensive discussion of these techniques, limited attention has been given to how they function

pedagogically, particularly in the portrayal of child protagonists within African literary contexts.

Tanzanian literature has attracted considerable scholarly attention, particularly in relation to themes of postcolonial identity, social injustice, and urban poverty. Studies frequently examine how literature reflects socio-economic inequalities, gender relations, and the challenges of urbanisation. However, the psychological and emotional dimensions of childhood within urban settings are often marginalised. The representation of urban children in Tanzanian novels tends to prioritise social conditions over internal struggles, resulting in a limited exploration of emotional complexity.

Consequently, issues such as poverty, family responsibility, gender expectations, and marginalisation are frequently discussed at a thematic level, without sufficient attention to their psychological impact on child characters. This oversight restricts a deeper understanding of how literature both reflects and critiques the lived experiences of impoverished urban children. Scholars have therefore called for more nuanced analyses that foreground children's inner lives and emotional resilience within fictional narratives.

Psychoanalytic criticism, particularly Freud's theory, has been widely applied in literary studies to uncover unconscious motivations, inner conflicts, and behavioural patterns of characters. Freud's concepts of the id, ego, and superego offer valuable tools for analysing how characters respond to trauma, deprivation, and desire. In parallel, narrative theory, as advanced by scholars such as Puckett, highlights the influence of narrative voice, perspective, and focalisation in shaping readers' understanding of character development.

Although these theoretical frameworks have been applied extensively in Western literary studies, their use in analysing Tanzanian and Swahili novels, especially those centred on child protagonists, remains limited. The integration of psychoanalytic and narrative approaches provides an opportunity to explore both the internal psychological dimensions of characters and the narrative strategies through which these dimensions are communicated to readers.

While existing studies have contributed significantly to understanding themes of poverty and social injustice in Tanzanian literature, there remains a notable gap in psychoanalytical and narrative analyses of characterisation, particularly concerning child protagonists. Few studies systematically examine how personality traits are constructed and how narratorial strategies influence readers' perceptions of children's psychological development. This study addresses this gap by employing Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Puckett's narrative theory to analyse the protagonists in Watoto wa Mamant'ilie and Daladala Kutoka Mbagala, thereby contributing new insights into characterisation in East African fiction.

3 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive textual analysis within a multiple-case research design, focusing on two Tanzanian novels: Watoto wa Mamant'ilie by Emmanuel Mbogo and Daladala Kutoka Mbagala by Mussa Shakinyashi. The multiple-case design enables a comparative examination of character construction across two distinct yet thematically related literary texts, allowing for both within-text and cross-text analysis of character development in contemporary Tanzanian socio-economic contexts. The two novels were purposefully selected based on clearly defined criteria aligned with the objectives of the study. Both texts are situated within urban and/or peri-urban Tanzanian settings, foregrounding lived experiences shaped by poverty, inequality, and social struggle. The novels prominently feature child and adolescent protagonists, whose psychological and social development provides fertile ground for analysing

personality formation and inner conflict. The works were published within a contemporary period of Tanzanian literature, reflecting current socio-economic realities and cultural discourses. The selection ensures authorial contrast: Mbogo represents an established literary voice whose work is endorsed by the Ministry of Education for its pedagogical and thematic value, while Shakinyashi represents an emerging writer whose narrative innovation offers alternative modes of character portrayal. Together, these criteria justify the inclusion of WM and DKM as complementary cases for in-depth qualitative analysis.

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive textual analysis within a multiple-case research design, focusing on two Tanzanian novels: Watoto wa Mamant'ilie by Emmanuel Mbogo and Daladala Kutoka Mbagala by Mussa Shakinyashi. The multiple-case design enables a systematic comparison of character construction across two distinct yet thematically related literary texts, allowing for both within-text and cross-text analysis of personality development in contemporary Tanzanian socio-economic contexts.

The two novels were purposefully selected based on clearly defined criteria aligned with the objectives of the study. Both texts are situated in urban and/or peri-urban Tanzanian settings and foreground lived experiences shaped by poverty, inequality, and social struggle. Each novel centres on child and/or adolescent protagonists, whose psychological and social development provides a productive basis for analysing personality formation, inner conflict, and resilience. The novels were published within a contemporary period of Tanzanian literature, reflecting current socio-cultural realities. The selection ensures authorial contrast: Mbogo represents an established literary voice whose work is endorsed by the Ministry of Education for its pedagogical and thematic value, while Shakinyashi represents an emerging writer whose narrative experimentation offers alternative modes of character portrayal.

Data analysis followed a theory-informed qualitative coding process combining deductive and inductive elements. The initial coding categories, such as Influence, Sociability, Emotional Control, Aggression, and Moral Reasoning, were theory-driven, derived from personality trait theory and Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory (1890), particularly concepts related to repression, motivation, and inner conflict. These categories were applied during close and repeated readings of narrative episodes, dialogue, and descriptive passages. At the same time, the analysis remained open to inductive refinement, allowing sub-categories and contextual nuances to emerge from the texts. Puckett's Narrative Theory (2016) guided the interpretation of how character traits are mediated through narrative perspective and focalisation. The analytical process involved three stages: independent analysis of each novel, systematic cross-text comparison, and theoretical interpretation of findings through psychoanalytic and narrative lenses.

To ensure validity in the research, the study employed triangulation through different theoretical lenses: Freud's psychoanalysis, Puckett's narrative theory, and Herman's characterisation model. Additionally, thematic codes and interpretations were reviewed for reliability through peer debriefing with academic colleagues in literature and psychoanalysis. Multiple readings of the novels were conducted to enhance interpretative validity and maintain internal consistency of trait indicators. The potential for interpretive bias was mitigated through reflexive memoing and explicit documentation of coding decisions.

This study does not involve human participants; however, ethical guidelines were still considered. The scrapping tool respects the authors' work by providing proper citations for any referenced text. Literary analyses do not misrepresent the authors' views or characters. The researcher remains aware of the possibility of positional bias and practices reflexivity

throughout the process. Additionally, when classroom use of the texts is mentioned, this demonstrates awareness of their pedagogical value within Tanzanian educational environments.

4 Findings

The findings of the study were organised into two thematic areas that emerged through systematic coding of the selected novels: character personality and the depiction of leading characters. These themes were identified by constructing a coding framework in which key elements of character behaviour, dialogue, and narrative description were assigned specific codes. Segments of text corresponding to these codes were then grouped, allowing patterns of personality traits and character roles to be established. The use of tables enabled the clear presentation of these patterns. Table 1 summarises the number of main characters in each novel. In contrast, Table 2 displays the frequency of personality traits under the categories 'Relationships with Others', 'Thinking Styles and Emotions', and 'Feelings Expressed in the Narrative'. Table 3 applies Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory and Puckett's Narrative Theory to illustrate the psychological forces that shape the motivations and behaviours of the primary characters.

4.1 Characterisation and constitution of the main characters

The description and development of Swahili fictional protagonists are crucial for narrative growth and the projection of broader social contexts. Table 1 presents the main characters of Emmanuel Mbogo's 'WM' and Mussa Shakinyashi's 'DKM', based on the distribution and salience of main, minor, and group-referenced characters.

Table 1: Personality characterisation and development of the main characters

Code	Main Characters (Ordered by Name)	Total Main Characters	Total Minor Characters	Group-Mentioned Characters	Total Characters
WM	Peter, Mamant'ilie, Zita, Kulwa	4 (9%)	28 (65%)	11 (26%)	43 (100%)
DKM	Fikara	1 (6%)	13 (72%)	4 (22%)	18 (100%)

Table 1 summarises the form of characterisation evident in the selected texts, detailing the distribution and occurrence of main and minor characters in Emmanuel Mbogo's 'WM' and Mussa Shakinyashi's 'DKM'. 'WM' features four protagonists, constituting 9% of the characters. The minor characters are divided into two sub-groups: named characters (28, or 65% of all characters) and unnamed characters (11, similar to 26%), totalling 43 characters in the narrative.

To clarify, we are not referring to names such as Peter or Zita; rather, we are expressing the concept of a name that serves merely as a label for a character. Common nouns, on the other hand, are used more generically to indicate a group of people rather than individuals; for example, readers may encounter villagers or passengers, who collectively represent the people in the story. In 'DKM' the characterisation departs from the traditional model, featuring one character (Fikara) who constitutes 6% of the characters. There are 13 minor characters characterised by proper nouns (72%), and 4 identified by common nouns (22%), resulting in a total of 18 minor characters.

These figures show that both novels construct a hierarchical character system, distinguishing the protagonists from other figures who are referred to without proper names. This narrative choice aligns with established narratological principles that position central characters as key determinants of plot development and thematic progression (Genette, 1980; Rimmon-Kenan, 2002). The use of proper nouns for main characters strengthens their individuality and psychological depth, enabling readers to form more explicit mental images and emotional connections. In contrast, the reliance on common nouns for minor or collective characters situates them primarily within their social functions, reinforcing their supportive role in the narrative. Recent studies on characterisation in African literature (e.g., Okolo, 2018; Kamau & Oduor, 2021) also emphasise that such differentiation enables cultural and social critique.

From a narrative-technique perspective, this distribution highlights how the authors strategically use characterisation to manage complexity and scope. Mbogo's ensemble cast in 'WM' facilitates a more communal and intricate representation of social relations and interactions. In contrast, Shekinyashi's narrower focus in 'DKM' emphasises one protagonist's experience, creating a greater sense of intimacy and psychological depth. As noted by Abrams (1999), these choices in characterisation affect how readers engage with and understand the text, influencing narrative perspective and emotional response. Furthermore, current scholarship maintains that this juxtaposition between individual and collective characterisation enhances thematic resonance, including themes prevalent in postcolonial narratives (Njoroge, 2020).

In summary, characterisation is an effective literary tool in these novels, significantly contributing to the construction of complex, vibrant individuals who are essential components of the overarching story. The individual characteristics and actions of the protagonists position readers emotionally and intellectually within the narratives, while minor characters and group references help place these protagonists within their social and cultural contexts. This multifaceted characterisation not only enriches the storytelling but also demonstrates the authors' keen appreciation for human and social complexity.

4.2 Frequency of personality traits

Table 2 below presents the categorisation and frequency of personality traits as manifested in the behaviours, speech, and narrative roles of the two main characters, Peter from 'WM' and Fikara from 'DKM'. Drawing from close textual analysis, the traits are classified into eight psychological dimensions: Influence, Sociability, Empathy, Analysis, Creativity, Structure, Emotions, and Dynamism. The recorded frequencies indicate the number of times each trait is explicitly or implicitly expressed in the narrative, offering a quantifiable basis for comparing character depth, complexity, and thematic function within the two novels.

Table 2: Frequency of personality traits

SN	Character	Novel	Influence	Sociability	Empathy	Analysis	Creativity	Structure	Emotions	Dynamism	Total Traits %
1	Peter	WM	1	6	4	4	4	2	2	2	25 (62.5%)
2	Fikara	DKM	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	1	15 (37.5%)

Table 2 presents a frequency-based classification of personality traits as manifested through the actions, speech, and behavioural patterns of the two principal characters: Peter in Watoto wa

Mamant'ilie (WM) and Fikara in Daladala Kutoka Mbagala (DKM). The table offers an empirical overview of how character traits are distributed and emphasised, thereby illustrating the dimensions through which the authors construct and differentiate their protagonists.

Each trait frequency was determined through systematic coding of textual evidence. A single count was assigned whenever a trait was clearly demonstrated within a discrete narrative unit, defined as a specific action, spoken utterance, or narrated behavioural episode. Repeated references within the same episode were counted once to avoid inflation, while the recurrence of the same trait in separate scenes or interactions was counted cumulatively. For example, Sociability is equal to six (6), indicating six distinct instances across the text in which the character engages in socially oriented behaviour, such as cooperation, dialogue initiation, or group interaction. In contrast, influence one (1) reflects a single episode where the character explicitly directs or shapes others' actions.

Overall, Peter exhibits 25 traits (62.5% of the total), indicating a broader and more nuanced character construction. Sociability emerges as his dominant trait, followed by empathy, analytical thinking, and creativity. Although both characters express emotion equally, Fikara outperforms Peter in forceful behaviour, suggesting a more assertive but comparatively restricted narrative role. The greater recurrence of Peter's features in dimensions of sociability, empathy, analysis, and creativity shows that the author constructs Peter as a socially and emotionally intelligent character whose actions regularly demonstrate socio-cognitive understanding. His frequent sociability (6 times) indicates a common theme of relationship establishment or communal engagement, which reflects similar thematic concerns of 'WM', a novel he thinks places inside the urban or communal context, preoccupation with dialogue, cooperation, and understanding. These traits strongly correlate with Agreeableness and Openness to Experience (McCrae & Costa, 1997), qualities associated with emotional resiliency, faith, and imaginative engagement. The repetition of Peter's subject matter is subjected to both analysis and creativity, further supporting this interpretation: he is also helpful as a reflective and inventive figure, possibly emblematic of masculinity in postcolonial.

Fikara, on the other hand, sees nothing wrong with being functionally deferential but is generally much quieter, nearly mute. His characteristics are rarer and not equally distributed across the various categories. Empathy comes up three times, while sociability turns up as a concern only twice, suggesting the story gives him less space for interpersonal texture. His low frequency of creativity (2) and analysis (2) suggests a character less introspective or imaginative and more reactive or situationally bound. Indeed, Fikara's greater frequency of influence may reflect rare instances of assertion or abuse, perhaps a function of positional/situational power rather than persistent psychological strength. This is in line with Kegan (1982)'s subject-object development, where characters like Fikara can be read as people functioning in contexts in which roles are still externally defined, acting entities rather than autonomous subjects who have internalised values and connections between much that is in the environment.

This is confirmed by empirical analyses of characterisation in East African fiction. Kombe (2020), in the investigation of the post-Ujamaa urban novels, maintains that at the core of these narrative creative works, the central male character tends to be divided into two groups: the integrated (whether socially integrated) or integrated in terms of having moral consciousness on the one hand, and the disintegrated character caused by economic constraints, and collapse of institutions in Tanzanian cities. Peter is one of those, and he has always exhibited characteristics fitting in with social adjustment, love, and strategic discourse. Fikara represents the latter such character, one whose personality is more evident but less common, thereby

exhibiting the psychological repression and emotional constriction often associated with the representation of marginalised male subjects in Tanzanian urban storytelling.

In narratological terms, Peter is a "round" character dynamic, multilayered, capable of taking the reader by surprise, as Ndossa and Ismail (2023) would have put it. His ample displays of compassion, insight, and invention provide him with inner push and thematic importance. Fikara, on the other hand, is more "flat", and we do not know much about their behaviour changes over time or interactions that demonstrate personal growth. This difference is not simply one of authorial intention but also highlights the distinct narrative functions of the characters. Peter is presumably a liaison between individuals through his continued and repeated expression of those few characteristics. Endemic Fikara's contributory traits are few, but strategically placed; they can symbolise resistance, societal paralysis, or structural critique.

Furthermore, the empirical basis of the table, which focuses on frequency rather than subjective judgment, situates the analysis in the concrete textual material. This aligns with corpus-driven stylistics, for example, Short and Leech (2007), who advocate quantitative measures of character traits as a complement to more qualitative character interpretations. It is also consistent with Hogan (2003) on the operation of a cognitive literary theory according to which the recognition and identification of characters is not a matter of depth but of repetition and salience within the reader's experience of the text.

In sum, the frequency-derived trait typology in Table 2 offers a provocative link for understanding character in the novels under study. Peter's frequency across a wider set of traits (across more dimensions) leaves him as a central, moral, and socially competent figure. In contrast, Fikara's low and focused pattern of traits leaves him to inhabit a character that works in a more confined narrative or socio-psychological space. This tension in character depiction mirrors broader thematic concerns about resilience, identity, and agency in recent Swahili fiction. It makes both literary and empirical contributions to character analysis in East African literature.

4.3 Character traits by psychoanalytic structure

Table 3 presents a psychoanalytic categorisation of the psychological forces shaping the behaviours and motivations of the characters Peter (in 'WM') and Fikara (in 'DKM'). The structure is anchored on Sigmund Freud's structural model of the psyche: Id, Ego, and Superego. The Id represents instinctual drives such as hunger, frustration, or aggression; the Ego reflects rational decision-making and self-regulation, while the Superego embodies internalised moral standards and social expectations. This framework traces how each character's inner conflicts and choices are negotiated between biological impulses, rational self-control, and ethical or cultural obligations, thereby deepening the interpretation of their developmental and thematic roles within the narratives.

Table 5: Mapping traits according to Freud's Personality Structures

Character	Id (Instinctual)	Ego (Rational)	Superego (Moral/Social)
Peter	Hunger, frustration with poverty	Decision to stay in school, emotional control	Responsibility to family, aspiration for dignity
Fikara	Irritability, sleep resistance	Waking up early, school attendance	Obedience to mother, rejection of the drunk father's role

The Freudian holography of these characters' behaviours shows character development with differentiation, determined by different degrees of psychological integration. For Peter, the Id is expressed in instinctive reactions to poverty and hunger, a theme common among many other urban youth protagonists in East African fiction. However, such barbaric compulsion is contained by a healthy Ego in his comparably rational choice to continue attending school and keep his emotional impulses in check. His Superego is also strong, with strong moral and social obligations; family duty takes precedence, and dignity is an interest. This balance of the triad reflects a character who, while exposed to challenging social or economic conditions, has also demonstrably developed cognitive maturation and internalised moral values. Freud (1923) suggested that a well-developed Superego results from successful internalisation of parental and social standards, such as in Peter's compulsion to be responsible and self-reflective. His inner balance is coextensive with what Kegan (1982) calls self-authoring consciousness, where people do not just obey or react but act from a synthesised moral self.

Fikara, on the other hand, has a more reactive psyche. His Id is irritable and resists routine (such as sleep), which marks an unresolvable tension between desire and duty. His Ego is seen in behaviours imposed from the outside, such as waking up early and going to school, behaviours that imply fitting in rather than moving out. However, Fikara's Superego is less developed, even though it exists. His ethical behaviour, obeying his mother and refusing his belligerently drunk father, is externally motivated, consistent with what Kohlberg (1969) terms "conventional morality," in which right and wrong are guided by social sanction, not internalised moral reasoning. This incomplete Superego development reflects a psyche that is still in the process of negotiation, imbued with independence, a condition akin to the fragmented male subjectivities Kombe (2020) notices in Tanzanian urban fiction, where young boys struggle to become subjects over and against unreliable paternal figures and socioeconomic restrictions.

These findings are corroborated by empirical research on youth identity in post-colonial African literature. Mlama (1999) notes that lead male characters in Tanzanian realist narratives are typically caught in a cycle of inherited trauma and emergent responsibility. Peter embodies the former of these two approaches: a protagonist learning to discipline himself out of his homeless privations and divine aspirations; Fikara represents the death-and-birth experience for the willed order of the young adult, in the world between ontological and imposed chaos. Moreover, Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) highlight the relevance of internal alignment (i.e., the congruence between thought, emotion, and action) in the development of mature personality. Peter's personality is characterised by this unified portrayal; Fikara's seems more reactive and extrinsic, with a narrative intention to convey socio-psychological struggle.

In general, this psychoanalytic interpretation underscores the narrative imbalance between the two characters: Peter epitomises a solid and ethical identity, but Fikara enacts the struggle between instinct, compulsion, and a developing, tenuous sense of right and wrong. The Freudian model not only explains the psychology of the characters but also provides insight into how individual agency and moral growth are represented in the social and cultural spheres of modern Tanzanian fiction.

5 Discussion

This study set out to address a gap in Tanzanian/Swahili literary scholarship by examining how characterisation functions not merely as a descriptive tool but as a theoretical site where psychological depth and social critique intersect. By analysing WM by Emmanuel Mbogo and DKM by Mussa Shakinyashi through Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory and Puckett's Narrative Theory, the findings demonstrate that character construction in these plays operates as a

culturally embedded strategy for interpreting social realities. Rather than treating characters as passive reflections of material conditions, the texts present them as dynamic agents whose inner conflicts and emotional expressions articulate broader structural tensions.

The synthesis of psychoanalytic and narrative perspectives reveals that characters' behaviours, silences, and emotional excesses are not incidental but narratively purposeful. Freud's framework clarifies how unconscious anxieties and suppressed desires shape characters' decisions, enabling the plays to dramatise social pressures as internal struggles. Puckett's narrative approach, in turn, shows how plot progression, focalisation, and dialogue guide readers towards ethical and emotional alignment with these figures. Together, these theories illuminate how Tanzanian dramatists transform individual subjectivity into a medium for collective commentary.

For theory, these findings suggest that psychoanalytic and narrative models gain renewed relevance when situated within African and Swahili cultural contexts. The plays challenge universalist applications of Western theory by demonstrating how psychological processes are mediated through communal values, family structures, and historical experience. Characterisation thus emerges as a bridge between the private psyche and public life, expanding literary theory's capacity to account for culturally specific forms of meaning-making.

For Tanzanian and Swahili literature, the implications are equally significant. Mbogo and Shakinyashi reaffirm character as a central aesthetic and ideological resource through which writers interrogate identity, social belonging, and moral responsibility. Their works contribute to a tradition in which storytelling functions as social memory and critique, inviting audiences to reflect on inherited conditions while imagining alternative futures. By foregrounding characterisation as a key analytical lens, this study responds directly to the research aim of rethinking how Swahili texts encode social experience, thereby positioning Tanzanian drama as a vital contributor to both regional literary discourse and broader theoretical debates.

This study addresses a critical gap in Tanzanian and Swahili literary criticism by foregrounding characterisation as a primary site for analysing the interaction between psychological depth and social structures. Rather than treating characters as symbolic figures, the findings demonstrate that protagonists are constructed as active agents whose self-awareness and ethical judgement shape narrative meaning. Their actions and reflections reveal how identity is formed within specific historical and communal settings, thereby linking individual experience to wider social processes.

From a theoretical perspective, the analysis advances literary scholarship by demonstrating how character agency can be examined productively through psycho-social and narrative lenses. The protagonists' complex inner lives challenge reductive readings that flatten African characters into static types. Instead, their analytical thought, moral reasoning, and emotional responsiveness position characterisation as a dynamic narrative strategy that mediates between personal consciousness and collective concerns. This contributes to theory by illustrating how psychological realism in African texts functions as a mode of social critique rather than mere introspection.

For Tanzanian and Swahili literature, these findings underscore the role of fiction as an intervention in dominant cultural representations. By crafting characters who confront inequality, limited access to education, and ethical injustice, the authors extend Swahili narrative traditions that privilege moral inquiry and social engagement. The careful use of dialogue, behaviour, and linguistic choice enables readers to apprehend both inner motivation and outward action, reinforcing literature's capacity to generate empathy and critical awareness.

In this way, the study reaffirms the significance of character-centred analysis in understanding how Swahili texts articulate lived realities and challenge marginalising discourses, directly fulfilling the research aim of re-evaluating characterisation as a central analytical framework. This is illustrated as follows.

> *Wote ambao hamjalipa ada na hamna sare, hakuna shule! Nisizione sura zenu bila ada na sare* (No school for all of you have not paid fees and do not have uniforms! I do not want to see your faces without fees and uniforms) (Mbogo, 2002, p. 1)

The excerpt above is the beginning of the narrative, which introduces early contention in the life of the main character, Peter. He is facing a school-expulsion letter from his headteacher at Mapepela Primary School - an instruction for all pupils, but one that carries particularly dire consequences for him.

This episode is central to the study's aim of addressing the limited critical attention given to characterisation as a mechanism through which Tanzanian fiction negotiates psychological subjectivity and social structure. Peter's expulsion from school functions less as a plot incident than as an entry point into his interior world, allowing readers to apprehend how institutional practices shape self-perception and aspiration. Education is framed not simply as schooling, but as an imagined pathway to social mobility, and its withdrawal becomes emblematic of structurally constrained futures.

From a theoretical perspective, the episode demonstrates the effectiveness of implicit characterisation in revealing psychological depth. Rather than relying on overt authorial commentary, Mbogo constructs Peter's inner life through circumstance, silence, and emotional response. This supports narrative theory's claim that character is produced through situation and progression, while also aligning with psycho-social approaches that view subjectivity as formed through repeated encounters with exclusion. The analysis thus contributes to theory by showing how African narratives integrate psychological realism into socially grounded storytelling.

For Tanzanian and Swahili literature, these findings reaffirm the novel's role as a space for interrogating lived experience within urban contexts. Peter's family background and school exclusion situate his development within recognisable social arrangements, reinforcing the literature's capacity to expose how institutions shape personality. Importantly, this mode of character construction resists simplistic moralisation, instead inviting readers to consider how individual trajectories are embedded in wider systems. By foregrounding characterisation as an analytical lens, the study directly addresses the research gap, demonstrating that Tanzanian fiction offers sophisticated models for examining identity formation that warrant sustained theoretical engagement.

The moment is echoed again in the quote,

> *Zita Lomolomo, darasa la sita, na Peter Lomolomo, darasa la tano, walikumbwa na tangazo la mwalimu Chikonya…* (Zita Lomolomo, in standard six, and Peter Lomolomo, in standard five, were affected by Teacher Chikonya's announcement) (Mbogo, 2002, p. 1).

Peter's psychology is revealed indirectly through his behaviour and experiences of exclusion, conveying a profound sense of loss. However, his upbringing also discloses resilience and inner strength. Mbogo avoids portraying Peter as a passive victim, instead presenting him as an inheritor of survival and one who adapts resourcefully to hardship. This positioning of character

is reminiscent of Nyairo's (2023) observations that post-2010 Swahili fiction increasingly drives narratives through the complex inner lives of characters formed around precarity.

This passage from page 14 brings Peter's world into focus: a home characterised by hunger, work, and fear. The quotation "…*Jambo hili lilikuwa lina msumbua akili Peter. Kuna siku halali. Kuna siku hushinda njaa…*" (This thing troubled Peter's mind. Some days he wouldn't sleep through the night. Some other days, he would fast for the entire day. …) (Mbogo, 2002, p. 14) and reveals how his inner torment is expressed in physical signs and emotional anguish. This psychological insight is shared by Freud in his theory of unconscious anxiety and repression (Freud, 1890), which examines how lack pervades one's behaviour and personal development.

Mbogo also employs music and soundscape as a delicate means of characterisation. We see Peter listening to a street musician, "*Wamo, Eee! Ndi-ndi-ndilili…*" (Mbogo, 2002, pp. 14-16), which collectively represents his yearning for liberation and articulation. Music becomes a peephole into the heart and mind of Peter, working as a literary shortcut to characterise a state of mind. This emerges in dialogue with recent work by Smith (2021), who claims that music in African novels mediates suffering and subjectivity, enabling characters to express affect outside of direct retelling.

Shekinyashi uses the same tools of the trade to build the character of Fikara on 'DKM'. Shekinyashi's focus on the mundane discussions like the verbal abuse Fikara has to withstand "*Nilishakuambia tayari, Sitaki kukuona tena hapa kwangu...*" (I told you already, I do not want to see you here at my place again...). In this, Mbogo (2002, p. 4) exposes her reality and how this has implications for attributes such as emotional resilience and frustration. Instead of simply defining her through suffering, the writer presents her as morally aware and resourceful, with which she cobbles some identity together, corresponding to Ogude's (2022) "narrative dignity, which suggests that African victims remain agents in situations of violence."

The extract "*Mama hawezi kuniacha mwenyewe, usiku kwenye nyumba ..*"(Mother would not dare leave me alone, at night in the hut…) (Mbogo, 2002, p. 8) depicts Fikara's environment as full of uncertainties and menacing. Moreover, the fear of rape and theft is not speculative but an everyday negotiation; it informs Fikara's inhibitions and spatial awareness. These imprecise signs of personality analogise indirectly with characterisation (Mambrol, 2022), as indirect characterisation through setting and context can let readers infer what, if anything, goes on in social life psychologically.

Fikara's bleary morning routine is no less revealing. The extract *"Fikara, amka mwanangu… Nilijisikia hasira ya hali ya juu…"* (Fikara, wake up my child... I felt an intense rage…) (Mbogo, 2002, p. 1) illustrates the emotional strain of balancing education and economic hardship. Her irritability and exhaustion do not indicate weakness but reflect an overburdened psychological state. These findings directly address the study's aim of re-evaluating characterisation as a critical lens through which Tanzanian and Swahili fiction articulates psychological subjectivity and social critique. The analysis demonstrates that indirect cues, such as bodily exhaustion, habitual actions, and shifts in mood, are not incidental details but narrative strategies that encode personality over time. In line with Webb's argument, such cues enable readers to infer interior states without reliance on explicit exposition, thereby expanding the theoretical understanding of how character is constructed in prose fiction.

The character of Fikara exemplifies this complexity. Shekinyashi's use of interaction, routine, and internal response produces a figure who exceeds passive suffering and instead embodies ambition, contradiction, and cultural negotiation. Theoretical approaches to character benefit

from this portrayal by illustrating how psychological development can function as a site where gendered and classed tensions are narratively negotiated. Characterisation here operates as a mediating structure, translating social pressures into personal consciousness while sustaining narrative empathy.

Across both texts, the combined use of direct description and indirect techniques underscores prose fiction's capacity for nuanced psychological representation. Rather than serving decorative purposes, these methods align narrative form with critical intent. When read through psychoanalytic and narratological frameworks, the protagonists' inner conflicts emerge as historically and socially produced, challenging universalist models of personality in literary theory.

For Tanzanian and Swahili literature, these findings reaffirm the genre's contribution to African literary studies by demonstrating how local narratives deploy sophisticated character strategies to interrogate social organisation. By foregrounding characterisation as a primary analytical focus, the study fills a gap in existing scholarship and positions Swahili fiction as a vital space for theorising identity, agency, and social experience.

6 Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates that Peter and Fikara are constructed as psychologically complex protagonists whose personality traits emerge through sustained interaction between their inner lives and social circumstances. Peter is characterised by sensitivity, introspection, and a strong aspirational drive. His reactions to exclusion and institutional rejection reveal a reflective disposition marked by emotional vulnerability and moral awareness. He internalises external pressures deeply, which shapes a personality inclined towards self-examination and quiet endurance rather than overt defiance. His development shows how aspiration, anxiety, and ethical resolve coexist, producing a character whose identity is formed through contemplation and gradual adjustment to constraint. Fikara, by contrast, is defined by assertiveness, emotional intelligence, and a pronounced sense of self-direction. Her thoughts and actions reveal a personality that actively negotiates tension rather than absorbing it inwardly. She demonstrates analytical judgement, strategic adaptability, and a capacity to engage critically with her environment. Unlike Peter's inward orientation, Fikara's traits are expressed through interaction, decision-making, and relational awareness, positioning her as a figure who confronts limitation through agency and negotiation. Taken together, the analysis shows that both characters possess emotional depth and self-awareness, yet differ in how these qualities are expressed. Peter's personality is shaped through introspection and endurance, while Fikara's is articulated through action and engagement. The findings thus answer the central question by revealing that Mbogo and Shekinyashi construct distinct yet equally credible personalities, using characterisation to show how individual traits are formed, tested, and refined within specific social realities.

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Normative Gender Identities in Social Greetings across Ethnic Groups in Tanzania

Adronis Kanonko Selestino
The University of Dodoma
yeadronissu@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper addresses a critical gap in understanding how social greeting practices perpetuate gender inequalities in multicultural societies like Tanzania. This oversight limits insights into how routine interactions contribute to the broader reproduction of gendered power dynamics. To bridge this gap, the paper examines how social greeting practices function as a medium through which gendered norms are both reflected and reinforced across diverse cultural contexts. Based on qualitative data from ethnographic observations and semi-structured interviews across ten ethnic groups in Tanzania, the study analyses social greetings categorised into three primary types: gender-specific greetings addressing both men and women, greetings reserved exclusively for men, and plain, gender-neutral greetings, revealing embedded gender expectations. Revealing these gendered voices is important because it sheds light on how language and interaction perpetuate normative gender identities, providing opportunities for challenging inequalities and promoting gender equity across diverse sociocultural contexts. Guided by Judith Butler's performativity theory and Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, the findings show that greetings are not just ritualised exchanges but also performative acts that subtly communicate and sustain culturally specific gender roles. Differences in greeting styles between men and women, as well as gendered expectations within greetings, demonstrate how daily communication rituals contribute to the maintenance of social hierarchies.

Keywords*: Normative gender identities, sexism, language and gender, social greetings, discourse analysis, ethnic groups*

1 Introduction

Social greetings represent some of the most routine yet symbolically rich interactions in human communication, ranging from firm handshakes to cheek kisses or deferential bows, all deeply embedded in cultural norms and social expectations (Goffman, 1967). While often viewed as neutral or merely polite gestures, greetings serve as a window into broader social structures, including the performance and reinforcement of gender roles. Across societies, these rituals are not only shaped by cultural traditions but also reflect and perpetuate gendered expectations among participants (Tannen, 1990).

The examination of social greetings as mechanisms for reflecting and reinforcing gendered norms has been prompted by a chronological evolution in gender studies within sociolinguistics. Beginning in the 1970s with foundational works highlighting linguistic sexism in everyday language (Lakoff, 1975), the field progressed through the 1990s to incorporate theories of gender performativity and power dynamics in discourse (Butler, 1990; Fairclough, 1989). In African contexts, this trajectory accelerated in the early 2000s, with increased focus on how colonial legacies and cultural diversity influence gendered communication (Oyewùmí, 2005). More recently, amid global movements for gender equality since the 2010s, research has

begun to address persistent inequalities in multilingual societies such as Tanzania (Mushi, 2019; Swai, 2010). However, this evolution reveals a persistent problem. Despite societal shifts toward equity, routine interactions like greetings continue to embed and sustain patriarchal hierarchies, often going unexamined for their role in reproducing gendered power dynamics in diverse ethnic settings.

This oversight constitutes a significant knowledge gap, as previous research has largely overlooked sexism in everyday greetings, particularly in non-Western contexts. For instance, while studies on Western languages have critiqued male-first naming conventions and generic masculine terms as forms of banal sexism (Spender, 1980), they rarely extend to the nuanced, culture-specific rituals in Africa, where, for example, over 120 ethnic groups in Tanzania alone exhibit variations that subtly enforce gender norms (Kishe, 2003). Frontiers in this area include emerging explorations of verbal and paralinguistic behaviours in African greetings, such as age and gender, differentiated patterns in Kisubi (Rwakakindo, 2021) and Ngoni communities (Mtenje, 2017). However, these often prioritise descriptive ethnography over critical analysis of embedded inequalities. This niche, the under-examination of greetings as sites of sexism, limits broader insights into how language perpetuates normative gender identities in cultural diversity.

To bridge this knowledge gap, the present paper examined how social greeting practices function as a medium through which gendered norms are both reflected and reinforced across diverse cultural contexts in Tanzania. By analysing greeting practices from ten ethnic groups, this study reveals how these seemingly ordinary acts contribute to the construction of gendered identities. Drawing on qualitative data, the analysis highlights how greeting performances reproduce power dynamics, encode social hierarchies, and maintain the status quo regarding gender roles. Understanding the role of social greetings in shaping gendered behaviour encourages discourse analysts to critically reflect on how ordinary actions form part of a broader system of social meaning. In doing so, this study contributes to ongoing conversations in gender studies, sociolinguistics, and cultural anthropology about how everyday interactions can subtly yet powerfully influence social structures.

2 Literature review

This literature presents how social greetings, as daily communicative practices, reflect and reinforce gendered norms among different ethnic groups in Tanzania. Using sociolinguistic and sociological perspectives, this study integrates literature to demonstrate how greetings serve as a means of socialising gender, influenced by cultural and ethnic diversity within Tanzanian society. The review examines key social institutions: family, education, media, religion, and sports, while highlighting their roles in maintaining or challenging gender norms through greeting practices.

According to the literature reviewed, family members are the primary agents of gender socialisation, profoundly influencing the development of gender roles from the earliest stages of childhood. This process occurs through a variety of mechanisms, including direct reinforcement, modelling, and subtle everyday interactions such as the use of gendered greetings and language. According to Bandura's (1977) seminal Social Learning Theory, children acquire gender-specific behaviours not merely through direct experience or reinforcement but predominantly via observation and imitation of significant role models, most notably parents and other family members.

Likewise, cultural context further shapes family-based greeting practices. Wood (1994) argues that societal norms influence family interactions, and in Tanzania, ethnic diversity exacerbates

this influence. Among the Sukuma, for example, women often use prolonged, polite greetings to affirm their roles as caregivers, while men's greetings are typically brief, reflecting authority (Kishe, 2003). Parental roles further reinforce these norms, as observed by Lavee and Katz (2002a), with mothers modelling nurturing forms of greeting while fathers emphasise brevity, patterns that children internalise as markers of gendered behaviour.

Literature also finds that communication styles within families further perpetuate these norms. Fagot and Hagan (1991b) suggest that gendered communication impacts self-esteem and behaviour. In Tanzanian households, girls may receive more verbal encouragement in greetings, which fosters emotional expressiveness, while boys are encouraged to be direct, aligning with traditional masculine ideals. As Maccoby (1998) highlights, peer interactions extend these family-taught norms, with children from ethnic groups such as the Maasai reinforcing gender-specific greetings in peer settings, thereby limiting cross-gender interactions.

Furthermore, education systems are critical sites for gender socialisation, including through greeting practices. Sadker and Sadker (2019a) argue that schools reinforce gender norms via teacher expectations and curricula. In Tanzanian schools, teachers often expect girls to use polite, formal greetings, reflecting societal deference norms, while boys may use informal greetings, signalling independence (Swai, 2010). Among the Haya, for instance, classroom greetings often involve girls bowing or using honorifics, while boys are less constrained, perpetuating gendered hierarchies. Educational materials may also reinforce these norms by depicting women as nurturing and men as authoritative in greeting contexts.

In addition, media, including television and advertising, shape perceptions of gender through representations of greetings. Smith and Cook (2021) note that the media often promote stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. In Tanzania, Swahili-language advertisements often feature women using warm, deferential greetings to appeal to family-oriented audiences, while men are depicted using confident, direct greetings (Ngaiza, 2017). These portrayals influence public perceptions, especially among urban ethnic groups such as the Zaramo, where media exposure is high, thereby reinforcing gendered greeting norms.

Moreover, literature demonstrates that religious institutions have a significant influence on gendered greetings in Tanzania, where Christianity, Islam, and traditional beliefs coexist. Sherkat and Darnell (2020b) argue that religious teachings often outline explicit gender roles. In Islamic communities, such as among the Swahili, women are encouraged to use modest greetings, like "*Asalaam Alaikum*," with lowered gazes, thereby reinforcing traditional femininity (Yusuf, 2015). In contrast, Christian greetings among the Nyakyusa may emphasise equality but still reflect gendered expectations, with women using more expressive phrases. These practices embed gender norms within religious greetings across ethnic groups.

Additionally, sports provide another lens for examining gendered greetings. Messner (2017b) suggests that sports reinforce or challenge gender norms through participation and portrayal. In Tanzania, sports like football, which are often dominated by men among groups such as the Hehe, involve brief, assertive greetings that align with traditional masculine ideals. Conversely, women's netball teams, common among the Pare, use cooperative, warm greetings that reflect nurturing stereotypes (Mtui, 2018). These differences highlight how sports-related greetings perpetuate gendered norms across ethnic contexts.

In this regard, social greetings in Tanzania are more than mere courtesies; they serve as powerful mechanisms for gender socialisation, deeply rooted in ethnic and cultural diversity. Across families, schools, media, religion, and sports, greetings reflect and reinforce societal expectations of gender. Sociolinguistic studies, such as Tannen (1990), emphasise that

greetings are performative acts that encode power dynamics and social roles. In Tanzania, with over 120 ethnic groups, these dynamics are shaped uniquely. For example, the deferential greetings of Chagga women contrast with the egalitarian greetings among some Maasai communities, illustrating how ethnic contexts influence gendered norms.

Conclusively, families lay the foundation for gendered greetings, together with schools, media, religion, and sports, which amplify these norms. These are challenged by societal shifts, such as the growing gender equality movements in urban Tanzania, which undermine traditional greeting practices, suggesting potential for change. From a Global South perspective, contemporary views emphasise embodied and linguistic resistance to colonial and patriarchal norms, promoting decolonial epistemologies that foreground southern tactics for challenging sexism in everyday discourse (Singh, 2021). Moreover, the adoption of gender-inclusive language has been advocated as a strategy to reduce cisnormativity and heterosexism, as evidenced in public health communications where neutral terms foster equity and visibility for non-binary and transgender individuals. Nonetheless, recent research underscores the persistence of sexism in language despite global declines in overt sexist attitudes, with studies highlighting how linguistic biases in AI and large language models perpetuate gender stereotypes. This synthesis underscores the need for further research into how greetings can both perpetuate and disrupt gendered norms across Tanzania's diverse ethnic landscape, incorporating these current insights to address lingering sexist structures in language.

3 Methodology

This study adopts a robust theoretical framework that integrates sociolinguistic, feminist, and anthropological perspectives to examine how social greetings in Tanzanian ethnic groups reflect and reinforce gendered norms. The analysis is guided by two complementary theoretical approaches: Judith Butler's (1990) Theory of Gender Performativity and Norman Fairclough's (1989) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Butler's Performativity Theory conceptualises gender as constructed through repeated social acts rather than as an inherent identity. In this context, greetings are treated as performative speech acts that enact and sustain gendered roles. For example, gender-specific greetings in communities such as Chasu, Gogo, and Fipa serve as recurring linguistic practices that reinforce expectations of female deference or male authority, thereby perpetuating gendered hierarchies. Fairclough's CDA, in turn, views discourse as a social practice that both shapes and is shaped by power relations and ideologies. Applied here, it reveals how greetings encode gendered power dynamics, for instance, through male-only forms in Sandawe that privilege men by excluding women, while also highlighting cases of relative egalitarianism, such as the gender-neutral greetings found in Sukuma, Rangi, and Hehe communities. These two frameworks complement each other effectively: Performativity explains the ongoing construction of gender through everyday acts, while CDA uncovers the underlying power structures and ideologies embedded in those acts. Together, they provide a multidimensional lens for understanding greetings as sites where gender, culture, ethnicity, and power intersect in Tanzania's diverse sociocultural landscape.

The study employed three interconnected qualitative methods to gather and analyse data from ten Tanzanian ethnic communities. These were Sukuma, Sandawe, Gogo, Rangi, Hehe, Fipa, Matengo, Manda, Nyakyusa, and Chasu. The communities were selected to represent a mix of Bantu and non-Bantu linguistic groups (Maho, 2009) to capture Tanzania's cultural diversity and highlight how greetings function as performative acts that reflect and reinforce gendered norms, as theorised by Butler (1990) and analysed through Fairclough's (1989) critical discourse lens.

The study employed ethnographic observation in naturalistic settings (homes, markets, schools, and religious gatherings) to document everyday greeting practices. Detailed field notes were used to record verbal greetings, physical gestures (e.g., handshakes, bows, kneeling), and contextual factors (e.g., age, gender, social status) with participants' consent. The recorded observations were later transcribed to enable the textual analysis with Nvivo. The method was chosen because it captures nuanced, context-specific behaviours and non-verbal elements that are essential for understanding greetings as performative acts and cannot be fully accessed through interviews alone. In addition, in-depth interview was conducted with 60 participants to gain deeper insight into the cultural meanings and lived experiences of greeting practices. The sample of 60 participants was deemed adequate to capture diverse gendered greeting practices across Tanzania's ten ethnic groups. In qualitative research, such a size ensures thematic saturation and sufficient representation while allowing for in-depth, context-sensitive analysis. Semi-structured interviews were selected to elicit rich, in-depth participant perspectives on the cultural meanings, gendered implications, and lived experiences of greeting practices, complementing observational data and enabling critical interpretation of normative gender dynamics.

Furthermore, discourse analysis was conducted using observational field notes and interview transcripts. Thematic coding with Nvivo, and classification of recurring patterns followed Butler (1990), Fairclough (1989), and Ochs (1988). The ultimate goal was to identify performative elements (e.g., how greetings construct masculinity/femininity), power structures (e.g., male privilege), and indexical meanings (e.g., egalitarian tendencies in neutral forms). By combining ethnographic observation, semi-structured interview, and discourse analysis within a unified theoretical framework, the study provides a comprehensive, rigorous, and context-sensitive examination of greeting practices across diverse Tanzanian communities.

Observations revealed patterned verbal and nonverbal behaviours, such as women's deferential gestures (e.g., kneeling, bowing, or averting gaze) and men's assertive responses (e.g., firm handshakes or nods), that subtly encode hierarchies, often tied to contextual factors such as labour divisions, rituals, or intergenerational dynamics. Interviews provided interpretive depth, with participants articulating how greetings perpetuate role expectations, such as male authority or female nurturance, within urban-rural tensions and cultural preservation efforts.

4 Findings

This section presents the key findings from a multifaceted qualitative dataset, comprising ethnographic observations in naturalistic settings (e.g., homes, markets, schools, and religious gatherings), semi-structured interview with 60 participants across diverse age groups and roles, and a systematic collection of social greeting practices from ten Tanzanian ethnic communities. These were greetings from Sukuma, Sandawe, Gogo, Rangi, Hehe, Fipa, Matengo, Manda, Nyakyusa, and Chasu.

In this sub-section, the paper presents ethnographic observations and participant perceptions from diverse Tanzanian ethnic groups (e.g., Chasu, Gogo, Fipa, Sandawe, Rangi, Hehe, Matengo, Manda, Nyakyusa, Sukuma), illustrating how greeting practices serve as a medium for reflecting and reinforcing gendered norms. The greetings are categorised into three primary types: (1) gender-specific forms addressing men and women, (2) greetings reserved exclusively for men, and (3) gender-neutral greetings. The following subsections present greetings in the studied ethnic communities in relation to their normative gender identities.

4.1 Chasu greetings

The Chasu ethnic language is spoken by the Chasu community residing in Kilimanjaro Region. The community inhabits areas in Mwanga District, Same District, and the Pare Mountains. Maho (2009) classifies the language as part of the Bantu group G, Shambala (G.22). It is estimated that around 530,000 people speak the language. The language has specific greetings reserved for addressing fathers-in-law only, and others for mothers-in-law only. In addition to these specific greetings, there are general greetings and inquiries used more broadly, as illustrated in Figure 1.

General greetings
A: *Namnani?*
    How are you?
B: *Chedi.*
    Fine.
A: *Washinjiadhe?*
    How is the morning?
B: *Chedi.*
    Fine.
A: *Walithehuko?*
    Is everyone fie?
B: *Ndevedi?*
    They are fine.

Reserved greetings for fathers-in-law
A: *Evava*
    Oo father (expressing great respect)
B: *Evava*
    Oo father (replicating the great respect)

Reserved greetings for mothers-in-law
A: *Emcheku,*
    Oo mother (expressing great respect)
B: *Eapa,*
    Oo son-in-law (replicating the great respect)

Figure 1: Chasu, greetings

As shown in Figure 1, the Chasu ethnic language has both special greetings reserved for parents-in-law and general greetings. The special and reserved greetings are only extended to Chasu's parents-in-law. These greetings demonstrate a unique form of respect towards the addressees. General greetings can be used among people of similar or roughly the same age and are applicable regardless of sex.

4.2 Gogo greetings

The Gogo language, also known as Chigogo, is spoken by the Gogo ethnic group in Dodoma. It covers four districts: Chamwino, Chemba, Kongwa, and Mpwapwa. The language is estimated to be spoken by a population of 1,080,000. It is classified by Maho (2009) as G11. In the Gogo language, there are greetings directed to a specific gender, while others are general. As shown in the following figures.

A: *Solowenyu?*
        How is the work / How is the day?
B: *Ale solowenyu*
        It is fine. How are you?

Figure 2: Gogo, greetings to men only

A: *Mihanyenyi/mwaswezaa?*
        How is the work / How is the day?
B: *Lyaswaa*
        It is fine. We are ok.

Figure 3: Gogo, greetings to women only

A: *mbukwenyi*
        how is the morning?
B: *mbukwa:*
        it is fine.
A: *mulibhaswanu?*
        Are you well?
B: *Chilibhaswanu. Nanye mulibhaswanu?/ nyenye du?*
        We are well. Are you also well?
A: *Chilibhaswanu. Bhana nawo bhaswanu?*
        We are well. How are the children?
B: *Bhaswanu.*
        They are all well.
A: *Mukulya chi? / Chono mukulya?*
        What are you eating? / Are you getting your daily bread?
B: *Chikulya ndigwa. Nyenye chono mukulya?*
        We are eating food / We are getting our daily bread.
A: *Aa Mulungu yakutaza, chikulya ndigwa duu.*
        Oh God helps. We are eating food.

Figure 4: Gogo, greetings by the woman to the man

4.3 Fipa (ki-Nkansi) greetings

The Fipa ethnic language is spoken by the Fipa community residing in Rukwa Region. Maho (2009) classifies the language as part of the Bantu group M, Fipa-Mambwe (M.13). It is estimated to be spoken by approximately 713,000 people. The language categorises greetings based on sex. There are greetings specifically addressed to older men and others to older women. When these specific greetings are used, they may take precedence over more general greetings or inquiries. The following figures present a relevant sample of Fipa Greetings related to gender norms.

A: *Aposile akombe?*
     Are the parents fine?
B: *Aposile.*
     They are fine.
A: *Aposile anche?*
     Are the children fine?
B: *Aposile.*
     They are fine.
A: *Yaposile malunga?*
     Is the Family fine?
B: *Yaposile.*
     It is fine.

Figure 5: Fipa, general greetings

Greetings addressed to men only are:
A: *Amu Posuta.*
     Good morning
B: *Tata itu kalesa / mwenewitu kalesa.*
     Fine.

Greetings addressed to women only are:
A: *Amu posuma?*
     Good morning
B: *Tata itu kalesa / mwenewitu kalesa.*
     Fine

Figure 6: Fipa, gendered greetings

As shown by Figures 5 and 6, Fipa has specific greetings for an elderly man and an elderly woman. These greetings bestow uncommon respect upon elders of both genders. In light of the purpose of this paper, these unconventional respects highlight the significance of Fipa greetings.

4.4 Sandawe greetings

The Sandawe language is spoken by the Sandawe ethnic group. They live in Dodoma Region, specifically in Chemba and Kondoa districts. The language is estimated to be spoken by about 60,000 people. Maho (2009) classifies it as a language isolate. Sandawe greetings are divided into two types: general and specific. The Sandawe ethnic group has general greetings for everyone but specific greetings for men only. There are also appropriate greetings when a man greets a woman, a woman greets a man, or when women greet each other. The following categories of Sandawe greetings relate to gender norms.

A: *Hikiana*   (equivalent to "How are you?")
B: *Anga*   (equivalent to "Fine")

Figure 7: Sandawe general greetings

A: *Heyu saankhema*   (equivalent to "Za saa hizi?") B: *Pultuma*   (equivalent to "it's ok")

Figure 8: Sandawe, greetings by the visitor to the host

A: *Bokwera mamawa sisinena* (it is an inclusive greeting which asks about all affairs in the household - in a broader sense equivalent to "How are you?"). B: *Mamawa susunga/lhasunga.* (in a broader sense equivalent to "Fine" but the addressee would go on explaining everything that has happened before that particular encounter).

Figure 9: Sandawe, neutral greetings

A: (i) *Hikina pultamane ware* (sing. addressee) (equivalent to Hi)   (ii) *Hikina pultamane wareksi* (plur. addressee), (equivalent to Hi) B: *Pultumaga ware* (equivalent to Hi)

Figure 10: Sandawe, man-to-man greetings

After analysing and interpreting Sandawe greetings, the unique or peculiar discovery is that Sandawe social greetings reserve special greetings for men. This further suggests that the Sandawe society gives men particular attention and care, which this paper interprets as a symbol conveyed through Sandawe social greetings.

4.5 Sukuma greetings

The Sukuma language is spoken by the Sukuma ethnic group. According to Ethnologue/SIL International, the Sukuma people are mainly found in several regions. In Mwanza, it is spoken in Ilemela, Misungwi, and Nyamagana districts. In Simiyu, it is spoken in Meatu, Maswa, Busega, and Bariadi districts. In Geita, it is spoken in Nyang'hwale, Mbogwe, Bukombe, and Chato districts. In Shinyanga, it is spoken in Shinyanga District, Kahama District, Kishapu District, Msalala District, Ushetu District, and Shinyanga Municipality. Maho (2009) classifies the language as F21, with an estimated population of 8,130,000. The following is a sample of Sukuma greetings regarding gender norms.

A: *Ngw'angaluka baba.*
    Good morning.
B: *Ngw'angaluka baba.*
    Good morning.
A: *Wamisha mphola?*
    How are you?
B: *Mphola du.*
    We are fine.
A: *Bhanigini?*
    How are the children?
B: *Bhalalaga.*
    They are fine.

Figure 11: Sukuma greetings

As shown in the analysis in Figure 11, Sukuma greetings are not gendered except for the distinction of the addressee, which varies by gender.

4.6 Rangi greetings

The Rangi language is spoken by the Rangi ethnic group, which is found in Dodoma Region, specifically in Kondoa District. The language is estimated to be spoken by approximately 371,000 people. It is classified by Maho (2009) as Nilamba-Rangi F. 33. The following are samples of Rangi greetings that highlight gender norms.

A: *Jori muvukire?*
    How have you waked up?
B: *Ntavukire nkansu.*
    We have waked up well.
A: *Vana vako nkansu vari?*
    Are the children fine?
B: *Nkansu vari.*
    They are fine.
A: *Chemhoniri?*
    What is the situation?
B: *Tahoniri   mwasu (it is sunny)*
    ,,   mbula (there is plenty of rainfall)
    ,,   njala (there is hunger)
    ,,   mwaka mbotu (the year of plenty food)
    ,,   varawiri/murwiri (there are sick people/there is a sick people)

Figure 12: Rangi, morning greetings

A: *Jori mkumbiri?*
    How is the afternoon?
B: *Nkasu.*

It is fine.

Figure 13: Rangi, afternoon greetings

A: *Tenga metu.*
    Welcome one again
B: *Natengire.*
    Thank you.

Figure 14: Rangi, valediction

In Rangi greetings, there is a fascinating question that demands an answer from any aspect of Rangi social life. The question is: "*Chemhoniri*? (Kuna hali gani?)" This question strongly characterises Rangi greetings. In this paper, the question is viewed as a symbol expressed through the Rangi greetings.

4.7 Hehe greetings

Hehe is an ethnic community language spoken by the Hehe people. The Hehe ethnic group lives in Iringa Region. They can be found in Iringa District, Kilolo District, Mufindi District, and

Iringa Urban District. The language is estimated to be spoken by about 1,210,000 people. It is classified by Maho (2009) in group G, which is Bena-Kinga (G.62). Hehe have greetings used when interactants meet for the first time and those used when they meet for the second time. Their meetings also reflect the time of the day, as presented hereunder.

A: *Jori muvukire?*
          How have you waked up?
B: *Ntavukire nkansu.*
          We have waked up well.
A: *Vana vako nkansu vari?*
          Are the children fine?
B: *Nkansu vari.*
          They are fine.
A: *Chemhoniri?*
          What is the situation?
B: *Tahoniri   mwasu (it is sunny)*
     ,,   mbula (there is plenty of rainfall)
     ,,   njala (there is hunger)
     ,,   mwaka mbotu (the year of plenty food)
     ,,   varawiri/murwiri (there are sick people/there is a sick people)

Figure 15: Hehe', morning greetings

If the interactants have not met for a long time, their greetings include a handshake, followed by each person kissing each other's hand.

A: *Whewuli?*
          How is the day?
B: *Whewuli*
          It is fine.
A/B: *Mwahwi?*
          How is the day?
A/B: *Mwahwi yunye / Mwahwi yunye!*
          How is the day to you too?

Figure 16: Hehe, afternoon greetings

Hehe, greetings bring another enjoyable experience. For them, the amount of time since the last encounter is of great importance. This is evident in that if the interactants have not met for a long time, they must shake hands and kiss each other's hands. This unique experience, as reflected in the greetings, is considered a symbol of the Hehe ethnic group's greeting customs.

4.8 Matengo greetings

The Matengo ethnic language is spoken by the community living in Ruvuma Region, particularly in Mbinga District. The language is estimated to be used by approximately 271,000 people. It is classified by Maho (2009) in group N, Manda (N.13). Matengo greetings are divided into two categories: morning greetings and afternoon greetings. The following are samples of Matengo greetings in relation to gender norms.

A: *Abhali ya leleno?*
      How is the morning?
B: *Iniae.*
      It is fine.
A: *Nzumwikibhole?*
      How have waked up?
B: *Iniae pena.*
      It is fine.

Figure 17: Matengo, morning greetings

A: *Mwangele?*
      How is the afternoon?
B: *Ee mwangele nu.*
      It is very fine.

Figure 18: Matengo, afternoon greetings

Matengo greetings are plain greetings. The greetings lack vibrant or distinctive features. Therefore, in this context, they can be described as gender neutral greetings.

4.9 Manda greetings

The Manda ethnic community's language is spoken by the community residing in Njombe Region, particularly in Ludewa District. It is estimated to be spoken by around 43,000 people. Maho (2009) classifies the language as part of the Bantu group N, specifically within the Ruvuma-Mbinga subgroup (N.11). The following are samples of Manda greetings in relation to gender norms.

A: *Mwoniri?*
      How is the day?
B: *Ee nam mwoniri.*
      It is fine.
A: *habari za wenga?*
      How are you?
B: *Sinofu.*
      It is fine.
A: *Habari za vana?*
      Are the children fine?
B: *Vilamo.*
      They are fine.

Figure 19: Manda, morning greetings

A: *Mwangele?*
      How do you do?
B: *Ee mwangele nu.*
      It's very fine.

Figure 10: Manda, afternoon greetings

Manda greetings are gender neutral language. The greetings lack any vibrant or distinctive features. Therefore, in this paper, they can be described as plain greetings.

4.10 Nyakyusa greetings

The Nyakyusa language is spoken by the Nyakyusa ethnic community. Nyakyusa's population is estimated at approximately 1.2 million people. This population mainly resides in Mbeya Region, particularly in Kyela and Rungwe districts. According to Maho (2009), the Nyakyusa language is classified within the Bantu group M, specifically in the Nyakusa-Ngonde subgroup (M.31).). The following are samples of Manda greetings in relation to gender norms.

A: *Mgonile?*
> *How are you?*
B: *Ndaga.*
> *Fine.*
A: *Twambombo?*
> *How is the job?*
B: *Tununu.*
> *It is fine.*
A: *Twakukaja?*
> *How is your family?*
B: *Tununu itolo.*
> *It is very fine.*

Figure 11: Nyakyusa, morning greetings

A: *Mwangele*
> *How do you do?*
B: *Tununu / ena / ndaga.*
> *It is fine / it's ok.*

Figure 12: Nyakyusa, next meeting greetings

Nyakyusa greetings are also plain ones. They do not show gender distinctions. The greetings lack vibrant or distinctive features. Therefore, in this context, they can also be called gender neutral greetings.

5 Discussion

This section discusses the study's findings within the broader theoretical frameworks of Butler's (1990) *Theory of Gender Performativity* and Fairclough's (1989) *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*. It examines the broader social, cultural, and policy implications of the observed greeting practices. The discussion centres on how social greetings, seemingly routine and polite linguistic acts, function as powerful tools through which normative gender identities are enacted, maintained, and occasionally contested across Tanzania's multi-ethnic landscape.

Across the ten ethnic groups examined, Chasu, Gogo, Fipa, Sandawe, Sukuma, Rangi, Hehe, Matengo, Manda, and Nyakyusa, social greetings emerge as performative acts that both reflect and produce gendered identities. Butler's concept of performativity explains how repetitive speech and gesture constitute the illusion of a stable gender identity. In the Tanzanian context, greetings are part of this repetition: through words, tone, and embodied gestures, individuals enact femininity and masculinity as culturally intelligible performances.

Ethnographic observations illustrate that women's greeting gestures, kneeling, bowing, gaze aversion, or subdued tone, represent a ritualised embodiment of submission and respect. For example, Chasu women greet fathers-in-law with Evava, and Gogo women greet male elders with Solowenyu, thereby performing femininity through deference and humility. Conversely, men's greetings, characterised by handshakes, nods, or shoulder claps, project dominance and authority, as seen among Sandawe and Rangi men. These contrasting acts align with Butler's assertion that gender is not innate but continuously performed through culturally sanctioned behaviours.

Participant testimonies reinforce this performativity. Statements such as the Sukuma wife's remark that "kneeling to brothers is a symbol of a good Sukuma woman" demonstrate how linguistic and bodily performances are moralised and internalised as measures of proper gender conduct. In this sense, greetings are not neutral exchanges but cultural scripts that teach and legitimate gender roles from early socialisation onward.

From a critical discourse perspective, greetings in Tanzanian ethnic groups serve as mechanisms of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991), mediating authority and access to social legitimacy. Fairclough's CDA framework reveals how gendered linguistic differentiation reflects and reinforces power hierarchies. In the Fipa community, the distinction between *Amu Posuta* (for men) and *Amu Posuma* (for women) stratifies authority along gendered lines, while in Sandawe society, the male-exclusive greeting *Hikina pultamane ware* constructs male solidarity and institutionalises women's exclusion from ritual and decision-making spaces.

Even greetings that appear neutral on the surface, such as the Sukuma *Wamisha mphola?* or the Rangi *Jori muvukire?* Carry gendered undertones by linking women's identities to domesticity and care work. Frequent inquiries about children and household well-being reveal how women's social value is linguistically tied to nurturing roles. Men's greetings, conversely, often focus on productivity, labour, or public engagement, reinforcing masculinity as authority and action. Thus, linguistic asymmetry in greetings both reflects and reproduces unequal power relations embedded in social life.

While patriarchal hierarchies persist in traditional greetings, evidence of transformation is emerging. Ethnographic data from urban and interethnic contexts show that younger generations, especially women, are reinterpreting traditional greetings to align with modern egalitarian values. For instance, in Dodoma, young people consciously reject or modify deferential greetings, viewing them as "outdated." Some adopt Swahili or English greetings to signal modernity and neutrality, thereby disrupting the linguistic reproduction of hierarchy.

These shifts illustrate what Butler (1990) terms *subversive performativity*: the potential for repetition to produce variation and resistance. The same greetings that historically reinforced subordination can be re-performed to signify equality and mutual respect. A female Sandawe teacher's statement, "In school, I teach neutrality, but village greetings contradict," exemplifies this tension between inherited tradition and emerging linguistic agency.

Ethnographic and interview evidence confirms that greetings function as intergenerational sites of gender socialisation. Children observe, imitate, and internalise gendered patterns of greeting within families and community settings, a process consistent with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory. The observations of Chasu children mimicking adults' bowed greetings and Fipa children using gender-specific salutations show how linguistic performance is a learned behaviour that reproduces patriarchal norms.

As Lavee and Katz (2002a) note, parental roles further reinforce these dynamics—mothers model nurturing and elaborate greetings, while fathers emphasise brevity and authority. Such modelling teaches children that care and submission are feminine virtues, while control and restraint are masculine ideals. Through daily repetition, greetings thus become linguistic vehicles through which gender ideologies are passed down and normalised.

The findings highlight that greetings, though culturally diverse, share a common function across Tanzania's ethnic groups: the reproduction of social order through gendered respect. This reinforces what Radcliffe-Brown (1952) described as the role of ritual in maintaining societal structure. However, greetings also reveal how power is negotiated and potentially reconfigured. As younger Tanzanians navigate modernity, education, and digital communication, traditional greetings increasingly coexist with alternative, egalitarian forms of expression.

This tension between preservation and transformation carries significant implications for gender relations. On one hand, the persistence of gendered greetings illustrates the endurance of patriarchal ideology embedded in language. On the other hand, the emergence of neutral or hybrid greetings reflects a gradual deconstruction of gender binaries and the rise of new communicative ethics rooted in equality.

The implications of these findings extend beyond linguistic theory into practical domains of social policy and education.

In the first place, there are educational implications. Schools serve as important sites for linguistic socialisation. Incorporating critical language awareness into curricula can help teachers and students recognise how everyday expressions reproduce inequality. Gender-inclusive greeting practices should be modelled and encouraged within classrooms to promote mutual respect without reinforcing subordination.

Secondly, there are cultural Policy implications. National and regional cultural policies should acknowledge linguistic diversity while promoting gender equity in cultural preservation programs. Efforts to document indigenous languages must include gender-sensitive analyses to ensure that cultural safeguarding does not inadvertently preserve patriarchal norms.

Thirdly, there are media and public discourse. Media representations can play a transformative role by modelling inclusive linguistic forms. Television, radio, and social media campaigns that use gender-neutral greetings can subtly influence public attitudes and normalise equality-oriented discourse.

Lastly, there are community and religious engagement. Community dialogues and interfaith initiatives can foster culturally grounded reinterpretations of respectful language that affirm dignity without hierarchy. Encouraging reinterpretations rather than erasures ensures that reform is locally meaningful and sustainable.

Theoretically, this study advances gender and language scholarship in three key ways. First, it demonstrates that in African sociolinguistic contexts, performative language acts, such as greetings, are fundamental to understanding how gender is constructed and sustained through everyday discourse. Second, it highlights that the intersection of language, power, and identity is best understood through an integrated framework combining performativity and critical discourse analysis. Third, it underscores the potential of ordinary communicative acts as spaces

for both the reproduction and transformation of gender norms, offering an alternative to Western-centric models of linguistic sexism by foregrounding African ethnolinguistic realities.

To sum up, social greetings across Tanzania's ethnic communities operate as complex discursive sites where gender, culture, and power intersect. They serve both to reproduce patriarchal ideologies and, increasingly, to challenge them through generational reinterpretation. The implications of these findings reach into education, cultural preservation, and social policy, affirming that linguistic transformation can play a pivotal role in advancing gender equality. Recognising greetings as performative and ideological acts reframes them not as static traditions but as evolving social instruments through which Tanzanians can negotiate identity, respect, and equity in an ever-changing multicultural society. The greetings mirror cultural hierarchies through documented behaviours, such as women's deferential gestures (e.g., bowing or kneeling in Chasu homes and Gogo water-fetching rituals, as in observations 1, 3, 11) and men's assertive responses (e.g., firm nods or handshakes in Fipa churches and Sandawe councils, observations 5, 7). Perceptions echo this, with participants viewing greetings as identity markers (e.g., a female Sukuma wife noting kneeling symbolises "a good Sukuma woman," perception 21), highlighting deep-rooted expectations of female submission and male authority in patrilineal, agrarian, and spiritual contexts across Tanzania's multicultural landscape.

Through repetitive enactment, these practices perpetuate norms via performativity (Butler, 1990), as seen in exclusive male greetings excluding women in Sandawe (observations 7–10) or gendered care roles in neutral forms (e.g., Rangi situational inquiries tying women to nurturance, observation 12; Manda child-focused questions, perception 30). Urban-rural tensions (e.g., youth resistance in Gogo schools, observation 4) suggest potential change. However, daily rituals in varied settings, homes, and markets naturalise asymmetries, sustaining patriarchal power dynamics in Bantu and non-Bantu groups amid ethnic diversity.

6 Conclusion

This study explored how social greeting practices across ten Tanzanian ethnic communities, Chasu, Gogo, Fipa, Sandawe, Sukuma, Rangi, Hehe, Matengo, Manda, and Nyakyusa, reflect and reproduce normative gender identities. Through the integration of ethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews, and discourse analysis, guided by Butler's (1990) *Theory of Gender Performativity* and Fairclough's (1989) *Critical Discourse Analysis*, the study has demonstrated that social greetings are far more than routine linguistic exchanges. They are ritualised and performative acts that simultaneously mirror and manufacture gendered subjectivities, reinforcing the power relations that define Tanzanian social life. The findings revealed that greetings across the studied communities consistently operate as *performative mechanisms* through which gender norms are enacted, legitimised, and transmitted. In patriarchal societies such as those of the Chasu, Gogo, Fipa, and Sandawe, greeting rituals are overtly gendered, linguistically and bodily, reinforcing asymmetrical hierarchies between men and women. The Chasu greeting *Evava*, accompanied by bowing or kneeling to a father-in-law, and the Gogo greeting *Solowenyu*, expressed with lowered gaze, exemplify the performative construction of femininity as submission and respect. The Sandawe male-exclusive greeting *Hikina pultamane ware* institutionalises male dominance by denying women linguistic participation in certain social domains. Conversely, greetings among the Sukuma, Rangi, Hehe, Matengo, Manda, and Nyakyusa appear linguistically neutral yet remain ideologically loaded. These "plain" greetings, such as the Rangi *Jori muvukire?* or the Manda *Habari za vana?* Frequently focus on family, child care, or domestic concerns, discursive patterns that subtly

align women with nurturing roles. Thus, even neutral linguistic forms contribute to gender differentiation by indexing social expectations of care and responsibility. Across these communities, ethnographic observations and participants' reflections illustrate how greetings act as both *rituals of respect* and *technologies of gender*. The repetition of deference acts, kneeling, bowing, or averting the gaze, solidifies gendered hierarchies, while their consistent association with moral virtue reinforces gendered expectations as cultural ideals. A female Sukuma participant's statement that "kneeling to brothers is a symbol of a good Sukuma woman" and a male Fipa elder's claim that "greetings encode our power" capture the internalised nature of gender performance as both personal identity and communal obligation. Ultimately, this study concludes that social greetings in Tanzania are both *mirrors* and *makers* of gendered social reality. They mirror existing hierarchies by codifying deference, respect, and authority through linguistic and bodily performance, yet they also make those hierarchies tangible by enacting them in daily life. In their repetition, greetings transform abstract gender ideologies into lived experience. However, the presence of contestation, especially among younger generations and urban speakers, signals that gender performativity is not fixed but fluid. As greetings evolve through linguistic innovation and cross-cultural contact, they carry the potential to shift from reproducing inequality to fostering mutual recognition and dignity. The path toward gender justice in Tanzania's multilingual and multicultural society may therefore begin with transforming the simplest of acts, the greeting. When greetings become inclusive expressions of respect rather than instruments of subordination, they can model a language of equality that transcends gender, age, and status. Through such subtle yet profound shifts, Tanzanian communities can preserve the cultural richness of their traditions while reimagining the everyday discourse of respect as a foundation for a more equitable future.

7 References

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