

**A FORENSIC LINGUISTIC STUDY OF VICTIM IMPACT STATEMENTS
OF RAPE CASES IN MAGISTRATES' COURTS IN MERU COUNTY
KENYA**

KIRIMI ANTONY KIAMBI

**A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Award of the Degree of Master of Arts in English
Language and Linguistics of Chuka University**

CHUKA UNIVERSITY

OCTOBER 2025

DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Declaration

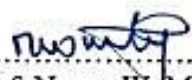
Declaration

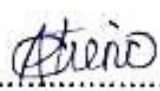
This thesis is my original work and has not been previously presented for the award of diploma or degree in any other University.

Signature.......... Date 16/10/2025
Kirihi Antony Kiambi
AM13/29205/17

Recommendations

This thesis has been examined, passed and submitted with our approval as University supervisors

Signature.......... Date 18/10/2025
Prof. Nancy W. Mbaka, PhD.
Chuka University

Signature.......... Date 16/10/2025
Prof. Christine Atieno, PhD.
Chuka University



COPYRIGHT

©2025

All rights reserved. No part of this thesis may be reproduced by any means, mechanical photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author or Chuka University.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my parents Gilbert Kiambi and Jennifer Kiambi, to my wife Juster Kirimi, my children Leon Kirimi, Nalah Kirimi and Naveen Kirimi.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I humbly thank God for enabling me go through this tough academic journey.

I give my sincere gratitude and appreciation to Prof. Nancy Mbaka and Prof Christine Atieno for giving me professional assistance in order to make it in this journey. Special appreciation to all lecturers in the field of linguistics, department and faculty of humanities and social sciences for their corrections, guidance and advice they gave me since I started this journey.

I also appreciate my parents Gilbert Kiambi and Jennifer Kiambi for partly sponsoring this project financially and my wife Juster Kirimi for her moral support and encouragement since I joined post graduate studies. Without you there would not be me.

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on Forensic Linguistics which is a branch of applied linguistics that involves use of linguistic knowledge, insights and methods to the forensic context of law, language, crime investigation, trial, and judicial procedure. It is said to be language of evidence. Language is important in courtroom discourse as it enhances communication among discourse participants in court. It serves to limit, control, promote or reduce dominance since language has power. This study therefore, sought to majorly focus on Forensic Linguistic Study of Victim Impact Statements (VISs) of Rape cases at Meru County Law courts. It was guided by the following objectives; to describe the emotive vocabulary in Victim Impact Statements of rape cases and to examine victims' use of language to establish authority in Victim Impact Statements of rape cases. The researcher adopted a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory. A descriptive qualitative technique was used in this study. The data was collected from written VISs(text). Purposive sampling was used and only relevant materials and documents were collected from rape cases. The sample size for this study was fifteen VISs. The three dimensions of CDA; description, interpretation and explanation were used in data analysis. The results of this study show that emotive vocabulary is used in VISs and victims use various Linguistic Markers to show power in VISs. For instance, the findings of the study reveal that the lexical features heavily relied on that were emotive in nature included; descriptive vocabulary, evaluative vocabulary, Specialized/legal, rare vocabulary, word collocations, modality and shared knowledge of the society and the constitution of Kenya. They also used experiential, expressive, relation value of words and ideologically significant meaning relations to emotively voice their concerns. The study also found out that the commonly used type of power was instrumental power. This was important in maintaining and enforcing authority. Linguistic markers of power used were; legal language, modal verbs, formal language, imperative sentences, personal pronouns, discourse markers, semantic field of words, assertions, metaphors, repetition, idioms and synthetic personalization. These portrayed the victims as more superior than the accused. The study concluded that emotive language is present in VISs and play a vital role in communicating the victim's mind in his/her quest for justice. It also concluded that Linguistic markers for power are present in the VISs. Producers of the text incorporate powerful linguistic expressions which as social agents in this context elevates them above the defendant. The fact that the Law has given them a platform to air their voices during a critical stage in the proceeding (before sentencing) and no rebuttal to the same from the defendant side, shows power asymmetry. This study is important as the findings add to the body of knowledge on Forensic Linguistics which is an emerging area of study especially courtroom discourse. The findings also give insight to legal practitioners especially legal decision makers on use of language in rape cases' VISs and its relation to power as rape cases are sensitive.